IBM: a major facilitator of Israel's surveillance and security apparatus.

December 2021

International Business Machines Corporation, also known as IBM, is a publicly-traded American multinational technology corporation, and one of the world's largest and oldest computer and IT companies.

Since the company's establishment in 1911, IBM has been complicit in human rights violations executed by states and oppressive regimes, including providing technology to Nazi Germany during World War II,[1] supplying computers for the racist population registry of the apartheid regime in South Africa,[2] and developing racist surveillance technology for the US police force.[3]

As will be detailed in this update, IBM is deeply complicit in Israel's violations of the rights of Palestinian and Syrian populations living under its direct military occupation, as well as in enhancing Israel's military-industrial complex, through the provision of services, technology, investment, and participation in joint projects with the Israeli military.

Through its Israeli subsidiary, IBM plays a crucial role in enhancing and facilitating Israel's pervasive and systematic surveillance and control of the Palestinian and Syrian populations under its domination. IBM designed and operates the Eitan System of the Israeli Population, Immigration and Border Authority (hereafter: PIBA), where personal information on the occupied Palestinian and Syrian people collected by Israel, is stored and managed. With similarities to the South African population registry deployed by the apartheid regime for racial sorting as a basis to implement racially based laws and segregation, the data in the Israeli registry is systematically used by Israel for the implementation of colonial policies.

Furthermore, this company feature outlines the IBM services delivered to Israel's illegal settlement enterprise and broader system of oppression, through the provision of services, equipment and technology to the Israeli police.

As will be shown in the examples below, IBM provides Israel with services that serve the state's efforts to enforce the use of biometric identification and the creation of a biometric database, which inevitably enables the Israeli authorities to use such data for the purpose of population monitoring and control.

Prior to publication, Who Profits contacted IBM and other companies mentioned in this feature to share information presented here and requested a response. By the time of publication, none were received.

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[1] Ford, Clyde W. Google's anti-worker actions evoke IBM's racist past. *The Guardian*. 6 Dec 2019.

[2] Harvard Law School Human Rights Program & International Human Rights Clinic. In re South African Apartheid Litigation.

[3] Joseph George, Lipp Kenneth. IBM Used NYPD Surveillance footage to develop technology that lets police search by skin color. *The Intercept*. September 6 2018.

Services to the Israeli Administration of Border Crossings, Population and Immigration

Eitan System

In 2017, IBM was contracted by the Israeli Population, Immigration and Border Authority (hereafter: PIBA) to design and operate a new main computing and data storage system called Eitan.[4]

Between 2018 and 2021, IBM was awarded contracts for computing services and hardware due to run until 2035, worth over NIS 800 million for the Eitan project alone,[5] the Israeli government's largest computer project.[6]

Since 2019, IBM through its Israeli subsidiary, IBM Israel, has acquired the overall operation of PIBA's systems.[7] The company operates PIBA's central database and computer system, and stores all the system's data for the Israeli authorities.[8]

The Eitan system was designed to replace the Aviv System (operated and managed by HP and later by HPE and DXC Technologies), which is currently being phased out.[9]

The main activity of IBM's Eitan System is the management of the information of Israel's population registry's national database.[10]

The registry includes information on Israeli citizens, including Palestinians who reside within the Green Line, as well as information on Palestinians who live under Israeli occupation in East Jerusalem,[11] the West Bank, Gaza, and Syrians in the occupied Syrian Golan.[12]

The personal data stored in the system is collected through the Israeli population registry and through Israeli borders and checkpoints for PIBA.[13] The System is in operation at the main Israeli checkpoints in

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[4] Population and Immigration Authority. The computer system is transferred to IBM Company. (Hebrew) 28 November 2017

[5] Ilan Shachar. The Finance Committee to approve: NIS 840 million for the Population Authority to contract with IBM. (Hebrew) *Calcalist*. March 19 2018.

[6] Population and Immigration Authority publications. 2017-2020: Years of doing and development report. (Hebrew) 23 August 2021.

[7] Population and Immigration Authority. IBM has accepted the overall responsibility for the Population Authority's systems. (Hebrew) July 2 2019.

[8] According to the response on a Freedom of Information request submitted by Who Profits in 2021.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Population and Immigration Authority publications. 2017-2020: Years of doing and development report. (Hebrew) 23 August 2021.

[11] Israel Central Bureau of Statistics. Population Definitions and Explanations. (Hebrew) accessed 21 January 2022.

[12] Nevo Legal Database. Golan Heights Regulations (Transitional Provisions) (No. 2), 1982. (Hebrew)

[13] According to the response on a Freedom of Information request submitted by Who Profits in 2021.

the occupied West Bank, which Palestinians are forced to use to cross the Green Line and move between the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza.

IBM's System documents all crossings and main Israeli checkpoints , including the Allenby Bridge Crossing to Jordan, which is the only access point for West Bank Palestinian residents to travel abroad and the Erez checkpoint, the only crossing for the movement of people between besieged Gaza, Israel and the West Bank—both controlled by Israel.[14]

Israel's compiling of registration data on Palestinians in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza is not new. Since the Oslo Accords, Israel has kept a copy of the Palestinian population registry from the Palestinian Authority, data which includes the personal information and addresses of all occupied West Bank and Gaza registered residents.[15]

PIBA is also part of Israel's repressive permit regime system used to enforce movement restrictions on Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territories (hereafter: oPt).

The permit system requires all Palestinian residents of the oPt to obtain a permit to exercise their basic rights and to cross the Green Line through Israeli checkpoints for any purpose,[16] including work, medical care, or family reunification.[17]

The application process to obtain a permit is conditioned on undergoing an extensive security procedure, and the possession of a magnetic smart card which Palestinians over the age of 16 are obliged to carry. The smart cards, issued by Israeli military authorities, contain personal information including an address and photo, and an electronic chip containing biometric identifiers and fingerprints.[18]

In the case of workers, work permits are issued only for sectors where there is a lack of Israeli workers, pending a request by an Israeli employer, and requires the provision of personal information of each Palestinian worker to PIBA.[19]

The systematic collection of such a large volume on information on people living under its military rule enhances Israel's broader cobweb of surveillance networks and technologies deployed to control and monitor Palestinian movement.[20]

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[14] Ibid.

[15] Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories. Population Registry.

[16] B`tselem. Restrictions on Movement. 11 November 2017

[17] Gisha. Gaza Up Close. September 1 2021.

[18] Israeli Civil Administration. Smart card issuance procedure. (Hebrew)

[19] Population and Immigration Authority Application for licenses to employ Palestinian workers. (Hebrew)

[20] Dwoskin, Elizabeth. Israel escalates surveillance of Palestinians with facial recognition program in West Bank. *The Washington Post*. November 8 2021.

Information of this kind regarding Palestinians' movement, in this case stored by IBM's system, has been used in the past by Israel to target people for extortion and exertion of political pressure.[21]

Biometric Identification Project

The biometric identification project is part of Israel's wider biometric policy, which includes the establishment of a biometric database compiling the biometric data of all residents. [22]

Since 2017, according to government [Resolution No. 2960](#), and following [The Biometric Identification Methods and Biometric Identification Data in Identification Documents and Database Act, 5769 – 2009](#), all Israeli residents are obliged to provide a facial photograph and fingerprints to receive an identification document i.e., an identity card or passport.[23]

-That same year, it was revealed that PIBA has created an illegal biometric database of facial images separate from the government's official biometric database.[25]

However, not only Israeli residents are required to provide their biometric data. Palestinians in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza are also forced to give their biometric data to Israeli authorities to obtain permits to cross Israel's checkpoints and settlements for work,[26] family reunification,[27] to practice religious rituals,[28] or to travel abroad.[29] As noted above, obtaining such permits requires a smart card containing an electronic chip with identification information and biometric fingerprint identifiers.[30]

Furthermore, Palestinians who reside in the area between the Green Line and the Separation Wall in the occupied West Bank, referred to as the "Seam Zone" by Israel, are required to carry a biometric card issued by Israeli authorities, to prove their place of residence and be allowed to enter.[31]

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[21] [Any Palestinian is exposed to monitoring by the Israeli Big Brother](#). T*he Guardian*. 12 September 2014.

[22] The National Cyber Array. [Law 2217: inclusion of biometric identification means and biometric identification data in identification documents and in the database - 2009](#). (Hebrew) November 18 2020.

[23] [State Comptroller Annual Report C70, Chapter 2: Ministry of the Interior - Population and Immigration Authority: Control of border crossings](#). (Hebrew) 2020.

[24] [The Population Authority will expand its engagement with IBM [In the amount of NIS 5.6 million]](#). (Hebrew) *Read It Now*. August 27 2021.

[25] Kabir, Omer. [Israel's secret biometric database revealed](#). *Calcalist*. July 17 2021.

[26] Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories. Procedures and Instructions: [Status of authorizations for entry of Palestinians into Israel, for their passage from Judea and Samaria into the Gaza Strip, and for their departure abroad](#). (Hebrew) updated January 2022.

[27] Ibid. p.41

[28] Ibid. p.38

[29] Ibid. p.43

[30] Gisha. [Smart card issuance procedure](#). (Hebrew)*.*

[31] Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories. Procedures and Instructions: [Procedures for entering the seam area – 2021](#). (Hebrew) 1 February 2021.

This puts many Palestinians in a situation where they are forced to provide Israel with biometric data simply to exercise basic rights and access to necessities, further entrenching, normalizing Israel's pervasive surveillance and control of an occupied population.

E-VISA Project

As part of the Israeli government's digital acceleration plan outlined in Resolution No. 260, IBM, along with Elbit Systems, has been awarded a number of contracts for digitization services and data storing for PIBA. [32] These include an NIS 18 million contract awarded to the companies in December 2020 for the development of the E-VISA project (*Marom* in Hebrew).[33] E-Visa is an online platform for visa applications, the project features a "pre-passenger arrival data" collection system to be developed by Elbit Systems.

In November 2021, the Israeli government introduced the Entry into Israel Bill (Amendment No. 33), which outlines the taking of biometric identification data from foreigners to produce biometric identification data,[34] a new condition for the entry of foreigners into Israel, and for the granting of residency visas, which is also dependent on them giving up their biometric data.[35] The bill comes as an amendment to an already existing PIBA database which is said to contain the biometric information of some 210,000 foreign nationals.[36]

IBM Contracts with the Israeli Military

IBM's involvement with the Israeli military dates back to the early 1960's, when the Israeli military was using manual mechanization machines manufactured by IBM. [37] In 1967,[38] the Israeli military purchased its first IBM computer followed by many more as part of the military's computerization process.

Over the last decades, IBM has been supplying services to the Israeli military both directly and through its fully owned Israeli subsidiaries, IBM Israel and Red Hat Israel.

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[32] Prime Minister's Office. Government Resolution No. 260: A program to accelerate digital services to the public and to promote digital learning. (Hebrew) July 7 2020.

[33] Tender on file with Who Profits.

[34] The Knesset, National Legislative Database. Entry into Israel Bill (Amendment No. 33), taking biometric identification means from foreigners and producing biometric identification data, 5722-2021. (Hebrew) Accessed January 19 2022.

[35] Peleg, Bar. Israel Moves to Require Foreigners to Provide Biometric Data for IDs. *Ha'aretz*. August 2 2021.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Cohen, Sa'ar & Melamed, Amit. Back to the story behind the first computer in the IDF. (Hebrew) January 23 2020.

[38] Hatoni, Yossi. Carrier pigeons, encryption and the first Computer (Hebrew) *Information Week*. February 2012.

Red Hat – Providing Military Technology

Through its Israeli subsidiary, Red Hat Israel, IBM works extensively with the Israeli military, providing cutting edge computing and software-based storage data centers to multiple military units.[39] The Israeli military widely uses Red Hat's Openshift software as its cloud platform and performs extensive activities with this technology.[40] Moreover, IBM company employees work closely with a number of Israeli military units. IBM also holds joint projects with Israeli military Computer Service and Cyber Defense Divisions in the fields of artificial intelligence and machine learning.[41]

In 2017, the Israeli military established its first own operational cloud in collaboration with Red Hat, based on its technologies. The cloud was part of the Israeli Military Network Program to establish an operational internet infrastructure which enables the sharing of operational information between military divisions such as the Israeli Air Force, Intelligence, Ground Forces, and Navy. The project was reportedly worth tens of millions of shekels.[42]

Services to the Israeli Military

In 2020, IBM was contracted by the Israeli Ministry of Defense (hereafter: IMOD) to be the main IT provider for the Israeli military's three new regional logistics centers for a period of 25 years.

The new technologically advanced centers are meant to provide all the military's logistical needs and are primarily based on robotics and sophisticated equipment provided by private companies. The contract, shared by IBM and Israeli IT Company Malam Team, is valued at US$1 billion for both companies.[43]

In 2017, IBM was awarded a US$20 million contract by IMOD to operate and maintain the Israeli military's computing centers.[44]

In 2011, IBM was contracted by the IMOD for hundreds of millions of US dollars to supply the Israeli military with storage and central servers.[45]

In 2008, IBM was awarded a 3-year, US$60 million contract by the Israeli military for the provision of servers, and an additional estimated US$6-7 million contract for virtual Vmware servers.[46]

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[39] Ministry of Foreign Affairs The Israel High-Tech Industry-Fifty Years of Excellence. 20 Oct 2002.

[40] Meital Mr. Haim, Red Hat: "We consider ourselves partners of the IDF". (Hebrew) *People and Computers*. October 25 2020.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Hatoni, Yossi. Mamram has set up a private cloud for the operational Internet for tens of millions of shekels. (Hebrew) *People and Computers*. November 11 2018.

[43] Appelberg, Shelly. Malam Tim and IBM will be the computer contractors in the IDF's supply centers project. (Hebrew) *The Marker*. January 22 2020.

[44] The IMOD signed an agreement with IBM for the continued maintenance and operation of IDF units' computers. (Hebrew) Israel Defense. December 12 2017.

[45] IBM wins the Ministry of Defense's high-performance computing systems tender. (Hebrew) *Calcalist*. December 28 2011.

[46] Shelach, Shmulik. IDF publishes tender for virtual products for $ 15 million; bidding: IBM, HP and Dell. (Hebrew) *Globes*. May 3 2009.

Since the early 2000s, the Israeli military has outsourced software development work that was conducted by IBM. Dozens of IBM Israel employees worked alongside soldiers from the Israeli military's Computer and IT Unit.[47]

Collaborations to Promote Israeli Militarism

IBM's work to strengthen the already reciprocal and close ties between the military and Israel's tech industry includes multiple joint projects with the Israeli military.

In 2020, in cooperation with the Israeli military Technology and Logistics Division, and the Start-Up Nation Central organization, IBM launched the Cyber4s program. The Cyber4s platform, which was launched for the first time in Israel, is intended to facilitate the smooth integration of Israeli soldiers into the Israeli hi-tech industry. [48]

IBM is also part of the Israel Innovation Authority committee that operates joint ventures with the IMOD and the National Cyber Directorate under the directives of the Prime Minister's Office. The Directorate supports Israeli technology companies in the field of cyber defense which market their technology and products globally to commercial and defense markets.[49]

In addition, IBM is collaborating with the Israeli military and the Israeli Ministry of Education in a project designed to encourage high school students to study computer science and technology as a way to "preserve and improve Israel's technological excellence.[50] Through the project, engineers from IBM lecture at schools alongside military officers who give preparatory lectures to Israeli high school students, destined for military service. [51]

Moreover, IBM is a participant in iHLS INNOTECH, the International Conference and Exhibition in Israel for Cyber and Homeland Security, organized in cooperation with the IMOD and the Israeli Administration for the Development of Weapons and Technological Infrastructure.[52] The conference hosts senior officials from the defense establishment, police, security and intelligence agencies, and senior executives from the defense industries in Israel and worldwide.

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[47] Hatoni, Yossi. Exposure: The IDF will bring outsourced software development "home", in a move that is expected to save tens of millions. (Hebrew) *People and Computers*. April 25 2013.

[48] Frenkel, Billy. Not just 8200 alumni: the new programs that will help discharged soldiers integrate into high-tech. (Hebrew) *Ynet*. July 15 2020.

[49] The Israel Innovation Authority. https://innovationisrael.org.il/en/mnc/ibm

[50] Coalition of Business Companies, IDF and Cyber: The Power of Joint Action. (Hebrew)

[51] Ibid.

[52] iHLS Innotech Broadcast Agenda Day One. (Hebrew) December 2020.

IBM is also a participant, sponsor and speaker at Cybertech exhibitions in Israel, organized and sponsored by Israel National Cyber Security Authority, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Israeli Ministry of Economy.[53]

Such events are an active part of strengthening Israel's position as a global powerhouse of cybersecurity and homeland security technology. For more on the reciprocal ties between the hi-tech industry and the Israeli military apparatus read our report: Repression Diplomacy - The Israeli Cyber Industry.

IBM Naqab Center

In 2018, IBM launched a new cyber research center in the Gav-Yam high-tech park, located in the city of Be'er Sheva in the Naqab.

The industrial park is located next to the Israeli military's Telecommunication Base and Computer Service Directorate campus, and was built as part of the Southern Relocation plan led by the Israeli Ministry of Defense.[54] The plan is designed to relocate military infrastructure, specifically military elite tech units, and tech companies to the Naqab to enhance the integration of soldiers from cyber units in tech companies at the end of their service, and also incentivize the movement of Jewish Israelis to the region.[55]

The project is part of wider plans to strengthen Jewish settlement and development in the Naqab at the expense of the indigenous Palestinian Bedouin communities there, who face ongoing forced displacement and de-development by Israeli authorities. For more see: Who Profits Tools of Dispossession in the Naqab: Development & Military Projects.

Services to Settlements

In 2019, IBM Israel hosted Ariel University's mentoring event at the company's complex and took part in another event for top students at the university.[56] Ariel University, located in the settlement of Ariel in the occupied West Bank, was granted university status in 2012.[57] The university is part of settlement infrastructure and services normalizing Israel's illegal settlements enterprise in the occupied Palestinian Territory.

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[53] CyberTech. 2020 Sponsors & Exhibitors.

[54] Ministry of Defense. National Projects: IDF Southern Relocation.

[55] Wilson, Simone. Can a cybersecurity center bloom in Israel's Negev? J*ewish Journal*. December 18 2014.

[56] Ariel University. Secretarial events: Ariel Exclusive The Quality Group of Ariel University. (Hebrew)

[57] Jeremy Bob, Yonah; Dayan, Yoni; Lazaroff Tovah. Barak authorizes Ariel upgrade to university. *The Jerusalem Post.* 24 December 2012.

Services to the Israeli Police

Since 1975, IBM has provided the Israel Police with computers and software equipment including a central computer, backup libraries and operating system software.[58] Many of the police computer systems have been developed based on IBM's hardware and software and depend solely on IBM products. In 2016, through a contract worth NIS 3 million and an exemption from tender, IBM was contracted by the Israel Police to be the sole supplier of software maintenance, and the sole supplier of hardware maintenance in an additional contract. In 2014, through a two-year NIS 2.8 million contract, IBM secured the maintenance of central computer and software licensing for two years.[59]

Corporate Information

Ownership:

The company is listed on the New York Stock Exchange and the NYSE Chicago under the ticker symbol IBM.

The majority ownership is controlled by Institutional investors (57.88%). Other major shareholders include: The Vanguard Group (7.93%); SSgA Funds Management (5.79%); BlackRock Fund Advisors (4.82%); Geode Capital Management LLC (1.60%); Charles Schwab Investment Management (1.50%), Northern Trust Investments (1.16%).[60]

Chairman & CEO: Arvind Krishna

Revenues:

US$73.6B (2020)

Partners:

Adobe, Apple, AWS, Cisco, Microsoft, Salesforce, Samsung, SAP, Workday

Blues Distribution Ltd. is the largest official distributor for IBM & RED HAT products in Israel.

Subsidiaries:

IBM has 135 fully-owned subsidiaries worldwide, including Red Hat Inc.

Israeli subsidiaries: IBM Israel Ltd., Red Hat Israel.

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[58] Application for exemption from tender: Israel Police/IBM. (Hebrew) *Read it Now*. January 3, 2015

[59] Tenders on file with Who Profits

[60] Top 10 Owners of Microsoft Corp. *CNN Business*. Accessed 20 October 2021

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