

APEX PREDATOR: RED WOLF AI IN THE WEST BANK

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This paper examines the deployment of “Red Wolf”, an artificial intelligence (AI)-powered biometric surveillance system used by Israeli forces in the West Bank of Palestine, through analyses of AI ethics frameworks and international law. Red Wolf, and its encompassing “Wolf Pack” surveillance apparatus, utilizes facial recognition to monitor and control the movements of Palestinians without consent, due process, or access to an equitable rule of law. Through this analysis, this study argues that Red Wolf’s algorithm and operation in this context represents a form of “automated apartheid”, as described by Amnesty International, and violates international frameworks and laws pertaining to privacy, transparency, and human rights. This paper will assess the legality and ethical implications of Red Wolf’s deployment using sources such as the 1973 Apartheid Convention, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) AI Ethics Recommendation (2021), the EU Artificial Intelligence Act (2021), and the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) Global Initiative on the Ethics of Autonomous and Intelligent Systems. Research through these methods indicates that Red Wolf not only fails to meet AI ethics standards, but enables targeted systemic oppression that mirrors international and legal definitions of apartheid. These findings emphasize the need for both consensus and binding international enforcement mechanisms to ensure the ethical use of AI in conflict zones and occupied territories.

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Introduction

Red Wolf is an artificial intelligence (AI)-powered automated biometric surveillance system used by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and the Israeli Intelligence Community (ISI) in the Palestinian West Bank, particularly in Hebron, to collect data on, surveil, and otherwise project control over Palestinian residents. This system is operated without consent by Palestinians, and is qualified by proponents as a deterrent against criminal activity and suspicious behavior; both terms being used as criteria to maintain order and control, as the inherent lack of consent indicates no social contract or consensual agreement in principles of liberty, privacy, or freedom of movement, amongst other standards of legitimate governance and rule of law.

The purpose of this work is not to explore the myriad questions of human rights violations and general political, social, and economic disparities between Israelis and Palestinians in internationally recognized Palestinian territory; the focus regards the ethical violations of utilizing AI without consent to monitor, intimidate, and control a specific group of people who share a common identity. This brings us to the core question behind the use of Red Wolf itself and the greater Wolf Pack system: Is this AI biometric surveillance system standardizing AI as a tool of oppression? Does it fit the description of what Amnesty International referred to in a 2023 report as “automated apartheid” (Amnesty International, 2023)? As this paper is argument-based, the foundational position here is yes, it is.

This work will utilize normative legal and ethical analysis, reinforced by international treaties, AI ethics frameworks, academic journals, and investigative reporting. Through the synthesis of these sources, we will explore how Red Wolf AI is used in violation of globally recognized standards of human rights and AI transparency.

II. Red Wolf: Algorithm and Function

Firstly, how does Red Wolf work? This AI utilizes facial recognition as a biomarker to identify distinctive facial features for Palestinians and stores them in a database, called Wolf Pack. “Red flags” or system alerts are raised for those who are marked for the first time or not previously identified. The database uses a “color-coded system of green, yellow and red to guide soldiers on whether to let the person go, stop them for questioning or arrest them” (Amnesty International, 2023). Red Wolf is one program that is part of a larger Wolf Pack surveillance system. Wolf Pack includes Blue Wolf, which is a technologically simpler application used by IDF soldiers to take photos of Palestinians on their cell phones, which are then sent to the greater Wolf Pack database, coupling photographs with biometric imaging to store comprehensive personal data on Palestinians.

The registration of faces with names and personal information in a database without publicly transparent indicators of threat-determination criteria forces Palestinians to tread carefully in the areas they live and travel through in order to avoid placement on higher levels of threat registry, be arrested, molested, tortured, or killed; each of these outcomes is not uncommon in the West Bank. Again, there is no clear protocol or visible algorithm to explain this process or the variables that determine these threat levels.

III. Inequity and Settler Apartheid Under International Law

By contrast, Israeli settlers that live amongst them, generally in objectively safer, cleaner, more developed communities on the other side of the fenced-in bazaars and neighborhoods of Palestinians, are not monitored by or beholden to Wolf Pack’s operation. Indeed, after the 2021 tumult in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of East Jerusalem, 13 Palestinian families were

forcibly evicted, precipitating the moving in of Israeli settler families, which is a violation of international law (Al Jazeera, 2021). Violence and protests led to the Israeli Supreme Court placing a temporary hold on the evictions, though the results remain relatively unclear, as the settler population is now nearly 700,000 in both the West Bank and East Jerusalem, including nearly 34,000 new Israeli settler housing units in what is internationally recognized as sovereign Palestinian territory (UNHCHR, 2024) (European External Action Service (EEAS), 2023). In addition, at least 1,346 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank and East Jerusalem since 2021, through August 2024 (UNRWA, 2024), indicating that this number is likely higher as of April 2025; these numbers mark the highest death tolls in decades in the region as of 2025. This data further supports descriptions of apartheid and the social, economic, and political imbalance between Israeli settlers and Palestinians in Palestinian territory, which includes asymmetrical rule of law.

Article II of the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid states: "The term 'the crime of apartheid'... shall apply to... inhuman acts committed for the purpose of establishing and maintaining domination by one racial group of persons over any other racial group of persons and systematically oppressing them." (ICSPCA, 1973). The operation of the Wolf Pack system operates on this basis, asserting dominance and oppression against Palestinians, dehumanizing and humiliating them through forced stops, frisks, searches and seizures without probable cause nor a warrant, and further, crimes of molestation, rape, and forced stripping, as documented by a Commission through the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2025: "forced public nudity, forced stripping and sexual humiliation, abuse and harassment" (UNHCHR, 2025).

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Article 7(2)(h) states: "The crime of apartheid" means inhumane acts of a character similar to those referred to in paragraph 1, committed in the context of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over any other racial group or groups and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime." (Rome Statute, 1998). Again, this definition mirrors that of the 1973 Apartheid Convention, which presently has more than 100 signatories, or countries who have consented to adhere to these rules and definitions. The Rome Statute has 123 signatories who have signed and ratified it, with 16 more states who have signed but not yet ratified.

Israel is not defying these rules as a signatory because it is not a signatory of either, despite signing then unsigning the Rome Statute in 2000 then 2002, respectively. Again, the conditions of its dominance over Palestinians fit these definitions, and it remains outside the purview of these codes because it refuses to sign them; this is further indicative of either disagreeing with the international system of laws, attempting to shield itself from accountability and prosecution, or both. Red Wolf and the Wolf Pack system perpetuate discriminatory and ostensibly apartheid conditions in territories it occupies or otherwise invades through settler colonialism, rendering Red Wolf AI a technology integral to the existence of an apartheid system.

IV. Opacity v. Transparency and AI as a Tool

Transparency and accountability are not synonymous concepts with Red Wolf. As previously discussed, not only is the algorithm of Red Wolf unknown to the public, the actual sourcing and development of the technology itself has not been revealed. Extrapolation of sources through Israeli intelligence and security technology companies remains publicly

unverified. In doing so, the black box of Red Wolf remains in the hands of its developers, whoever they may be, and its transparency-in-use is efficient only to IDF soldiers who administer the technology arbitrarily on Palestinians in the West Bank. Privacy considerations, integral to AI ethics considerations, are again absent for Palestinians, as this system is used to invade privacy without a warrant or consent in order to police and oppress. It is evident that deployment of Red Wolf AI does not meet recognized definitions of AI ethics, where its operation benefits only one group – its developers and operators – while subjugating another.

AI is a tool, like a shovel, calculator, or gun, that exists and operates at the behest of the user. If the user is attempting to surveil, subjugate, and oppress without consent, then the AI they use will follow suit. The ethical implications of deploying AI technology that mirrors such actions are as apparent as the actions themselves. They are subjectively morally and ethically questionable, objectively invasive and illegal in established international agreements and legal precedents, and permissible only through disputed definitions of “national security” threats, which have been used to justify passage of the PATRIOT Act and the creation and operation of the Department of Homeland Security in the United States, and numerous violations of privacy and civil liberties globally, certainly in occupied Palestine.

V. International Frameworks for AI Ethics

Red Wolf AI is deployed in a context that functions to sustain dominance by one state over another; a state recognized by 147 of 193 UN Member States. Decades of international law and recent definitions concerning novel technologies like AI render Red Wolf both immoral and objectively illegal. Per Article 27 of the 2021 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence: Member States

must “Ensure that AI systems are not used for social scoring or mass surveillance purposes that violate human rights.” (UNESCO AI Ethics Recommendation, 2021); Red Wolf’s purpose and usage is objectively in violation of this recommendation. The EU Artificial Intelligence Act of 2021, aiming for ratification purportedly this year by EU members (which does not include Israel), contains a section on Real-Time Biometric Identification in Public Spaces, where Article 5(1)(d) of the AI Act prohibits: “The placing on the market, putting into service or use of AI systems for the purpose of real-time remote biometric identification of natural persons in publicly accessible spaces for the purpose of law enforcement, unless and in so far as such use is strictly necessary for one of the following objectives:

(i) the targeted search for specific potential victims of crime, including missing children;

(ii) the prevention of a specific, substantial and imminent threat to the life or physical safety of natural persons or of a terrorist attack;

(iii) the detection, localisation, identification or prosecution of a perpetrator or suspect of a criminal offence referred to in Article 2(2) of Council Framework Decision 2002/584/JHA.” (UNESCO AI Ethics Recommendation, 2021)

Again, this does not include Israel, but it is a key example of an accountability framework designed to mitigate novel ethical questions regarding AI, particularly in the fields of surveillance and security. The collaborative effort and mutual aim of the framing of the EU AI Act present its considerations as a multilateral effort to limit the use of AI for

purposes like biometric surveillance, which, in the case of Red Wolf, implicitly operates in a partisan and oppressive modality. Article 27 of the Act categorically states: "Unwanted harms (safety risks) should be avoided and vulnerabilities to attacks (security risks) should be addressed throughout the life cycle of the AI system. This includes ensuring that AI systems do not pose unacceptable risks to human rights, peace, and democratic values" (EU AI Act, 2021); this would specifically condemn the algorithm and transparency-in-use of Red Wolf, if Israel was party to the Act.

In another landmark framework, the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers' (IEEE) Global Initiative on Ethics of Autonomous and Intelligent Systems, specifically the Ethical Aspects of Autonomous and Intelligent Systems position statement, states: "Autonomous and Intelligent Systems (A/IS) should be developed and operated in a manner that respects internationally recognized human rights." (IEEE, 2019). This non-binding and research-based framework sets a reaffirming tone of ethics for novel AI technology that serves as an important example of underlining human rights considerations in development and operation for such systems as Red Wolf, where it would again fail on each count. With blatant international human rights violations publicly visible, and many more under the protective cloak of sovereign state interests, Red Wolf belies legitimate consent, equitable consideration, and basic human rights adherence. Its usage is foundationally opaque, oppressive, suppressive, and renders punitive action based on collective identity, unilaterally contradicting global AI norms and frameworks collaboratively established to protect human rights.

VI. Conclusion: Law by Consensus

Unfortunately, international laws, treaties, and general position-based frameworks like those detailed above nominally exist by consensus, like the mandate of the United Nations itself,

and so enforcement mechanisms remain weak and ambiguous at best. Calling for ethical and legal standards of restricting technologies like Red Wolf and security apparatus like Wolf Pack is vitally important, and is echoed by countless institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) of globally recognized prominence and credibility, like Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and numerous UN-based and accredited institutions and commissions. Repeating and reaffirming these calls to build cases and substantiate frameworks of accountability and prosecution are vital to protecting the human rights of all peoples, but it will take the support of powerful developed states like the U.S. and U.K., organizations of countries like the EU, and consistency and support across legal institutions like the International Court of Justice to recognize crimes, and the International Criminal Court to prosecute the actors responsible. With AI largely open-sourced, shadow developers of systems like Red Wolf will likely remain a perpetual concern, until the international community, especially the most powerful states among it, decides to act.

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