When “caterpillar” treads first appeared in the early 1900s, they were used on farm tractors. But World War I changed all that and the track-tread was converted to military use for tanks and artillery-hauling machines. For this we can thank the Holt Caterpillar Co. Nowadays — with more than $64 billion in assets — Caterpillar (CAT) is the world’s largest manufacturer of heavy equipment used in construction and mining.

Of the US$1.6 billion in contracts that CAT received from the US federal government between 2000 and 2009, over 95% were for the military.

When CAT acquired Britain’s Perkins company for US$1.3 billion in 1998, it created the world’s largest diesel engine maker. Caterpillar Defence Products supplies CAT and Perkins “engines and automatic transmissions for armoured and logistic vehicles, both tracked and wheeled.” Its engines are “combat proven in infantry fighting vehicles and main battle tanks.”

Perkins engines are sold in Israel by the Israel Tractor & Equipment (ITE) Co. (This firm is 100% owned by Israel’s Zoko Enterprises. See Eaton, pp.26-27.) The “Who Profits from the occupation” website says ITE “retrofits Caterpillar heavy machinery vehicles for the needs of the Israeli army, including the installation of a gunner position and a bullet-proof driver cabin...for battle use. The armoured tools are used for house demolitions, uprooting of trees and military urban incursions into Gaza and the West Bank.”

In fact, since it began supplying Israel’s army in 1967, CAT equipment has demolished tens of thousands of Palestinian homes. Its so-called “construction” vehicles have also destroyed hundreds of thousands of trees in orchards and olive groves in the occupied Palestinian territories. The main tool in Israel’s arsenal for this widespread destruction is CAT’s D9 bulldozer. It is armoured in Israel by two state-owned firms, Israel Military Industries and Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI). (See “State-owned Israeli War Industries,” pp.48-49.) As IAI says, CAT’s “armored D9R,” is used “in combat/assault operations,” and has been “successfully deployed to field units accomplishing battlefield demolition/construction, urban warfare support, creating access and egress routes for combat troops, and clearing lines of fire.”

In 2003, when U.S. peace activist Rachel Corrie was trying to nonviolently stop the demolition of a Palestinian home in Gaza’s Rafah refugee camp, she was crushed to death by a CAT bulldozer that was being operated by an Israeli soldier.

Corporate Watch notes that “The D9 bulldozer was extensively used by Israel during ‘Operation Defensive Shield’ in 2001-2, particularly during invasion of Jenin, when countless homes were destroyed by bulldozers and a disabled man was crushed to death.”

Israeli troops have affectionately nicknamed the D9, “doobi,” which means “teddy bear” in Hebrew. CAT has worked with former Israel military personnel at an Israeli firm called InRob to robotise the D9 for army operations. The result is a brand of unmanned, 60-ton robotic bulldozers called “Black Thunder” that cleared the way for Israeli ground troops in the 2008-2009 assault on Gaza. InRob, which calls itself “Israel’s leader” in creating robotic ground vehicles, says it “supports the IDF (Israel Defense Forces), Israeli police, and other military and civilian companies dealing with security.”

InRob details the links between its management team and the IDF. While InRob’s founder/chair, Ben-Tsur Joseph, “was in an elite unit of the Israeli Air Force,” its head of R&D, Shimon Shamay, was “an officer in the IDF, which gave him a unique perspective regarding robotics opportunities and potential.” InRob’s CEO, Nissim Lavi, was “an officer in an IDF combat unit which gave him first-hand knowledge of military operations.”

InRob’s IDF veterans have created “Front Runner,” a “Robotic Caterpillar MTL 257B.” These unmanned, multi-terrain, killer robots — operated from up to 3 km. away — are designed to include a “weapons mount for different kinds of machine-guns,” an “anti-riot shield,” launchers to fire “smoke/
tackles attacks by Israeli forces using Caterpillar D9R Dozers under a contract. The company’s technology and services are said to be "highly suited for a wide range of military, paramilitary, and law enforcement operations." In 2007, InRob said the “Robotic MTL 257B platform will be marketed through Caterpillar’s network of distributors around the world.”

CAT also makes engines used by Israel’s Navy. In 2010, when Israel launched its deadly attack against the “Mavi Marmara” – the lead ship in a flotilla trying to bring aid to Gaza – Israel’s Navy used a commando boat powered by CAT engines. Israel’s Morena Rigid-Hull Inflatable Boat, made by US Marine Inc., uses CAT’s turbocharged 3126 diesel engines.

Caterpillar

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