



The Disinformation Campaigns about the Israel-Palestine Conflict in the Digital Era

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1. Introduction

Disinformation is a word which has become progressively public in modern times. Disinformation refers to the intentional dissemination of false or misleading information as an effort to mislead. Disinformation must not be mistaken for misinformation since it can be disseminated without intent to mislead, given that it is performed as a deliberate act of shaping public opinion, leading to disorientation, or some other strategic objective (Posetti & Matthews, 2018). It has been used traditionally in a variety of contexts, from political disinformation to corporate competitions. In the pre-digital era, disinformation campaigns relied on print media, word of mouth, and other low-speed communication channels (Martens et al., 2018). But with the rise of the internet and social media, its spread and impact have been accelerated exponentially, and now it is one of the top threats to the modern information environment.

Traditionally, disinformation has been one of the types of political and ideological warfare capable of changing popular views, influencing policy in governments, and foreclosing justification on the balance of reserve action (Asmolov, 2018; Starbird et al., 2019). Under the circumstances of digitalisation, disinformation became an even broader tool in political and ideological campaigning (Steinfeld, 2022). Its capacity to shape public opinion, determine the policy directions of governments, and authorise action on the global stage is profound according to available literature. An example is The Israel-Palestine conflict, a deeply rooted and longstanding issue, which is a stark and vivid illustration, where systematically false information has been utilised by various parties to advance national and geopolitical agendas (Pappe, 2007). The conflict has a long history of being influenced by propaganda. On the other hand, in the information age, spreading of information at lightning speed through social websites and other electronic channels has simplified the process of spreading disinformation (Finkelstein, 2003). Media coverage of conflicts has the power to contribute an elephant-sized amount to what people think, and the construction of such coverage is usually driven by prejudice, information selection, and counter-narratives (Alkalliny, 2017).

Such selective framing not only conceals realities on the ground but also serves to reinforce pre-existing biases. This dynamic illustrates how information ecosystems—most significantly, media narratives—are at the center of broader geopolitical strategies. The competition for political influence and legitimacy is also more and more conducted through control and construction of narratives. It is in this respect that, according to their strategic narrative warfare theory, Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle (2014) argue, state and non-state actors strive to shape the international system through the projection of explicit narratives that shape the past, account for the present, and prescript the future. These narratives are soft power tools that define conflict, alliance, and identity in ways that serve specific strategic interests.

In 2023, Hamas launched an attack on Israel on October 7, prompting the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) to engage in aerial campaigns and ground operations within the Gaza Strip. This conflict has been the longest, deadliest, and most destructive in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As of 2024, Gaza continues to suffer from high unemployment rates, widespread poverty, and limited access to necessities, where 1.9 million Gazans, about 90 percent of Gaza's population have been displaced and are categorised as facing acute or catastrophic food insecurity (Dardona et al., 2024). Beyond the physical destruction inflicted on Gaza, the Israeli government has actively waged an information war aimed at shaping international perception to its strategic advantage. Through a combination of state-coordinated digital campaigns, AI-generated content, and legislative framing efforts, Israel has sought not only to justify its military operations but to delegitimise Palestinian narratives, humanitarian institutions, and dissenting voices abroad. These disinformation tactics serve to reinforce Israel's moral positioning, deflect international criticism, and secure diplomatic and financial support from key Western allies.

During the Gaza wars, Israel has employed a coordinated information management and legal narrative framing strategy to shape global opinion and legitimise its military actions (Naval, 2024). In October 2023, the Israeli government boosted its digital diplomacy in response to the October 7th attack by Hamas. It employed cooperative social media campaigns to justify its military retaliation (Helmus & Marcellino, 2023). State-backed influencers and bot networks promoted pro-Israeli content on social media sites such as X (formerly Twitter), discrediting pro-Palestinian narratives and suppressing news about sympathy for the Palestinian people (Luckhurst, 2021) (Lorenz, 2023). Meanwhile, the use of generative AI in emotionally manipulative disinformation dissemination was demonstrated. As such, studying this case of the Israeli campaign is not only essential to understanding the dynamics of the Gaza information war but also crucial for exploring the evolving boundaries between AI, statecraft, and civil society. It provides a timely entry point into the future of disinformation research—one where the capabilities of machines intersect directly with the politics of perception.

1.1 Aims of the Research

The Israeli government's disinformation campaign of the 2023-2024 Gaza war represents a paradigmatic shift in contemporary warfare. This study will examine the phenomenon of the Israeli government's disinformation campaigns and their digital strategy during the age of the internet, where state-sponsored digital propaganda, AI applications, and legal redefinitions meet to construct international narratives, silence dissension, and undermine humanitarian intervention. It will discuss the impact of disinformation campaigns on the international actors' perception and reaction, and how the Israeli government utilises disinformation to achieve its diplomacy and interests.

1.2 Objectives of the Research

1. To analyse the historical reasons and development of propaganda and disinformation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, establishing how different narratives have emerged and developed over time.
2. To research how disinformation campaigns have transformed from more classic means of propaganda to newer digital misinformation tactics, identifying key technology and societal determinants accountable for such transformation.
3. To research the role of the Israeli state and non-state actors towards shaping public opinion and policy based on the use of misinformation, examining their influence on international discourse and geopolitical policy-making.
4. To assess the effectiveness of counter-disinformation interventions, including fact-checking initiatives, media literacy, and policy initiatives to push back against the spread of disinformation.
5. To provide strategic recommendations for raising public awareness, promoting critical thinking, and establishing a better-informed discussion of the Israel-Palestine conflict in mainstream and online media outlets.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Historical background

To understand Israel's modern disinformation strategies, it is essential to examine the historical roots of its statehood—particularly the geopolitical support Zionism received from the United Kingdom and the United States. During the British Mandate era and later in the post-World War II period, Western powers endorsed Zionism not only as a humanitarian response to the Holocaust but also as a strategic initiative to secure influence in the Middle

East (Pappé, 2006; Khalidi, 2020). Israel's enduring strategic value—through military cooperation, intelligence sharing, and its role in maintaining regional stability—has long cemented its position as a key U.S. ally (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007).

British involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict traces back to the early 20th century. The 1917 Balfour Declaration marked a pivotal moment when the British government expressed support for establishing a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine (Gutwein, 2016). This declaration significantly bolstered support for Zionism among European Jewish communities facing rising antisemitism and exclusionary nationalism. It laid the groundwork for the League of Nations' establishment of the British Mandate for Palestine in 1920.

In 1947, the United Nations passed Resolution 181, proposing the partition of Palestine into separate Arab and Jewish states (Lapidot & Hirsch, 1992). In 1948, the Israel declaration of independence triggered the first Arab-Israeli War, and the region was subsequently divided among Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip.

In 1967, during the Six-Day War, Israel occupied the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, East Jerusalem, the Sinai Peninsula (Egypt), and the Golan Heights (Syria). In the following decades, tensions and violence persisted, culminating in the First Intifada in 1987—a mass Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank (Naser-Najjab, 2020). The uprising was sparked by a fatal incident in the Jabalia refugee camp, where an Israeli military vehicle killed four Palestinian labourers, prompting widespread outrage. Intifada, an Arabic term meaning “uprising,” came to symbolise organised civil resistance characterised by protests, civil disobedience, and violent clashes. The movement reflected long-standing grievances and a growing sense of Palestinian national identity, while also drawing significant international attention to the urgency of political resolution (Hammond, 2010).

In response to the uprising and increasing international pressure, the 1993 Oslo Accords marked a significant turning point (Qutob, 2011). Under these agreements, the newly formed Palestinian Authority (PA) was granted limited self-governance in parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The PA, led by Fatah—a nationalist political faction founded in the 1950s by Yasser Arafat and others—became the recognised representative of the Palestinian people through the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). However, the broader issue of Palestinian statehood remained unresolved (Hammond, 2010).

The Second Intifada, also known as the Al-Aqsa Intifada, erupted in 2000. The trigger of the event was the visiting of the Israeli opposition leader Ariel Sharon to the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in Jerusalem, a site of religious significance to both Muslims and Jews (Pressman, 2003). The visit was widely perceived by Palestinians as a provocation and triggered widespread violence. The conflict deepened mutual distrust and signaled the breakdown of the 1990s peace process initiated under the Oslo framework (Nasrallah, 2013).

Tensions continued to rise. In 2005, Israel unilaterally withdrew from the Gaza Strip, ending direct military governance while still maintaining control over Gaza's borders, airspace, and seaports. In the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections, Hamas, a militant Islamist group that had gained influence since the 1990s by providing social services and opposing the Oslo process, won a parliamentary majority. The outcome led to a power struggle between Hamas and Fatah. In 2007, Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip, resulting in a de facto territorial and political division: Hamas governed Gaza, while Fatah retained control of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank.

The situation in Gaza deteriorated further during the 2008 Gaza War—also known as Operation Cast Lead—a three-week military conflict between Israel and Hamas. This marked the beginning of recurring conflicts in Gaza. The war followed the breakdown of a ceasefire and an increase in Hamas-launched rocket attacks on southern Israel (Khalifeh, 2009). On December 27, 2008, Israel launched a large-scale offensive with the stated objectives of halting rocket fire and stopping arms smuggling into Gaza (Meir, n.d.).

During this conflict, the United States maintained a strong pro-Israel stance, emphasising Israel's right to self-defense and continuing military aid and intelligence cooperation. The United Kingdom, meanwhile, played a more reserved role, abstaining from a UN resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire during the 2008–2009 war (Amer, 2017).

Following Operation Cast Lead, Gaza was faced with colossal reconstruction challenges that were worsened by the Israeli blockade. Created in 2007 after Hamas's coup, the blockade severely restricted the movement of individuals, aid, and commodities in the name of security (Mousa et al., 2020). The humanitarian crisis worsened after subsequent Israeli attacks: Operation Pillar of Defense in 2012 and Operation Protective Edge in 2014. Both were aimed at halting rocket fire from Gaza and contributed to worsening conditions for civilians (Henderson, 2018).

This rich and multi-dimensional historical context is the backdrop against which the modern disinformation techniques have evolved—not only as weapons of information war but as extensions of ancient great-power conflicts, border wars, and efforts to control narratives on both regional and global levels.

2.2 Supporting Zionism

Government, political party, and diaspora support for Zionism has always been subject to a complex dynamic of strategic, historical, and ideological factors. During World War I, for example, the British government issued the Balfour Declaration as partly driven by a perception that its backing for Zionism would assist in the acquisition of Jewish cooperation with the Allied war effort (Gutwein, 2016). For European-persecuted Jews, Zionism offered a promise of ideological and existential national refuge. In the West, including Britain, France, and the United States, support for Israel has tended to be framed in terms of a common

commitment to democratic principles and recognition of Israel as the world's only Jewish state (Smootha, 2002). This background has continued even in the face of mounting global condemnation and growing evidence of Israeli war atrocities, particularly since the 2008 Gaza War (Slater, 2012). The United States, in particular, has continued to provide Israel with robust military, political, and economic support, motivated by both ideological affinity and strategic imperatives. Israel is not only perceived as a moral ally in terms of liberal-democratic values (Graeber, 2017) but as a geostrategic partner of utmost importance to the defense of trade corridors, access to regional resources, and responding to Iran and other forces in the Middle East (Michael, 2015).

Israel's survival has long depended on this robust American support. U.S. military aid enables Israel to maintain a qualitative military edge over regional adversaries, many of whom view it as an occupying aggressor (U.S. Security Cooperation with Israel, 2025). Moreover, U.S. diplomatic support has consistently bolstered Israel's international legitimacy. At forums such as the United Nations, the United States has frequently backed Israel's settlement expansion and has often overlooked the humanitarian crises facing Palestinians.

2.3 The Israeli Motivation of Disinformation Campaign

However, in recent years, U.S. policy toward Israel has faced growing scrutiny and calls for reform, particularly in light of escalating humanitarian concerns. In October 2023, Israeli forces attacked a convoy operated by World Central Kitchen in Gaza, killing seven humanitarian aid workers (Refugees International, 2024). This incident prompted renewed pressure from Congressional Democrats for the Biden administration to reconsider the nature of American support for Israel. In a notably tense phone call, President Biden reportedly told Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu that the humanitarian situation in Gaza was “an unacceptable crisis.” Some Democratic lawmakers, including Senator Chris Coons, publicly urged the administration to pursue a policy shift, arguing that the Israeli government's recent actions did not reflect the core democratic values shared by both nations (Diamond et al., 2024).

To resist increasing domestic and foreign pressure, Israel has increasingly relied on disinformation strategies to influence public opinion and gain foreign support. One leading tactic has been to demonise aid agencies such as UNRWA, which Israeli officials have unfairly accused of being terrorist fronts. Such labeling is designed to de-legitimise provision of aid and divert attention from the humanitarian consequences of Israeli policy. In addition, Israeli leaders have downplayed the scope of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza by placing security issues stemming from militant groups at the top of the list as justification for continued military campaigns and the closure of aid. Through selective reporting, Israeli media have downplayed civilian fatalities and losses among aid workers, instead reshaping accounts of the perceived danger of Palestinian militancy.

2.4 Disinformation and Its Modern Implementation in War

As Cherry (2024) argues, modern war is no longer defined by territorial mastery or kinetic activity but by competitive information manipulation in the cyber space. Disinformation campaigns—often carried out through social media, search engines, and AI websites—are used as tools for discrediting enemy credibility, manipulating fact reporting, and generating confusion for observers. Information operations become force multipliers that allow states to project power far superior to traditional battlefield constraints.

Drawing on this analysis, Steinfeld (2022) adds the evolution of social media into a war zone for narratives, one in which governments and users alike wage narrative warfare using whatever tools are at hand—meme, hashtag, sock puppet account, and manipulated video. While Steinfeld has user dynamics in mind, the study also shines light on how state actors leverage platform affordances to their benefit, creating content to appear organic and thus more believable. This move is particularly highlighted in Israel's simultaneous use of fake American identities, automated posts, and community-oriented messaging to generate pseudo-grassroots support in the Gaza war.

Saeed et al. (2024) extend further to examine the larger state-sponsored disinformation ecosystem on Twitter (now X). In their research, they uncover how disinformation networks are often composed of complex actor hierarchies involving contractors, PR firms, and anonymous accounts operating in coordinated designs. This model is consistent with the Israeli use of Tel Aviv-based firm STOIC, which created English-language pro-Israel content and deployed it on imposter accounts attempted to shape public opinion by skewing the perceived consensus on social media platforms—a hallmark characteristic of computational propaganda.

2.5 Platforms and Gen AI in Disinformation

Research by Papadogiannakis et al. (2023) argued that commercial social platforms are naturally vulnerable to the disinformation due to the business model relying on advertising revenue, a model that incentivise the spread of disinformation. The study found that Meta generated more than \$30 million in ad revenue between 2018 and 2022 from networks that it itself identified as “Coordinated Inauthentic Behaviour” (CIB). Although these networks were subsequently removed, the associated advertising revenue was not refunded. These ad networks were often run by public relations or marketing firms and were designed to influence public opinion through false content. In addition, ad networks such as Google have been found to have direct advertising relationships with a large number of fake news sites, further contributing to the spread of false information.

Murphy (2023) emphasises how foreign disinformation campaigns specifically exploit these endogenous weaknesses of commercial social media platforms to influence democratic

outcomes, particularly U.S. elections. By leveraging the precision-targeting capacities of digital platforms, such campaigns are able to spread divisive, false narratives more efficiently and at greater scale than ever before. Social media, as Murphy argues, has thus become not only a communication infrastructure but a strategic battlefield in the struggle over democratic legitimacy.

Building upon these structural vulnerabilities, the emergence of generative AI further exacerbates the disinformation crisis by enabling the mass production of synthetic, human-like content that can simulate authentic public discourse (Bontcheva et al., 2024). Unlike traditional disinformation campaigns, which required substantial human effort to generate persuasive or emotionally resonant content, Gen AI systems can now automatically generate text, images, and even deepfake videos at scale and with increasing sophistication. This allows malign actors to flood digital spaces with fabricated opinions, comments, and narratives that appear indistinguishably human, thus artificially inflating the appearance of public consensus or dissent. The effect is akin to digitally hiring thousands of “protesters” to march in a virtual square—only faster, cheaper, and harder to detect. In the context of elections, policy debates, or geopolitical conflicts, such simulations of mass sentiment can skew perceptions of legitimacy, manipulate public opinion, and even influence decision-making processes. Crucially, as the internet is inherently quantitative—where perceived volume often equates to perceived truth—AI-amplified disinformation disrupts the representational integrity of digital platforms, eroding the link between online discourse and genuine public sentiment.

3. Methodology

3.1 Theoretical Framework

In order to understand how modern states utilise information operations to shape public perception and legitimise political action, this study draws on the concept of Strategic Narrative Warfare, a framework developed by Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, and Roselle (2014). Strategic narratives are not simply propaganda or falsehoods, but carefully constructed stories that aim to shape how domestic and international audiences interpret political reality. These narratives operate across multiple levels of meaning and serve as tools of soft power, particularly in asymmetrical or highly mediated conflicts. These three layers are deployed not only through state media and official statements, but also through AI-generated content, government-linked think tanks, social media campaigns, and search engine marketing. What distinguishes strategic narrative warfare from traditional propaganda is its long-term nature, cross-platform dissemination, and integration with institutions and legal frameworks, rather than isolated disinformation.

The Strategic Narrative Warfare Typologies includes three elements:

- Issue narratives focus on specific events, crises, or policy issues of immediate importance (Korb, n.d., Miskimmon, O'Loughlin & Roselle, 2018). They are the most concrete and time-bound type of strategic narrative. An issue narrative explains what is happening and what should be done about it, framing a particular situation in a way that guides public opinion and policy preferences. According to Miskimmon et al., issue narratives are tied to “a specific event” or problem and aim to direct discourse about that issue in the actor’s favour (Korb, n.d.). In practice, an issue narrative will outline why a certain policy or action is necessary and desirable, and how it will achieve its intended goals (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin & Roselle, 2018). For example, a government might craft an issue narrative around a military intervention, depicting it as an urgent humanitarian mission that aligns with national values and international law. Issue narratives are often reactive or opportunistic – they arise to address immediate battles in the information space, from diplomatic incidents to breaking news events.
- Identity narratives tell the story of who the actors are. They define the values, characteristics, and intentions of a political actor. In essence, an identity narrative answers “who are we, and who are they?”, paints a picture of a nation or group’s character and role. Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle (2018) describe identity narratives as efforts to shape how an actor is perceived on the world stage. For example, an identity narrative might portray a state as peace-loving and democratic, or alternatively as aggressive and untrustworthy.
- System narratives describe the structure of the international system and the overarching rules and norms that govern it. They answer questions about how the world is organised, for example, who the major actors are and what kind of order or hierarchy exists (Miskimmon et al., 2018). System narratives set the broadest context by articulating a vision of international politics that favours the narrator’s interests. As originally defined, they are intended “to shape the recipient audiences’ understanding of the international system, its nature, and its structures” in a way that advantages the actor advancing the narrative. In other words, a system narrative tells a story about world order (e.g. unipolar vs. multipolar, conflictual vs. cooperative) that legitimises the narrator’s role within that order.

3.2 Research Sources

Given the recency and rapid development of the Israel-Palestine conflict, there is currently a limited amount of academic literature focused specifically on the disinformation campaigns surrounding the 2023–2024 escalation. Therefore, this study adopts a qualitative approach using case studies, relying primarily on the analysis of news media, social media content, and archival materials to understand the patterns and evolution of disinformation in this context.

To analyse the Israeli government’s disinformation strategies during the 2023–2024 Gaza conflict, this study draws upon a multi-source that integrates journalistic investigations, official documentation, platform transparency reports, and digital trace evidence. The

rationale behind this diverse source base is to balance narrative perspectives, trace covert influence operations, and ensure both credibility and triangulation of findings. The sources used can be classified into the following nine categories:

1. Major International News Agencies

These include The New York Times, The Guardian, Al Jazeera, Time Magazine, Bloomberg, and The Wall Street Journal. These outlets provided timely investigative reports on AI-generated disinformation, fake news networks, and diplomatic attempts to shape discourse, especially in the U.S. and EU.

2. Israeli Government and Affiliated Media

State-affiliated sources such as Israeli government press releases, statements by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and sponsored Google Ads linked to official domains (e.g., gov.il) were used to analyse how the state positioned its narrative externally. These sources also reflect the strategic self-representation of Israel as a defender of democracy under existential threat.

3. Palestinian Digital Platforms

Palestinian social media posts, independent Gaza-based outlets, and NGO statements contributed valuable bottom-up perspectives on how Israeli disinformation was experienced on the ground and how local narratives countered or reframed dominant international discourse.

4. Independent Fact-Checking and Watchdog Organisations

Reports by NewsGuard, OpenAI, and Meta's Adversarial Threat Report offered verifiable insights into the operational structure of fake accounts, coordinated inauthentic behaviour (CIB), and AI-generated content dissemination. These organisations provided key technical validation and attribution of actors such as STOIC.

5. Academic and Think Tank Publications

Institutions such as the Colonna UN Independent Review, and academic literature on disinformation, narrative warfare, and computational propaganda provided both theoretical and case-specific depth. Meanwhile, by analysing the results of pro-Israeli institutes like the Institute for the Study of Global Antisemitism and Policy (ISGAP), this research could also illustrate how strategic narrative warfare could legitimising Israeli government positions by the name of "the independent institute". These sources framed the Israeli campaign within broader paradigms of strategic communication and influence operations.

6. Platform Transparency Reports

Technical and transparency reports from Meta, OpenAI, and Google documented how their platforms were used or manipulated in the campaign. Meta's threat reporting identified networks of fake Israeli-operated personas, while Google Ads tracking revealed state-sponsored keyword manipulation to undermine UNRWA.

7. Legal and Policy Documents

This category includes U.S. congressional texts (e.g., the Antisemitism Awareness Act), Israeli legal frameworks, and official UN resolutions and response statements. These documents were crucial in analysing how disinformation was institutionalised through policy and legal lobbying.

8. Digital Behaviour Analysis Platforms

Tools and research by organisations like the Digital Forensic Research Lab (DFRLab) and bot-tracking platforms helped identify patterns of narrative amplification and platform-based manipulation. Their reports linked pro-Israel misinformation surges to verified blue-check accounts on X (formerly Twitter).

9. Search Engine Marketing and Ad Analytics

Using third-party reports and Google Ads Archives, the study traced how Israeli ministries leveraged search engine marketing (SEM) to dominate public discourse spaces, for instance, outbidding UNRWA to promote accusatory links during humanitarian funding crises.

4. Analysis

4.1 The Disinformation Infrastructure

4.1.1 The Use of Disinformation by the Israeli Government

In the execution of strategic narrative warfare, the narrative itself is only as effective as the channels through which it is disseminated. Disinformation, whether aimed at shaping perceptions of global order, constructing the identity of political actors, or framing specific issues, all require credibility, reach, and emotional resonance to penetrate public consciousness (Ecker et al., 2022). One of the most critical and accessible mechanisms for this narrative transmission in the digital age has been the creation and deployment of fake social media accounts, many of which are deliberately designed to influence the US audiences.

These inauthentic accounts, often masquerading as ordinary citizens, journalists, or even grassroots activists, serve as a powerful narrative delivery system. By embedding false or manipulated content into online spaces such as X, Facebook, Reddit, TikTok, or comment sections of mainstream media, these accounts allow disinformation actors to simulate

widespread consensus, manipulate trending discussions, and lend credibility to otherwise unverifiable claims. By doing this, they act as both amplifiers and normalisers of strategic narratives that might otherwise be dismissed as fringe or implausible.

These strategies are the operational scaffolding upon which strategic narrative warfare is built. They allow state and non-state actors to infiltrate public discourse without attribution, construct consensus where none exists, and obscure the boundary between genuine public sentiment and engineered opinion. In the American context, where public perception can shape foreign policy, such covert influence mechanisms represent a significant narrative battleground.

4.1.2 Fake Social Media Influence & AI-generated Content:

During the 2023–2024 Gaza conflict, the Israeli government launched a coordinated digital influence campaign targeting audiences in the United States and other Western countries. At the centre of this strategy was a \$2 million initiative by Israel's Ministry of Diaspora Affairs, which contracted the Tel Aviv-based political marketing firm STOIC to operate a covert online propaganda network (Rodriguez, Schechner & Volz, 2024; Counts, 2024).

STOIC created hundreds of fake social media accounts impersonating American citizens, including Jewish students, African Americans, and other “concerned” individuals. These accounts were active across platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and YouTube, where they posted pro-Israel content in English that aimed to influence U.S. public opinion on the Gaza war. The content often included support for Israeli military operations, criticism of anti-Israel protests on university campuses, and disinformation targeting Palestinian organisations (Meta, 2024a; Meta, 2024b).

The campaign also sought to shape the perspectives of over 120 U.S. lawmakers, predominantly Democrats, by flooding their social media comment sections with supportive messages about Israel's actions. The goal was to give the impression of broad domestic backing for Israeli policies, thereby pressuring politicians to maintain or increase their support for Israel amid growing protests and criticism (Shane & Frenkel, 2024).

What made this campaign especially alarming was its integration of AI-generated content. According to both OpenAI and Meta, STOIC used ChatGPT to mass-produce social media posts, comment replies, and even fake news articles designed to appear organic and locally authored. These AI-generated texts were meant to bypass detection while amplifying narratives favourable to the Israeli government (OpenAI, 2024; Anand, 2024). The use of generative AI made the campaign more scalable and harder to trace, representing a new evolution in digital disinformation tactics.

Meta's investigation ultimately led to the removal of 510 Facebook accounts, 11 pages, 1 group, and 32 Instagram accounts associated with this Israeli-origin operation. The company labelled the activity as a violation of its rules against coordinated inauthentic behaviour

(Meta, 2024a). Notably, this was one of the first times a major platform publicly linked the use of large language models (LLMs) like ChatGPT to a state-linked disinformation campaign (OpenAI, 2024).

4.1.3 Creation of Fake News Websites

As part of its covert digital influence operation during the 2023–2024 Gaza conflict, the Israeli government supported the creation of fictitious English-language news websites that mimicked legitimate media outlets in style and presentation, including "Non-Agenda," "Unfold Magazine," and "The Moral Alliance." These websites, operated by the political marketing firm STOIC under the direction of Israel's Ministry of Diaspora Affairs, were designed to amplify pro-Israel narratives while undermining Palestinian credibility (Rodriguez, Schechner & Volz, 2024; Filiu, 2024; Middle East Monitor, 2024). These sites published articles that praised Israeli military actions, emphasised narratives around the defense of democracy and anti-terrorism, and discredited Palestinian groups by framing them as violent or deceptive. Importantly, the content was crafted to appear as if it originated from American or Canadian grassroots perspectives, further misleading audiences about the sources' legitimacy (Frenkel & Shane, 2024; Anand, 2024).

In addition to distributing fabricated content, the Israeli operation deployed a delegitimisation strategy accusing Palestinians of staging deaths and destruction for international sympathy, a tactic colloquially known as "Pallywood." This propaganda technique aims to erode the credibility of Palestinian civilian casualty reports and humanitarian claims by casting them as theatrical manipulation (Filiu, 2024). This mirrors broader disinformation strategies seen in authoritarian regimes, where the manufacturing of doubt and discrediting of humanitarian narratives are central to information warfare.

Furthermore, research from NewsGuard confirmed that during the Gaza conflict, a significant proportion of the most viral misinformation across platforms, including both pro-Israel and anti-Israel disinformation, was artificially amplified. Notably, X (formerly Twitter) Premium users were responsible for posting over 70% of the most widely shared false claims (Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, 2023), illustrating how platform monetisation and verification systems can unintentionally boost the visibility of coordinated propaganda efforts (NewsGuard, n.d.).

4.2 The Content of Disinformation & Strategic Narrative Warfare Model:

4.2.1 Issue Narrative

Issue narratives are the most concrete and time-sensitive form of strategic narrative, focusing on specific events, crises, or policy issues to shape public understanding and justify immediate actions. The issue narratives are considered as often reactive and opportunistic,

commonly used in real-time to justify actions, such as military interventions, by framing them as necessary, urgent, and aligned with broader values or legal norms.

In the case of Israeli disinformation, one of the most commonly used strategies is firstly the Israeli official draft an issue narrative according to instant events and then use the social media to reinforce these conclusions. The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) claimed that Hamas operated a command centre beneath Al-Shifa Hospital, Gaza's largest medical facility. They released videos¹ and images purportedly showing tunnel shafts and weapons caches. However, investigations by outlets like The Washington Post (Loveluck et al., 2023) found no immediate evidence of military use by Hamas within the hospital's premises.

Following an explosion at the Al-Ahli Arab Hospital, Israel attributed² the blast to a misfired rocket from Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Human Rights Watch (2023) noted that the Israeli military did not provide evidence to justify depriving hospitals of their protected status under international humanitarian law (United Nations News, 2025).

Another case of issue narrative would be related to school, Israel has conducted airstrikes on schools run by the UNRWA, claiming they were being used by Hamas militants³ (New York Post, 2024). For instance, an airstrike on the al-Sardi School in Nuseirat killed over 30 people. The IDF stated that the school housed a Hamas compound, but local officials and witnesses reported that the school was sheltering displaced civilians (Al Jazeera, 2024).

Once these narratives were articulated, Israeli-affiliated or sympathetic fake social media accounts were used to rapidly disseminate and normalise these framings across digital platforms (Bond, 2023). These accounts, posing as ordinary users or pseudo-news sources, amplified official statements, flooded search results, and crowded online discourse with seemingly organic support for Israel's claims. By repeating and emotionally framing these issue narratives, such as portraying schools and hospitals as legitimate military targets, fake social media activity helped to obscure counter-evidence, shape public opinion in real time, and legitimise immediate military actions under the guise of self-defence and legal necessity.

4.2.2 Identity Narrative

The concept of identity narratives addresses the question of “Who are we?” by defining a nation or group's core values, intentions, and historical significance. Typically constructed through contrasts with opposing actors, identity narratives frame perceptions in binary terms, such as victim versus aggressor, in order to legitimise certain political actions under a greater moral justification. These narratives serve as powerful tools to provide rationale for policy choices, military interventions, and international alignments. In the case of Israel's disinformation campaign against UNRWA, identity narratives were deployed in a calculated

¹ The video published by the IDF official account: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hjZbApMyANs>

² The content published by the IDF's official X account, picture resource in Attachment

³ The content published by the IDF's official X account, picture resource in Attachment

manner within the broader framework of strategic narrative warfare. By portraying UNRWA and other humanitarian organisations not as neutral aid providers but as terrorist collabourators, Israel sought to reframe the identity of these institutions in the eyes of the international public. This redefinition served to delegitimise humanitarian actors, aligning them with perceived "villains," and thus to morally justify Israel's military and political actions in Gaza. Through weaponised digital marketing and the repeated circulation of allegations unsupported by substantive evidence, Israel constructed an identity contrast that positioned itself as a defender against terrorism while casting critical humanitarian bodies as extensions of hostile forces. In doing so, the manipulation of identity narratives advanced both immediate military goals and the broader strategic objective of reshaping the international moral discourse surrounding the Gaza conflict.

A central tactic of Israel's disinformation campaign was the strategic use of Google Ads, purchasing top-ranking search results for terms like "UNRWA" and "UNRWA USA" that redirected users to Israeli government websites accusing UNRWA of collabourating with Hamas (Dave, 2024; Times of Israel, 2024). These ads even outperformed UNRWA's own donor outreach and reinforced the message that UNRWA was strongly correlated with Hamas. UNRWA and UN officials condemned the campaign as harmful and misleading, with Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini describing it as an attack on humanitarian neutrality (Al Jazeera, 2024). The campaign's impact was immediate, causing several governments to suspend funding and severely disrupting UNRWA's ability to deliver aid during Gaza's humanitarian crisis.

Despite the severity of the allegations, Israel did not present concrete evidence to substantiate its claims that UNRWA was complicit in terrorism. In response, the United Nations commissioned an independent review led by former French foreign minister Catherine Colonna. The final report, released in April 2024, found that while Israel alleged widespread infiltration of UNRWA by Hamas, it "has yet to provide supporting evidence" for those claims (United Nations, 2024). The report affirmed that UNRWA had established and maintained neutrality protocols and that Israel itself had not flagged any UNRWA staff through official channels in over a decade. Many donor states resumed funding following the report's publication, but not before the agency suffered severe reputational and financial setbacks.

Furthermore, the senior Israeli officials began personally attacking UNRWA leadership. The Israeli media and government messaging was publicly labelled Philippe Lazzarini, the commissioner-general of UNRWA, as a "terrorist sympathiser", which was condemned by the United Nations and other humanitarian groups (Al Jazeera, 2024). The UN warned that such inflammatory utterance could endanger the safety of humanitarian staff and represented a dangerous politicisation of international relief efforts. This episode demonstrates how narrative warfare and disinformation can undermine humanitarian neutrality, erode donor confidence, and endanger aid workers during conflict. Israel's campaign against UNRWA illustrates a broader trend of using digital platforms not just for strategic communication, but as tools of reputational damage.

4.2.3 System Narrative

While identity narratives construct how a political actor identifies itself and how it identifies allies and enemies, system narratives serve a broader purpose and can tell us how the international order should look and who has moral and political authority in it. Miskimmon and O'Loughlin (2017) have demonstrated how Russia advances a system narrative of an emerging multipolar world to counter what it believes is the dominance of the West. This section is more focused on how the Israeli government advances a system narrative rooted in a liberal international order, which presents itself as a democratic state committed to human rights and the fight against antisemitism. Israel is not just defending itself and its national identity, instead, it positions itself as a legitimate actor within the Western-led system of values that commands not only the right to exist and defend itself in a hostile region but also to endorse an ongoing fight against a global rise of antisemitism. This is a significant difference in utterance, which frames antisemitism not as a historical prejudice but as an ongoing global threat, which in turn serves as justification for Israeli action in the present as well as framing its fight against antisemitism in the context of the broader fight against intolerance and extremism. The system narrative functionalities Israel's geopolitical legitimacy under the liberal democratic order, and specifically rejects criticism of Israel's behaviours and policies, as an attack not only on Israel's character but the liberal democratic consensus more broadly.

From this perspective, the Israeli government has collabourated with the US advocacy groups to promote legislation in the United States that redefines antisemitism to include certain criticisms of Israeli state policy. This strategic effort is seen by many scholars and rights advocates as an attempt to suppress dissent and conflate political opposition with hate speech, particularly on U.S. university campuses (The Guardian, 2024; Time, 2024).

The Institute for the Study of Global Antisemitism and Policy (ISGAP) has been a major player in this initiative. ISGAP has close relationships with Israeli officials, and has been instrumental in developing the narrative in Congress around campus-based protests. ISGAP has said that protests related to Israel's actions in Gaza, and/or even its broader record on human rights, should be viewed as antisemitism, and has been a crucial player in pushing congressionally supported legislation based on this broader definition (The Guardian, 2024). These efforts began to take hold in Congress, where eventually legislators began to utilise campus-based protests against Israel as evidence of increasing antisemitism, calling for federal interventions and legislative reforms (Time, 2024). This dissertation examines ISGAP not just as a research agency, and as a narrative agency. Thus, this section demonstrates how disinformation can get laundered through the language of academic neutrality, and how geopolitical strategy disguises itself as scholarly inquiry.

The push to redefine antisemitism also manifested in federal investigative actions. Under pressure from political allies of Israel, U.S. federal authorities began probing university faculty who had signed open letters addressing Israeli military actions after October 7, 2023.

Faculty at the University of California, for example, were subjected to interviews and compelled to release personal data in response to a federal antisemitism probe, raising serious concerns about academic freedom and civil liberties (Time, 2024)

ISGAP plays a functional role in strategic narrative warfare, it explains how power structures co-opt ostensibly neutral institutions and media to reproduce dominant ideologies. ISGAP's reports, often cited in U.S. congressional hearings and campus policy debates, exemplify this dynamic: they reframe pro-Palestinian activism and criticism of Israeli human rights records as expressions of antisemitism, thus advancing a securitised, state-aligned discourse within the boundaries of academic legitimacy (Miskimmon et al., 2014). The narrative power lies not only in what is said but in how discourse boundaries are drawn—deciding what can be discussed and what is taboo. ISGAP's rhetoric demonstrated this mechanism by redefining antisemitism in a way that conflates dissent with bigotry, thereby excluding critical perspectives from what is deemed “acceptable” public discourse. This contributes directly to the Israeli government's broader effort to reengineer the cognitive terrain of Western audiences, particularly in academic and legislative spaces.

5. Discussion

5.1 Disinformation Campaign Outcomes and Expert Evaluations

Disinformation is a word that has been increasingly coming into view in the contemporary society. Disinformation refers to a process of systematic dissemination of false or inaccurate information to mislead with the intentional aim. Disinformation is different from misinformation, as misinformation can be disseminated without the aim of misleading since it's intentional in nature to manipulate people's views, confuse them, or achieve any other strategic purpose (Posetti & Matthews, 2018). It has been used historically in all forms of environment, from political propaganda to corporate competitions. Prior to the age of the internet, campaigns of disinformation relied on the use of print media, word-of-mouth, and other slower-speed modes of communication (Martens et al., 2018). But with the internet and social media, its proliferation and impact have been amplified hundreds of times, and now it is a real threat to the information space of today.

Traditionally, disinformation was one of the tools of ideological and political war that could affect public opinion, construct state policy, and ward off justification on the periphery of reserve action (Asmolov, 2018; Starbird et al., 2019). Under a condition of digitalisation, disinformation turned into an even broader tool of ideological and political campaigning (Steinfeld, 2022). Its power to influence public opinion, drive governments' decisions, and sanction actions on the international level is particularly rooted in the existing research. For instance, The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, an enduring and deeply rooted issue, is a clear and shining case, in which disinformation has been utilised intentionally by everyone to achieve national and geopolitics ends (Pappe, 2007). The conflict has a historical background of

being conditioned by propaganda. On the contrary, in the contemporary information era, rapid spreading of information through social media and other online platforms has facilitated spreading of misinformation (Finkelstein, 2003). Media coverage of war is capable of having a massive impact on what people think, and the way in which these stories are framed is oftentimes subject to influence by bias, selection reporting, and competing narratives (Alkalliny, 2017).

Such strategic framing not merely conceals realities on the ground but is employed to amplify existing prejudices. This process illustrates how information environments—most significantly, media narratives—are caught in the midst of broader geopolitics. The struggle for political power and legitimacy is also increasingly waged through contestation and construction of narratives. It is in this respect that, as per their strategic narrative warfare theory, Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle (2014) argue, state and non-state actors seek to influence the international system by projecting explicit narratives that define the past, interpret the present, and write the future. Such narratives are soft power tools that define conflict, alliance, and identity in terms that serve specific strategic interests.

AI and advanced social media tools have magnified these effects. As discussed in the previous section, Israel has run AI-powered campaigns that have targeted over 120 US lawmakers with personalised content aimed at influencing their positions on the Gaza war. These campaigns demonstrate how modern disinformation is no longer restricted to public opinion but is now reaching out to the micro-targeting of political leaders. The sophistication of such campaigns illustrates the evolution from traditional propaganda to precision-engineered narrative warfare. OpenAI's own internal investigation (The Guardian, 2024) into the misuse of its tools is an indication of a broader issue where even generative AI is becoming a front line in modern conflict.

Communication and information warfare specialists point out that disinformation may be countered with something more than fact-checking. As Buckingham (2009) succinctly describes it, the key to the solution lies in developing critical media literacy, teaching people how to analyse and question media messages' sources, structures, and intentions. This may particularly apply in a time when emotional appeals are more common than factual truth. Hameleers (2024) discusses that emotionally charged images, that typically disseminated in coverage of the Israel-Palestine and Ukraine wars, exploit visual biases and strengthen pre-existing beliefs of the public. Such visual misinformation strategies are more difficult to recognise and more influential in attitude formation, as they avoid rational processing and directly appeal to emotional responses.

Cognitive and psychological processes significantly contribute to the entrenchment of disinformation. According to Pereira, Harris, and Van Bavel (2023), identity-based reasoning tends to overcome impartial consideration of checkable facts, particularly when the disinformation is consistent with an individual's partisan or cultural identity. In such a scenario, despite disinformation having been corrected, individuals will still believe and disseminate it if it appeals to them. Algorithmic curation-generated echo chambers (Manor &

Manor, 2019) also maximise this effect by ensuring individuals are continuously exposed to confirming content, insulating them from contrary perspectives.

In brief, the fruits of Israel's disinformation campaigns are not merely discrete cases of manipulation but part of a broader strategy aimed at shaping popular opinion, dictating political discourse, and intimidating dissent. Professional opinion holds that unless these campaigns are addressed with sweeping reforms in the media, improved digital literacy, and international collaboration, they will persist in influencing global narratives in ever more undemocratic fashion.

5.2 The Significance of Modern Israel-Palestine Disinformation and Reflections on Information Warfare in the Digital Age

The importance of contemporary disinformation wars in the Israel-Palestine conflict lies not just in their subject or target, but in what they indicate about the evolving nature of war, power, and truth in the age of the internet. As war ever more spills beyond the physical battlefield, dominance of the narrative—of how a conflict is interpreted and understood—has become as vital as dominance of territory. This trajectory requires us to reimagine our notions of global conflict, moralities, and resistance in a time defined by data, platforms, and algorithms.

In the internet era, disinformation is no longer the domain of legacy media or official state press releases. Today, it thrives in social media ecosystems where messages are readily shared, manipulated, and recreated. Political actors, as well as digitally literate citizens, partake in "information gaming" under Steinfeld (2022)—manipulating platform algorithms to disseminate fake or warped storylines. They include hashtag hijacking and amplification bots, selective frame amplification of images, and algorithmic silencing of oppositional opinion.

The conflict of Israel-Palestine illustrates the two-fold role of digital technologies to communicate and control. Visual disinformation, in this case, is employed to elicit intense emotional responses that can stop rational analysis, Hameleers (2024) adds. One image, be it genuine, out of context, or manipulated, can shape the public understanding of a situation, usually leading to long-term misconceptions. These affectively charged constructions are often utilised for demonising one side and idealising the other, thereby collapsing complicated geopolitical facts into moral fables.

More broadly geopolitically, disinformation is now a tool of soft power. As Walt and Mearsheimer (2006) phrase it, influential actors utilise information campaigns in order to shape global perceptions to fit their strategic interests. In the virtual sphere, this can easily be done through the strategic use of persuasive content, which is often customised according to the language and cultural conventions of target groups. This is evident in the recent Israeli campaigns and strategies, as outlined in the paper.

Yet, disinformation is not unopposed. The same technologies that propagate propaganda can be redirected toward resistance. As Mahlouly and Erhaim (2023) chronicled, Palestinian digital activists have employed online platforms to reveal state violence, humanise the Palestinian cause, and counter the prevailing Israeli narrative. Such digital resistances are more than acts of activism—they are acts of narrative survival, where communities struggle not only for land or rights but for the validity of their narratives.

The concept of "digital occupation," which was termed by Tawil-Souri (2012), encapsulates the existence of living under physical siege and also in informational control. It describes how internet usage, censorship, and content moderation policies are utilised to further marginalise Palestinian voices. Under such a condition, control of information flow is tantamount to dominating the battlefield.

The ethical ramifications of these trends are deep. Information warfare undermines our conventional moral assumptions regarding warfare, the sanctity of civilians, and the nature of truth. When wars are waged via platforms that prioritise engagement over truth, and when artificial intelligence-generated content obscures the distinction between reality and fiction, the burden of truth-telling falls on the individual. Disinformation campaigns, says Asmolov (2018), possess a "disconnective power" that destroys social cohesion, institutional trust, and the ability to establish a common understanding.

To address these challenges, there need to be cultural and structural shifts. Media literacy, as Buckingham (2009) envisioned it, needs to be a part of education systems worldwide. Moreover, platform accountability needs to go beyond content moderation into decision-making and algorithmic transparency. Without these changes, the information war that has been unleashed on the Israel-Palestine conflict can become the template for geopolitical manipulation in the future.

In effect, the Israel-Palestine conflict demonstrates the conduct of contemporary warfare that involves not only conventional arms and territorial borders, but also virtual space, visual interfaces, and narrative. Since virtual space continues to be the predominant domain for social discourse, there is a need to comprehend and address the mechanics of disinformation in order to advance peace, uphold justice, and foster democratic stability.

5.3 Reconsideration of Disinformation Campaign's Influence

While much of the literature on disinformation campaigns in the Israel-Palestine conflict focuses on their seeming effectiveness in shaping narrative and shifting public opinion, a more critical consideration reveals a second position worthy of significant consideration: in the present context of hyper political and media polarisation, disinformation may not dramatically alter belief but rather operates to reinforce current predispositions within people. This process, commonly explained by cognitive heuristics like motivated reasoning and

confirmation bias, is especially prevalent in the United States, where the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has become a domestic cause of division, most visibly within the Democratic Party.

Recent developments highlight this imbalance. Progressive activists in the Democratic Party, led by Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and her allies in the "Squad", have made plain their dissent over Israel's military actions in Gaza, calling for the conditioning of or ending U.S. military aid. Mainstream Democrats, however, led by President Joe Biden and Senate leaders, have largely maintained traditional pro-Israel positions. The strains were evident at the 2024 Democratic National Convention, where pro-Palestinian protesters disrupted the event to decry the ongoing United States support for Israel (Guardian Staff, 2024). Despite the visibility of these protests, the party's official platform generally remained unchanged, reflecting the complex internal dynamics at play.

Disinformation campaigns have sought to exploit these fissures, with probes uncovering Israeli-linked influence campaigns targeting U.S. lawmakers with AI-created personas and bogus social media accounts. These initiatives spread customised information to various segments of the Democratic voter base, with the objective of influencing opinion or reinforcing suspicion among factions (Breland, 2024). The actual impact of these activities, though, seems to prefer entrenchment to persuasion. During a time when digital consumers are usually trapped in ideological echo chambers built by platform algorithms, the limited influence of disinformation has less to do with its ability to instil new beliefs but rather with its abilities to solidify those that are already present.

This finding necessitates a revisiting of the primary research question: in what ways do disinformation campaigns impact global discussions and perceptions of the Israel-Palestine conflict? Research demonstrates that although these campaigns are extremely technologically sophisticated and strategically driven, their success is contingent on the audience's pre-existing beliefs and the general epistemic polarisation environment. As researchers like Greifeneder, Jaffé, Newman, & Schwarz (2021) have observed, even painstakingly crafted corrections and fact-checking measures have minimal effect on audiences with deeply rooted political identities. Therefore, the deepest effect of disinformation can barely be the invention of lies but the license it gives individuals to deny inconvenient truths and maintain emotionally satisfying opinions.

In this context, disinformation transforms from a revolutionary to a catalytic agent, fuelling social fissures, rising distrust, and intensifying conflict. Its strength resides in its interaction with established ideological frameworks and not in its newness or mendacity. Therefore, while it is important to monitor and respond to disinformation, it is also important to avoid overestimating its ability to shape belief systems. Structural polarisation, partisanship, and media distrust were present before the advent of AI-based disinformation and, in many cases, would persist regardless of its existence. Disinformation in the Israel-Palestine context exacerbates underlying tensions, thus rendering reconciliation difficult and agreement hard to reach within the global discourse on conflict and justice.

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Attachment:

The IDF’s official X account and its contents

帖子



Israel Defense Forces

@IDF

关注

A failed rocket launch by the Islamic Jihad terrorist organization hit the Al Ahli hospital in Gaza City.

IAF footage from the area around the hospital before and after the failed rocket launch by the Islamic Jihad terrorist organization:

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Israel Defense Forces

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关注

These findings were found within @UNRWA facilities:

Acting on ISA intelligence, the forces discovered a tunnel shaft near an UNRWA school, leading to an underground terrorist tunnel beneath UNRWA's main headquarters. The forces found electrical infrastructure inside the tunnel connected to UNRWA's main HQ, suggesting it was supplying the tunnel with electricity—generated by the fuel provided through humanitarian aid.

This 700-meter-long tunnel, 18 meters deep, contained multiple blast doors and various intelligence assets seized by the forces. Intelligence and documents found confirmed the offices' use by Hamas terrorists. Large quantities of weapons, including rifles, ammunition, grenades and explosives, were uncovered hidden in the building's offices.

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