

"Hasbara" Zionist Propaganda in the Digital Age its Role after the Al-Aqsa Flood

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Abstract

This paper seeks to examine the particular importance accorded by the global Zionist movement to its propaganda activity known as Hasbara, which is considered the most significant form of Zionist public relations. Its activities became manifest with the establishment of the State of Israel on the occupied Palestinian territories, evolving into a critical instrument in shaping and directing global public opinion regarding the Palestinian cause and the emergence of the nascent state. This propaganda effort has primarily aimed at garnering international support, presenting Israel as a peaceful, democratic, open, and coexistent state, while simultaneously portraying the Palestinian side particularly resistance movements as terrorists and perpetrators of violence.

Following the events of Al-Aqsa Flood on October 7, 2023, and Israel's declaration of war on the Gaza Strip through unprecedented military operations, including large-scale massacres, starvation, forced displacement, and mass arrests, Hasbara once again re-emerged with force in the international media sphere. For Israel, it has become the optimal mechanism to polish its image amid ongoing violations, and the primary instrument through which it seeks to address its existential crisis.

Keywords: *Hasbara; Israeli propaganda; Digital diplomacy; Palestinian cause; Media warfare; Public opinion; Gaza war; Zionist strategy.*

La propagande sioniste « Hasbara » à l'ère numérique et son rôle après le déluge d'Al-Aqsa

Résumé :

Cet article examine l'importance particulière accordée par le mouvement sioniste mondial à sa propagande, la « Hasbara », considérée comme la forme la plus significative de relations publiques sionistes. Ses activités se sont manifestées avec l'établissement de l'État d'Israël dans les territoires palestiniens occupés, devenant un instrument essentiel pour façonner et orienter l'opinion publique mondiale sur la cause palestinienne et l'émergence de cet État naissant. Cet effort de propagande visait principalement à obtenir un soutien international, à présenter Israël comme un État pacifique, démocratique, ouvert et coexistant, tout en dépeignant simultanément la partie palestinienne, et notamment les mouvements de résistance, comme des terroristes et des auteurs de violences. Suite aux événements du déluge d'Al-Aqsa du 7 octobre 2023 et à la déclaration de guerre d'Israël à la bande de Gaza, par le biais d'opérations militaires sans précédent, incluant massacres à grande échelle, famines, déplacements forcés et arrestations massives, la Hasbara a refait surface avec force dans la sphère médiatique internationale. Pour Israël, elle est devenue le mécanisme idéal pour redorer son image face aux violations persistantes et le principal instrument par lequel il cherche à résoudre sa crise existentielle.

Mots-clés : *Hasbara ; propagande israélienne ; diplomatie numérique ; cause palestinienne ; guerre médiatique ; opinion publique ; guerre de Gaza ; stratégie sioniste.*

Introduction

The world in general, and the West in particular, has long recognized the strategic importance of controlling information in times of war an importance equal to that of field battles and weaponry. Consequently, efforts have been directed toward monopolizing various media outlets under the principle that “whoever controls information controls global public opinion.” The influential role of Western media in wars and international conflicts has become evident, particularly in the confrontation between Islam and the West, as well as in the protracted Arab-Israeli conflict. Since the infamous Balfour Declaration, Zionist efforts have consistently sought to legitimize Israel’s occupation of Palestinian land and maintain this legitimacy in the eyes of the world.

To this end, global Zionist organizations and their supporters have mobilized all available media, including contemporary social media platforms, to propagate the narrative of Jewish indigeneity and the legitimacy of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine. This has included securing material and moral support worldwide. Such media channels have relied on the dissemination of distorted information, manipulation of facts, fabrication of narratives, and the creation of misleading content ultimately fueling the spread of disinformation in service of Zionist objectives.

This type of Zionist information warfare is known as Hasbara a Hebrew term meaning “explanation,” “clarification,” or “simplification.” In practice, however, it functions as a sophisticated ideological propaganda machine whose primary purpose is to sanitize Israel’s image, provide seemingly convincing justifications for its colonization of Pales-

tinian land, the expulsion of its indigenous population, and the deployment of systemic violence against them. Hasbara strategically employs multilingual media platforms including Arabic-language outlets such as Avichay Adraee's official pages and Israel Speaks Arabic to directly engage with Palestinians and Arab audiences at large. By exploiting online interactions and comments, these outlets seek to penetrate public consciousness in ways that traditional media could not. At the same time, they conduct psychological warfare designed to instill despair, weakness, and frustration among their target audiences.

Against this backdrop, the present study addresses the central research problem: What is Hasbara? What roles has it played domestically, regionally, and globally in mitigating Israel's media fallout following the Al-Aqsa Flood operation?

Research Problem and Questions

This study stems from the following central research problem: What is Hasbara, and what role has it played at the domestic, regional, and international levels in masking Israel's media failures following the Al-Aqsa Flood operation?

From this overarching problem, several subsidiary questions emerge:

- What is Hasbara, and how did it originate? What mechanisms govern its operation?
- How was Hasbara deployed during the war on Gaza? Did it succeed in fulfilling the mission assigned to it after the Al-Aqsa Flood?
- How does Israel address: (a) Israeli domestic public opinion, (b) global popular demonstrations, and (c)

student mobilizations across international universities?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this research derives from the importance of its subject matter. Hasbara, as a Zionist media strategy that has evolved into a form of public diplomacy in the digital age, represents a critical tool for mobilizing international opinion in favor of Zionism and the State of Israel, established on occupied Palestinian land. Exploiting advanced technological and communicative tools, Hasbara has succeeded in rallying substantial global support and mobilization for the Zionist project.

Understanding its mechanisms is essential for developing effective counter-strategies, particularly given the growing international endorsement of Zionist narratives and the accelerating normalization of relations between Israel and certain Arab states developments that have left many observers astonished by the apparent moral abdication in the face of ongoing Palestinian suffering.

Objectives of the Study

This study seeks to achieve several objectives:

- 1) To contextualize Zionist propaganda and trace the evolution of Hasbara as a result of digital and technological advancements, recognizing it as an integral part of this broader propaganda system.
- 2) To outline the operational mechanisms of this strategy through reference to key literature, such as the Hasbara Handbook.

- 3) To analyze how Hasbara was employed during the most recent war on Gaza, and whether it succeeded in achieving its intended objectives.
- 4) To examine how Israel engages with domestic public opinion, global protest movements, and student activism within international universities.

Methodological Approach

To address the research problem and its subsidiary questions, this study employs a dual methodological framework:

The historical method, which entails a qualitative description of past events by identifying their elements, analyzing them, and interpreting them to understand the present and anticipate future trajectories (**Sarhan Ali Mahmoud, 2019, p. 36**). This is especially pertinent given that the article revolves around the historical, political, religious, and ideological underpinnings of the Zionist movement. The descriptive-analytical method, which analyzes social and political phenomena in order to provide accurate assessments of their occurrence and explore the nature of their interrelationships (*ibid.*, p. 51).

1. Review of Previous Studies

The topic of Hasbara has already attracted significant scholarly attention. Among the most notable studies consulted are:

- 1) Seif Dhia's study on Hasbara Tactics in the Age of Digital Public Diplomacy (**published by Al-Bayan Center for Studies and Planning, 2024**). This research highlights the key strategic transformations in Israeli propaganda mechanisms prompted by the digital revolution, cataloging major initiatives and cam-

paigns launched by Zionist institutions, as well as the tactics employed to bolster Israel's global image.

- 2) Abdullah Adawi and others' study titled *Israeli Propaganda: A Reading in Soft Power (published as a book by the Vision for Political Development Center, Turkey, 2023)*. This work offers an in-depth exploration of propaganda directed at Palestinians, Arabs, and global audiences, analyzing both its tools and content, while also assessing its impact on target populations.

Building on these and other contributions, the present study aims to provide a more comprehensive perspective on Zionist propaganda particularly Hasbara its exploitation for image-building in the digital era, and the degree of its success or failure, especially in the wake of the Al-Aqsa Flood operation and the subsequent events in Gaza.

2. Israeli Media Discourse: From Propaganda to Hasbara as Concept and Strategy

From its inception, the Zionist project was accompanied if not preceded by extensive propaganda efforts. These appeared early in the writings, research, and political programs advanced by the founders of the Zionist movement, who skillfully exploited the most influential media outlets of their time. With technological development, these efforts became increasingly systematic, comprehensive, and precise in both terminology and objectives. Ultimately, this evolution gave rise to what came to be known as Hasbara, a form of diplomatic propaganda designed to present Israel as an innocent, democratic, and civilized state in the eyes of the world.

The origins of this propaganda can be traced back to the First Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland, in 1897, where Theodor Herzl founder of modern political Zionism recognized the centrality of propaganda for the realization of Zionist goals. He launched a weekly newspaper titled *Die Welt* (**The World**), whose first issue appeared on June 3, 1897. Its editorial proclaimed: "This journal must serve as a shield and a weapon against the enemies of the Jewish people, regardless of religion." (**Al-Nairab, 2010, p. 12**).

From this congress emerged the Central Guidance Office, followed by the establishment of a propaganda department within the Zionist Organization's leadership after World War I. This department was tasked with sustaining global Zionist advocacy and defaming Arabs and Palestinians. By the time of Israel's founding in 1948, there were already 18 daily newspapers in circulation, and Hollywood cinema heavily influenced by Jewish producers was deployed as a vehicle for advancing Zionist political and propaganda objectives (**Faleh Taha, 2024**).

Zionist media initially concentrated on the major centers of global political influence first Europe, and later North America. As Al-Nairab (**2010, p. 7**) notes, this propaganda was organized with meticulous precision and became one of the principal barriers to Western understanding of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Robert Cooper, foreign policy adviser to former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, emphasized this double standard in media narratives: "We must grow accustomed to double standards. The repetition of certain 'facts,' disguised as news, reinforces them. For instance, some lives are portrayed as valuable while others are deemed worthless; the death of 'our people' is seen as a crime, whereas others are scarcely considered human." (**ibid, p. 14**).

This manipulation of narratives was central to Herzl's early vision, who once stated: "All that matters is that they talk even if they criticize Zionism. Shouting is everything; indeed, loud voices matter greatly, for human history is nothing but the clatter of weapons and the rumble of opinion. You must awaken and shout." (**Abu Juma'a, 2023**).

Today, this legacy persists under the modern guise of Israeli digital diplomacy, embodied in Hasbara. As Al-Khashn (2023) explains, Hasbara "links the information war to Israel's strategic objectives in order to justify the unjustifiable. It has become a central strategy for shaping Israel's international image one that has faced criticism since 1948 while simultaneously explaining policies, framing events positively, and countering any criticism. In the current war, Hasbara serves as an additional weapon for promoting deceptive narratives that obscure the genocidal practices committed by Israel."

Scholarly inquiry into the concept reveals its linguistic roots: in Hebrew, Hasbara literally means "explanation" or "clarification." Some studies attribute the formalization of the term to the Jewish Polish journalist and writer Nahum Sokolow, who used it as an equivalent of modern public diplomacy.

He viewed Hasbara as the natural extension of Zionist advocacy, engaging European elites through public speeches and diplomatic pressure (**Jaber, 2018, p. 13**). Over time, particularly following the 1982 invasion of Beirut and the Sabra and Shatila massacres, Israeli organizations began institutionalizing Hasbara as a distinct apparatus, later overseen by the Ministry of Strategic Affairs and Public Diplomacy (**Dhia, 2024, p. 6**).

By 1982, the Israeli Knesset formally expanded the use of the term beyond political discourse, embedding it within Israel's foreign relations and diplomatic infrastructure (**Abu Juma'a, 2023**). Some analysts therefore describe Hasbara as a political instrument managed by the Israeli Ministry of Strategic Affairs and Public Diplomacy, operated by intelligence officers, and supported by a coalition of governmental and non-governmental actors, lobbyists, academics, journalists, and volunteers worldwide. Its tactics range from manipulating narratives and distorting facts to mobilizing digital platforms and social media campaigns (**Arab Post, 2022**).

Ultimately, all these efforts serve one purpose: to project a favorable image of Israel internationally and to neutralize criticism of its policies. This occurs even at the expense of freedom of speech within Israel itself, where dissenting voices are marginalized under the pretext of national security. As Mousa (2015) observes, Israeli society is fully mobilized to serve the state's occupation agenda, with both official and unofficial institutions incorporated into a broader propaganda strategy aimed at shaping domestic and international public opinion.

Hasbara not only seeks to distort opposing narratives but also to enforce a form of "political correctness" within media ecosystems, encouraging self-censorship among journalists and audiences alike. Its ultimate goal is to reduce public receptivity to alternative perspectives and to suppress the circulation of information critical of Israel across social and digital networks (**Freeman, 2025**).

3. Hasbara Strategies for Enhancing Israel's Image and Its Arenas of Activity

3.1 Hasbara Strategies

The most authoritative reference for understanding Hasbara strategies is the Hasbara Handbook by Frank Luntz, a prominent American-Jewish political consultant and Republican strategist. The handbook, published after the 2009 Gaza War, provides a detailed set of arguments, tactics, and rhetorical tools to defend Israel, justify its policies, and improve its global image in the face of international criticism (**Richard Silverstein, 2009, pp. 30-32**).

According to Seif Dhia (2024, p. 7), the handbook outlines comprehensive communication techniques designed to strengthen Israel's international standing. It serves as a training manual that explains in detail the methods for defending Zionist interests across virtual platforms, including debate techniques and strategies for engaging in intellectual discussions. Based on the handbook and Hasbara Fellowship guidelines¹, the strategies can be summarized as follows:

1. Comprehensive messaging across social media platforms: Disseminating targeted content to diverse audiences to encourage pro-Israel advocacy, including the organization of public or covert demonstrations.

2. Creation of dedicated websites: Establishing online repositories of pro-Israel narratives for dissemination via social media, supported by advanced tech companies that manage, translate, and amplify Israel-related content. These companies also train specialized teams in "war rooms."

3. Agenda setting: Transitioning Hasbara efforts from reactive to proactive initiatives, particularly targeting neutral

¹ <https://hasbarafellowships.org/apply/>

or undecided populations. This includes highlighting Jewish suffering, emphasizing shared values between Israel and Western liberal democracies, and framing Hamas as a terrorist threat to the global West. This narrative is vital for deflecting criticism of Israeli actions in Gaza.

4. Organizational coalitions: Coordinating across a network of Hasbara “war rooms” involving over 100 independent organizations. These groups not only distribute content but also share insights and coordinate messaging, with WhatsApp groups (e.g., **Hasbara for Sharing**) serving as hubs for distributing prepared materials.

5. Coordination with government ministries: While some Hasbara initiatives operate independently, many maintain close collaboration with official bodies. These partnerships enhance responsiveness to developments and expand the reach of Hasbara campaigns.

6. Financial and logistical support: Israeli ministries provide grants to civil society initiatives engaged in Hasbara. For instance, the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs has funded multiple Hasbara projects to sustain advocacy efforts globally.

7. Deflection and demonization: Hasbara often shifts blame for Israeli atrocities to Palestinian resistance movements, particularly Hamas. A prominent example was the bombing of Al-Ahli Arab Hospital, initially blamed on Israel by global media, but later reframed through Hasbara networks as an attack carried out by Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

8. Exploitation of global media platforms: Zionist organizations established the Israel Project (TIP) in 2003, a U.S and Israel-based public relations initiative aimed at promoting Israel’s image internationally. TIP has focused heavily on digital television platforms such as HBO and Netflix, which

have aired more than 20 Israeli productions (films, series, documentaries) in recent years (**Tamimi, 2020**).

9. Technological interaction and digital mobilization: Training programs and apps are central to Hasbara efforts. Examples include the ACT.IL/4IL app, launched in 2017 with Israeli governmental backing, which mobilizes global users to post pro-Israel content online. Another example is the Hasbara App (2010), aimed at digitally countering the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement by portraying Israel as a peace-loving, humanitarian state (**Dhia, 2024, p. 8**).

3.2 Arenas of Hasbara Activity

Hasbara activities are concentrated in regions with significant Jewish communities and lobbying power, particularly North America. The Hasbara Fellowships program has been active for over 20 years, training students across more than 95 campuses in the United States and Canada. Each year, hundreds of students are sent to Israel for intensive programs that include visits to strategic sites (**e.g., borders with Gaza and Syria, the Knesset, and the Supreme Court**). Upon returning, participants act as pro-Israel advocates within their universities, maintaining constant coordination with their Israeli counterparts (**Al-Khashn, 2023**).

Hasbara is equally active in Europe and Russia. In 2017, Israel allocated 128 million shekels to Hasbara campaigns on social media, much of it targeting Russian-speaking audiences. This included content moderation, censorship of anti-Israel narratives, and mobilization of Russian-Jewish communities, nearly half of whom (49%) expressed pro-Israel sentiments in online platforms (**Kirbitchenok, 2023**).

In Western Europe, Hasbara enjoys even greater freedom. For example, during the 1967 war, French media reported false claims that Egypt had attacked Israel, which only later proved to be fabricated. More recently, following the killing of Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh in 2022, Israel initially claimed she was killed by “terrorists,” only to later acknowledge that an Israeli soldier had fired the fatal shots.

Despite such incidents, Israeli spokespersons such as Raphaël Rafowicz continue to enjoy near-unlimited media access in France, supported by strong ties between Israeli advocates and French media institutions (**Gresh, 2024**).¹

In the Arab world, Hasbara activities are directed through Arabic-language channels such as the official page of Avi-chay Adraee (**Head of the IDF’s Arab Media Division**) and Israel Speaks Arabic. These outlets humanize the Israeli army as “ethical” and “committed to humanitarian values,” while simultaneously demonizing Palestinian resistance as terrorism. They also emphasize Israel’s technological and scientific advancements, while concealing evidence of war crimes, settlement expansion, and forced displacement (**Al-Nairab, 2010, p. 84**).

As Mariam Habib Matta (2025) notes, Hasbara in the Arab region seeks to tightly control political narratives by exploiting existing internal divisions. Although not a “magic solution,” this strategy represents a broader shift toward direct, unfiltered public diplomacy aimed at reshaping regional perceptions of Israel.

4. Hasbara Tactics After the Al-Aqsa Flood

On the morning of October 7, 2023, Palestinian resistance fighters breached the separation wall erected by Israel in the

¹ He is a reserve officer in the Israeli army, born in France, and a former head of the Paris delegation of the Jewish Agency for Israel.

occupied territories and took Israeli hostages. Immediately, Israel unleashed a massive propaganda campaign through Hasbara, portraying itself as the victim while casting Palestinian resistance as the aggressor deliberately ignoring over seventy-five years of occupation, dispossession, and systematic violence.

This campaign spread fabricated stories, including claims that Hamas militants had beheaded 40 Israeli children, raped women, executed civilians, and burned corpses. No credible evidence was provided, but the Western public was quick to absorb such narratives. Even U.S. President Joe Biden initially echoed the beheading story before it was exposed as a fabrication (Abadi, 2023).

This event dramatically reshaped Israel's public diplomacy efforts, marking a shift toward more direct messaging. For instance, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu began addressing not only foreign governments but also the populations of states such as Lebanon and Iran directly (Matta, 2025). As Ze'ev Elkin, head of the Hasbara Committee in the Israeli Knesset,

remarked: "Hasbara is a vital front in this war, aimed at shaping public opinion and securing international approval for continuing combat under the conditions necessary to eliminate Hamas." (Al-Khashn, 2023).

The main tactics deployed after the Al-Aqsa Flood included:

4.1 Mobilizing Domestic and International Initiatives Through Technology

Two months into the war, Hasbara operations expanded to include 120 task rooms, 40 NGOs specializing in technological tools, and 100 databases, coordinated by Israel's Insti-

tute for National Security Studies in collaboration with the Israeli Hasbara Map project. Of the initiatives launched, 72 were non-profit efforts driven by volunteers, tech companies, and academics aligned with Israel's agenda. The IDF Spokesperson became the primary source of content for these campaigns (Al-Khashn, 2023).

4.2 Narrative Shifts and Selective Comparisons

Hasbara strongly emphasized portraying Israel as the vulnerable victim of potential genocide, rather than as the perpetrator of ethnic cleansing. When initial narratives failed, Hasbara shifted strategies for instance, from likening Hamas to ISIS (to resonate with Western audiences) to drawing comparisons with U.S. war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, suggesting that if such atrocities were tolerated, so too should Israel's actions in Gaza (InfoPlus, 2024).

4.3 Lies and Fabrication of Evidence

As Israeli journalist Haim Levinson wrote in Haaretz (Dec. 20, 2023): "In Israel, lies are an industry, a booming commodity. Anyone who insists on telling the truth is treated as a demoralizing defeatist." This culture of fabrication was evident during the Gaza war, where Israel propagated false claims to gain sympathy, justify atrocities, and maintain a façade of victory despite intelligence and military failures on October 7. Examples of debunked fabrications include:

- The alleged beheading of children,
- The Re'im music festival "massacre,"
- Claims of mass rapes of Israeli women,
- The Al-Ahli Hospital bombing being blamed on Palestinians, "terror tunnels" beneath hospitals,
- UNRWA's alleged ties to Hamas,

- And reports of piles of burned Palestinian children (**Arab Post, 2024**).

4.4 Religious and Humanitarian Appeals

Zionist propaganda frequently draws upon religious and emotional appeals, varying its rhetoric depending on audience, language, and circumstances. Narratives often invoke the notion of Israel as a divine promise, a democracy seeking peace, and a Western outpost in a hostile region (**Tamimi, 2020**).

Rabbi Mosheh Gurion famously described Israel's wars of 1948, 1956, and 1967 as "holy wars," with the first to liberate Israel, the second to consolidate it, and the third to fulfill the prophecies of the Hebrew prophets (**Bal'aysha, 2003, p. 203**).

Hasbara also relied heavily on ZAKA, an Israeli volunteer organization, whose representatives (e.g, **Yossi Landau**) gave graphic testimonies of atrocities allegedly committed on October 7. Their emotional storytelling often broadcast with tears and dramatic gestures was later proven false after investigations (**Anderson, 2024**). Nonetheless, Israeli leaders, including Netanyahu, praised ZAKA's contributions, calling them essential to legitimizing and prolonging the war effort.

4.5 Digital Suppression ("Digital Deterrence")

Since the late 1990s, Israel has treated the internet as a battlefield for narrative warfare. Palestinian content has faced widespread censorship under accusations of antisemitism or incitement. During the Gaza war, hundreds of Palestinian accounts and pages were suspended or shadow-banned on platforms like Facebook and X.

The 7amleh Center documented over 1,000 digital rights violations, with 950 cases on Facebook alone, including page

deletions, account suspensions, and restrictions on keywords such as Hamas, jihad, martyr, Al-Qassam, Hezbollah, and resistance fighter. These systematic efforts aimed to erase Palestinian narratives from digital platforms (**Nashef, 2023, p. 64**).¹

4.6 Paid Advertisements on Social Media

The Israeli government invested heavily in sponsored campaigns. In the first month of the war, Israel spent approximately \$7.1 million on YouTube ads alone, according to Semrush data. These ads promoted narratives of Hamas' alleged plans to use chemical weapons, often drawing parallels with Al-Qaeda (**Al-Khashn, 2023**).

4.7 Direct Government Funding

Hasbara received substantial financial support. One month after October 7, Israel's Finance Ministry allocated 63 million shekels (\$17 million) to Hasbara operations, with 10 million for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 20 million for the Ministry of Strategic Affairs, and 33 million for civil-society organizations engaged in Hasbara (**Marsden, 2023**).

By early 2025, the Israeli government allocated \$150 million twenty times more than in previous years for "campaigns to explain Israel's position to the world." Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar described this as part of a broader "war of consciousness," with funds dedicated to global media campaigns, intensive social media activities, and univer-

¹ ZAKA is an Israeli volunteer organization whose members are primarily responsible for recovering the bodies of victims of "unnatural" deaths. It holds official classification as a non-governmental organization (NGO) in Israel. Its members are also referred to as first responders or as specialists in search and recovery.

sity programs in the United States to counter growing pro-Palestinian solidarity (Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, 2025).

5. Has Hasbara Succeeded in the Gaza War?

In an article published by Jewish Insider, Ruth Marks Eglash (2024) argues that Israel has been losing the Hasbara battle due to a “broken public relations playbook.” Communication experts attribute this failure to organizational chaos, lack of discipline and unity, and poor strategic planning. Despite Israel’s intense Hasbara activity from the very first moments of the Al-Aqsa Flood, these shortcomings undermined its effectiveness. For example, Michael Oren, former Israeli ambassador to the United States, gave hundreds of interviews, wrote multiple op-eds, and spoke to communities worldwide about the October 7 attacks and Israel’s existential struggle against Hamas. Yet he admitted that he received little to no support from the Israeli government no briefings, no official talking points, and no unified narrative to bolster his efforts.

As Israel’s war of annihilation against Gaza extended into its 23rd month, the global impact of images emerging from the Strip grew overwhelming: malnourished children with protruding ribs, mothers carrying dead or starving infants, and desperate civilians fighting over bags of flour or bottles of water in aid centers (Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, 2025). These images generated mounting internal and external criticism.

Mass protests erupted worldwide, condemning Israel and calling for an end to the genocide. Lawmakers in countries such as Ireland, Spain, South Africa, and Brazil demanded recognition of the State of Palestine. Ministers and parliamentarians in traditionally pro-Israel governments including the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the

Netherlands (**where three cabinet ministers resigned**) openly challenged their governments' unconditional support for Israel. Calls grew for Israeli leaders to face war crimes charges, ambassadors were expelled, and Israeli tourists were sometimes treated as criminals abroad. Even U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken reportedly admitted in September 2025: "Israel may be winning the war, but it is losing the battle of international relations."

Given these developments, it is evident that Hasbara failed significantly to promote Israel's narrative. Its reliance on one-sided justifications of atrocities against Palestinians backfired in the age of digital diplomacy, where communication is two-way and citizens actively participate in shaping discourse. As Abdullah Adawi and colleagues (2023, p. 86) note, Palestinian activists and their allies succeeded in exposing Israeli propaganda by leveraging social media to broadcast images of destruction and civilian deaths, thereby shifting global opinion against Israel.

Former Jerusalem Post editor-in-chief Yaakov Katz admitted: "Israel is failing miserably in its public diplomacy. We are simply terrible at it." He further described Hasbara as plagued by too many competing voices and no clear chain of command.

Similarly, Matt Leib, host of the Bad Hasbara podcast, identified a fundamental flaw: "You can convince Western governments to support Israel, but you cannot convince ordinary people who see the massacres with their own eyes. The more Israel tries to justify atrocities, the more people recognize it as sheer propaganda." While the Israeli government has attempted to mobilize celebrities and influencers to promote its narrative, Leib dismissed these efforts as futile: "People do not base their moral or political convictions on celebrity endorsements."

6. How Does Israel Confront Public Opinion, Global Protests, and Student Movements?

After nearly two years of war on Gaza, Israel's international standing has significantly eroded despite its extensive public diplomacy efforts. This decline is reflected in shifting global political positions, growing domestic discontent, and widespread international protests condemning Israeli actions.

6.1 Confronting Israeli Domestic Public Opinion

A poll conducted by Maariv on June 30, 2025, revealed that a majority of Israelis supported a comprehensive prisoner exchange deal in return for halting the war in Gaza. The survey showed broad public consensus on the need for an immediate agreement to secure the release of all Israeli hostages, even if it required a full military withdrawal from Gaza and the continued rule of Hamas there (**Ru'ya Center for Studies, 2025**).

This issue has sparked deep divisions between Israel's governing coalition and the opposition, manifested in large-scale protests and demonstrations led by the families of hostages. Although the Israeli government has often ignored these movements, some mainstream media outlets have cautiously broken the silence.

For instance, Channel 12 aired rare footage of Gaza's humanitarian catastrophe children scrambling for food and women staring blankly amid ruins. Yet even such coverage was framed as part of a "propaganda war led by Hamas," thus attempting to deflect blame.

In practice, Israel's strategy alternates between suppressing dissent at home and framing Hamas as the sole culprit for the suffering in Gaza. This enables the government to

justify ongoing military aggression under the pretext of “fighting terrorism.”

6.2 Confronting Global Protests

A report by the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) indicated that between October 7 and 27, 2023, there were 182 pro-Israel demonstrations in the United States, compared to 402 pro-Palestinian demonstrations. Globally, during the same period, there were 359 pro-Israel demonstrations versus 3,482 pro-Palestinian ones. Another study found 3,761 pro-Palestinian demonstrations worldwide compared to just 529 in support of Israel, meaning approximately 86% of global demonstrations favored Palestine (**Abdel-Hay, 2023**).

Initially, Hasbara succeeded in generating Western sympathy by framing Israel as the victim. However, as the war dragged on and images of atrocities in Gaza spread, public opinion shifted dramatically. Mass protests erupted in cities worldwide, including London, Paris, New York, and Johannesburg. Many targeted Western media outlets accused of bias, such as the BBC, where protesters demanded fair coverage of Palestinian suffering (**Hammoud, 2023**).

Israel’s response was to double down on its core narrative: the war was necessary to eliminate Hamas, framed as a terrorist organization threatening not only Israel but the entire Western democratic order. Hasbara campaigns emphasized that Israel did not target civilians but only militants, seeking to portray its military actions as part of a broader fight against “Islamic extremism.”

Yet opinion polls suggest that Western publics were not convinced. For example, a YouGov poll in the UK conducted less than 10 days after October 7 showed that 39% of young people (ages 18–24) sympathized with Palestinians, com-

pared to only 11% who sympathized with Israelis (**Ham-moud, 2023**). This demonstrates a growing generational divide, with younger populations rejecting official narratives and identifying Israeli actions as colonial violence.

6.3 Confronting Student Movements in Global Universities

Student mobilizations in Western universities have been particularly alarming for Israel and its allies. Beyond moral solidarity with Palestinians, student activism has economic implications, as divestment campaigns target Israeli institutions and companies complicit in the occupation.

In the United States, pro-Palestinian student protests gained momentum despite efforts by pro-Israel lobbies to suppress them by labeling them as “antisemitic.” The Israeli strategy has been to leverage its influence in U.S. media to keep the focus on Israeli suffering while minimizing coverage of Palestinian casualties. However, the visibility of Jewish students opposing Zionism within these movements further undermined the Israeli narrative.

As Haneen Al-Wuhaili (2024) observes, the long-term impact of student activism lies in shaping the future elite: many of today’s activists will become tomorrow’s policy-makers. Their reliance on alternative media platforms such as TikTok also makes it harder for Israel to monopolize information flows.

Similar movements have spread across Europe. In Denmark, for example, more than 2,100 students and staff signed a petition titled “Students Against Occupation”, demanding academic disengagement from Israeli institutions and divestment from illegal settlements. Pro-Israel lobbies labeled such actions as “antisemitism,” but many protesting

students themselves came from Jewish backgrounds critical of Zionism (Souhaili, 2024).

This reveals a pattern: Hasbara seeks to suppress student mobilizations through media campaigns and political pressure, framing them as support for terrorism or antisemitism. Yet the persistence of these movements demonstrates the limits of Israel's ability to control narratives in academic spaces.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that Israeli public diplomacy Hasbara suffered a profound rupture after nearly twenty-three months of war on Gaza. The carefully constructed image of Israel as a democratic and humane state has collapsed in much of the Western and global public sphere. Despite continuing to enjoy official U.S. support and partial backing from some Western European governments, Israel has effectively lost the media war. The double standards with which it justifies its aggression against Gaza no longer suffice to conceal the atrocities committed.

This subject thus remains of utmost importance for research and critical engagement. Exposing and countering Hasbara requires systematic efforts, including:

Verification of facts: Disseminating accurate, well-documented information about the war while debunking false Israeli narratives.

Technological engagement: Harnessing the latest digital tools to reach the widest possible audiences and raise awareness of Palestinian suffering.

Public events and knowledge production: Organizing conferences, seminars, books, and articles to expose Zionist

propaganda and develop forward-looking strategies for resistance.

Political pressure: Leveraging international media, protests, and influential public figures to demand an end to the genocide in Gaza and the restoration of Palestinian freedom.

Institutional support: Providing financial and organizational resources to grassroots and individual initiatives countering Hasbara, which otherwise remain fragmented and underfunded compared to Israel's highly resourced propaganda apparatus.

Ultimately, Gaza's images of devastation and human suffering succeeded where Hasbara failed: dismantling the Israeli propaganda narrative before the world's eyes, weakening Israel's moral and political standing, and invigorating global solidarity with Palestine.

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