Controlling the Narrative: Contemporary Hasbara, Digital Propaganda, and the Psychology of Perception in the Israel-Palestine Conflict

In modern conflict, information is no longer the backdrop to war - it *is* the war. Images, words, hashtags, and algorithms now function as weapons just as surely as bombs and bullets. The battlefield is not only Gaza, the West Bank, or the halls of the UN - it is also your phone screen, your news feed, and your emotional reflexes. The fight is not merely over territory, but over **truth**, **memory**, and **moral perception**. And in this arena, Israel's propaganda system - known as **Hasbara** - has emerged as one of the most advanced and aggressive narrative operations in the world.

Traditionally translated as "explanation," *Hasbara* presents itself as public diplomacy: an effort to "clarify" Israel's actions to the global community. But in practice, it functions as a comprehensive, state-backed psychological and digital influence operation. Its aim is not merely to persuade, but to **control the story** - who is seen as victim or aggressor, legitimate or criminal, human or disposable.

Over the past two years, amid Israel's intensified assault on Gaza and the global rise of digital activism, Hasbara has entered a new phase. No longer limited to press releases or state media, it now operates through **algorithms, influencer networks, disinformation campaigns, and corporate enforcement**. Platforms like **X (formerly Twitter)** and **TikTok**, once imagined as democratizing spaces, have become digital battlegrounds where the visibility of suffering - and the legitimacy of resistance - are subject to algorithmic erasure.

At the same time, powerful billionaires like **Larry Ellison**, who now holds major influence over both TikTok and legacy media through Oracle and Skydance/Paramount, are enforcing ideological conformity from the top down. Pro-Palestinian voices are increasingly silenced, not only by state censorship but by **employer policies**, **algorithmic suppression**, and **psychological manipulation** embedded in the very platforms we use to understand the world.

But despite all this, truth persists.

Eyewitness testimonies, digital archives, and global consciousness have begun to resist and rupture the Hasbara illusion. The goal of this work is to **document**, **expose**, and **equip** readers with the tools to understand and challenge that illusion - before it becomes reality itself.

The Evolution of Hasbara - From Cold War Diplomacy to Digital Domination

"Hasbara" (הסברה) literally means "explanation" in Hebrew. On the surface, it implies clarification or public diplomacy - Israel's effort to "explain itself" to the world. But Hasbara is not merely explanatory; it is **performative, preemptive, and manipulative**. It is a coordinated propaganda framework designed to control global narratives about Israel, particularly in the context of its occupation of Palestine.

Unlike traditional public relations, Hasbara is **militarized and institutionalized**, rooted in the security state, and practiced across platforms, languages, and disciplines. It is not about winning a debate - it is about **defining the terms of reality** before the debate begins.

The Origins: From Zionist Advocacy to State Propaganda

The seeds of Hasbara were planted well before the founding of Israel in 1948. Zionist leaders in the early 20th century recognized the importance of shaping Western public opinion. Figures like Chaim Weizmann and Theodor Herzl were not just diplomats but **narrative entrepreneurs**, working to convince British and American elites that Zionism was a modern, civilizing project rather than a colonial one.

After the establishment of the Israeli state, Hasbara took on a more formal role. Throughout the Cold War, Israeli officials framed the state as a liberal outpost of democracy in a hostile Arab region, aligning themselves with American values and Western fears of Soviet influence.

Key early Hasbara goals included:

- Justifying the **Nakba** (the forced displacement of over 700,000 Palestinians in 1948)
- Rebranding the 1967 occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem as a "defensive war"
- Deflecting criticism from military actions like the 1982 Lebanon War and intifada crackdowns

In each of these periods, Hasbara relied on the **Western press, diplomatic allies, and Jewish diaspora institutions** to amplify Israel's version of events. It portrayed Israel as small, besieged, and morally superior - despite holding overwhelming military power.

Institutionalization: The Rise of the Hasbara Bureaucracy

By the 1970s and 80s, Hasbara had become formalized within the Israeli state. The **Ministry of Foreign Affairs**, **Ministry of Strategic Affairs**, and **IDF spokesperson units** each developed propaganda wings focused on shaping international opinion.

Key developments included:

- The founding of the **Hasbara Department** within the Foreign Ministry
- Training programs for Israeli diplomats and soldiers on "narrative discipline"
- The use of **AIPAC** and affiliated lobbies to coordinate U.S. media messaging
- Partnerships with PR firms, think tanks, and major U.S. media outlets

This was not just about putting Israel in a good light - it was about **delegitimizing Palestinian resistance**, reframing criticism as antisemitism, and influencing political decision-making in Western capitals.

The Hasbara Handbook: Propaganda in Practice

By the 2000s, Hasbara had moved beyond traditional diplomacy into **mass-media influence and disinformation techniques**. One key artifact from this period is the **"Hasbara Handbook"**, a guide widely circulated among Israel advocates in the early internet era.

The handbook outlines rhetorical strategies such as:

- **Point-scoring vs. truth-seeking**: Always aim to win the argument, not explain the issue
- **Emotional appeals**: Evoke fear, guilt, and trauma (e.g., constant references to the Holocaust or terrorism)
- **Redirection**: When challenged on Israel's actions, pivot to Hamas, Iran, or antisemitism
- **Discredit and delegitimize**: Attack the messenger, not the message - especially critics, journalists, and academics

These tactics are not limited to state actors. They are now disseminated through **student groups, diaspora organizations, and online volunteers**, forming a global army of digital propagandists.

Hasbara 2.0: The Digital Pivot

The real transformation came in the 2010s and accelerated in the 2020s. As traditional media lost influence and social media gained dominance, Hasbara pivoted. It began to focus on **influencer campaigns, AI moderation, algorithmic engineering, and real-time digital disinformation**.

Key developments include:

- The IDF's **"Spokesperson's Unit"** creating viral TikToks to reframe airstrikes as heroism
- Civilian "Hasbara warriors" coordinated on WhatsApp and Telegram to mass-report pro-Palestinian posts
- The Israeli government funding **multi-million-dollar digital campaigns** to flood platforms with pro-Israel content, especially during periods of escalated violence
- The 2019 Israeli Ministry tender offering 3 million NIS for a covert social media operation targeting "delegitimization campaigns"

These efforts culminated in what analysts call **Hasbara 2.0** - a propaganda regime adapted for the platform age, where **speed, virality, and emotional manipulation** matter more than facts or policy.

Platform as Propaganda - How Hasbara Captured X (formerly Twitter)

When Elon Musk acquired Twitter in late 2022 and rebranded it as **X**, the platform entered a new ideological phase. Marketed as a haven for "free speech," X rapidly evolved into something far more partisan: **a battleground for state-aligned information warfare**, with Israel's Hasbara apparatus finding fertile ground to amplify its messaging, suppress dissent, and shape public perception of the Israel-Palestine conflict in real time.

While Twitter has long had issues with bias and moderation asymmetries, the post-Musk era marks a dramatic escalation in **state-adjacent narrative engineering** - with the Israeli government, the IDF, and affiliated networks taking full advantage of platform changes, leadership sympathies, and algorithmic opacity to entrench a dominant perspective.

From Platform to Proxy: How X Aligned with Hasbara Goals

Immediately following the **October 7, 2023 Hamas attacks** and Israel's subsequent assault on Gaza, Hasbara operations entered overdrive. At the same time, X became **structurally aligned** with these efforts:

Algorithmic Bias

- **Pro-Israel content surged in visibility**, often receiving inflated reach despite low engagement.
- **Pro-Palestinian posts were buried**, shadowbanned, or flagged as "terrorism-supporting," even when posted by journalists or academics.
- **Trending topics like #Gaza** mysteriously disappeared from the platform's visibility tools during periods of heavy bombardment and civilian death in Gaza.

Endorsements by Elon Musk

- Musk personally **boosted accounts** known for spreading disinformation or highly partisan pro-Israel content.
- He platformed figures with ties to Israeli influence networks, including those who repeated IDF messaging during critical military operations.
- In many cases, Musk echoed Hasbara talking points himself, reframing critiques of Israel as security threats or "extremist propaganda."

Policy Tweaks That Favor Censorship

- The "community notes" feature, intended to add context, was often **weaponized to undermine pro-Palestinian voices**.

- **Mass suspensions** targeted journalists, artists, and even survivors posting real-time footage of events in Gaza.
- Dissenting voices were often labeled "misinformation" without appeal or explanation.

Together, these structural changes created what users began calling a **"Hasbara Feed"** - a manipulated version of reality where only one side of a brutal conflict was consistently visible, and empathy for the other was algorithmically discouraged.

Digital Brigades and Content Flooding

Hasbara's success on X has never relied solely on algorithms. Human intervention - **often coordinated** - has played a major role.

Digital Brigades:

- Volunteers and paid Hasbara influencers work in networks to **mass-report pro-Palestinian accounts**.
- These networks **flood comments** with scripted talking points, derail threads with harassment, and seed misinformation that is difficult to correct once viral.

Flooding Strategy:

- During high-profile moments (e.g., hospital bombings, UN resolutions), X is **flooded with pro-Israel infographics**, AI-generated content, or emotionally manipulative videos portraying IDF soldiers as reluctant humanitarians.
- The purpose is not just persuasion - it's **volume control**. To drown out critical posts by sheer saturation.

This practice is aided by **state partnerships**. The Israeli government has documented investment in social media propaganda, including:

- A $145 million public diplomacy campaign aimed at Western audiences.
- A 2019 tender offering millions of shekels for digital influence operations.
- Publicly admitted plans by Netanyahu to use social media as a "weapon" in shaping U.S. public opinion.

Narrative Framing: From Victimhood to Moral Justification

X's transformation into a Hasbara amplifier has also shifted the **narrative framing** of the conflict:

- **Israel is portrayed as the perpetual victim**, regardless of military asymmetry or civilian casualties inflicted.
- **Palestinians are consistently linked to terrorism**, dehumanized through language and visual cues, even when discussing children or hospitals.
- **Structural violence, occupation, and apartheid are made invisible** by reframing each escalation as a spontaneous act of defense.

These framings are amplified through:

- **Blue-check influencers** (often paid) who post viral content during bombardments.
- **AI-generated threads** that use emotionally persuasive language and imagery to maintain support for military action.
- **Disinformation tactics**, such as falsely linking journalists or NGOs to Hamas to discredit their reporting.

From Moderation to Manipulation: The Death of Platform Neutrality

X is no longer a "town square." It is a **militarized information system**, where engagement is engineered, visibility is controlled, and political dissent is managed through both code and coercion.

This marks a dangerous precedent - not just for the Israel-Palestine conflict, but for **democracy and digital rights globally**. When one side of a war enjoys full-spectrum algorithmic protection - and the other faces deboosting, bans, and slander - the result is not debate. It is **manufactured consent**.

TikTok and the Ellison Doctrine - Influence, Ideology, and Platform Capture

In the early 2020s, **TikTok** emerged as the most powerful cultural and political platform for Gen Z. With over a billion users globally and more than 150 million in the U.S. alone, TikTok became a space where global narratives were not just shared - they were *felt*. During times of war, uprising, or injustice, it served as a frontline of visual testimony: fast, unfiltered, and emotionally direct.

It is precisely this raw power that made TikTok a threat - to governments, corporations, and powerful narrative regimes like Hasbara.

Initially, U.S. scrutiny of TikTok focused on **data privacy and fears of Chinese Communist Party influence**, due to its ownership by Chinese tech giant **ByteDance**. However, in 2025, that concern was "solved" when an 80% stake in TikTok's U.S. operations was sold to a **consortium of American investors**, with **Oracle** - led by pro-Israel billionaire **Larry Ellison** - taking the lead on overseeing TikTok's **algorithm and data infrastructure**.

Yet what followed was not a restoration of neutrality or civic freedom.

Instead, **TikTok became yet another arm of ideological enforcement**, particularly aligned with **Israeli state interests**, U.S. foreign policy narratives, and billionaire cultural influence.

The Buyout That Replaced One Empire with Another

In September 2025, under bipartisan pressure and through a Trump-era executive order, TikTok's U.S. operations were effectively seized and handed to American tech elites. Larry Ellison's **Oracle** took control of data governance and algorithmic oversight - a decision celebrated by national security hawks and business media.

But in trading Chinese state influence for Ellison's ideological empire, the U.S. did not "de-politicize" TikTok - it simply **redirected** the platform's loyalty. And that loyalty is not neutral.

Ellison is not just a businessman. He is:

- A **vocal supporter of Israel and the IDF**
- A **major funder** of pro-Israel political lobbies and military programs
- The financial architect behind his son's takeover of **Paramount Global**, which includes **CBS**, **Showtime**, and a wide swath of American media

In short, Ellison's influence spans:

- **Big Tech** (Oracle)
- **Social Media** (TikTok, via Oracle's infrastructure)
- **Mainstream Media** (Paramount/CBS)
- **U.S. Politics** (a major Trump donor, with ties to Marco Rubio, among others)

He is not simply shaping the information system - he **owns it**.

The Ellison Doctrine: Ideological Control as Corporate Culture

Following the Gaza war escalation in late 2023, internal reports from Oracle began to surface. These revealed a disturbing **corporate culture shift** under Ellison's influence, particularly as Oracle positioned itself to take over TikTok's operations.

Key developments included:

- Executives demanding a **"love for Israel" be embedded into company culture**
- Employees who expressed concern over Israeli military actions being **referred to corporate mental health resources**
- Pro-Palestinian workers facing **disciplinary pressure** or retaliation for their views
- An open letter from dozens of Oracle employees in early 2025 protesting the company's deepening ties with Israeli military tech and censorship operations

These practices do not merely reflect bias - they evoke **authoritarian conditioning**: the idea that deviation from a pro-Israel worldview is a symptom of instability, confusion, or disloyalty.

This chilling environment was mirrored by changes on TikTok itself.

Censorship on TikTok: Quiet, Targeted, and Effective

Since Oracle assumed control over TikTok's algorithm and infrastructure, users have reported a range of suppression tactics affecting pro-Palestinian voices:

Visibility Decline

- Posts documenting Israeli airstrikes, civilian deaths, or testimonies from Gaza began receiving **markedly lower engagement** than before the buyout.

- Hashtags like **#FreePalestine** or **#CeasefireNow** were intermittently throttled or made unsearchable.
- Videos flagged as "graphic" or "misleading" were **removed or restricted** - even when verified or posted by journalists.

Targeted Account Actions

- Prominent Palestinian creators and activists reported **shadowbans**, account suspensions, and content takedowns without warning.
- Verified accounts sharing news from Gaza saw their **reach drop drastically**, especially during periods of active bombing.

Propaganda Promotion

- Pro-Israel content, including Hasbara-style infographics and influencer commentary, was **featured more prominently** in For You feeds.
- Sponsored posts from Israeli government-linked campaigns were **pushed to American audiences**, sometimes framed as educational or humanitarian.

This **content asymmetry** mirrors similar dynamics observed on X - but TikTok's reach among **younger users** makes it especially dangerous. The platform has become an **ideological grooming ground**, where **selective visibility** dictates the moral boundaries of what's seen as normal, acceptable, or "correct."

From Algorithmic Neutrality to Ideological Warfare

TikTok was once viewed as a platform that offered underrepresented voices - including Palestinians - a place to be heard. It was the stage for:

- Raw footage of bombings
- Personal testimony from occupied territories
- Viral solidarity movements that circumvented mainstream news biases

But under Oracle and Ellison, the platform's ideological alignment is shifting. This is not just about visibility - it's about **value encoding**:

- Israeli soldiers are portrayed as protectors.
- Palestinians are depicted - explicitly or implicitly - as threats.
- Suffering is algorithmically curated to favor one kind of grief.

This is **narrative engineering at scale** - and it's being conducted under the guise of "content moderation" and "brand safety."

Ellison's Media Empire: Reinforcing the Narrative Wall

The capture of TikTok is just one node in Ellison's wider media consolidation strattegy. Through Skydance Media and its acquisition of **Paramount Global**, the Ellison family now controls:

- **CBS News**
- **Showtime**
- **Comedy Central**
- **Nickelodeon**
- **Paramount Pictures**
- Global streaming platforms

Together with Oracle and TikTok, Ellison's influence spans nearly **every major medium of information consumption**, from children's programming to enterprise databases to viral video platforms.

With his deep political ties and ideological rigidity, this isn't just media ownership - it is **narrative monopolization**. And it is being used to sanitize war, discipline dissent, and define the boundaries of permissible empathy.

The Psychological Effects of Hasbara - Algorithms, Anxiety, and the Shaping of Public Emotion

The power of propaganda is not simply in what it says, but in what it does to the **mind**.

Contemporary Hasbara - far from being a relic of the Cold War - is a **highly evolved psychological influence system**. It no longer depends solely on controlling state media or spinning press releases. It now lives in **algorithms**, **interface designs**, **reward systems**, and **social feedback loops**.

Hasbara in the digital age doesn't just aim to *convince* - it aims to **condition**. To shape public emotion, mold moral reflexes, suppress dissent, and engineer the perception of consensus.

Algorithmic Engineering of Emotion

Social media platforms curate what users see through algorithmic "feeds" designed to maximize engagement - but these algorithms also determine what kind of information is **rewarded** or **invisibilized**. Hasbara operations exploit this by ensuring that **pro-Israel content is amplified** while **pro-Palestinian content is deboosted** or suppressed.

The result is **emotional conditioning**:

- Content that **supports Israel's narrative** receives likes, retweets, and views - triggering **dopamine hits** for the user and reinforcing those behaviors.
- Content critical of Israel, no matter how accurate or urgent, often receives little or no engagement - leading to **frustration, self-doubt, and eventual withdrawal**.

This forms a **reward-punishment loop**:

- **Engagement = correctness**
- **Silence = shame**

- Over time, users unconsciously **self-adjust** to align with the content that performs well, mistaking **visibility for truth**.

Echo Chambers and Manufactured Consensus

When platforms like X and TikTok boost one side of a political narrative, they create **digital echo chambers** - environments where users are repeatedly exposed to a narrow range of opinions, reinforcing the illusion of **universal agreement**.

This has profound psychological consequences:

- According to **Asch's conformity experiments**, humans tend to adopt group opinions - even when they conflict with personal beliefs - if they perceive themselves as alone in dissent.
- This leads to **pluralistic ignorance**: the belief that one's private views are wrong or fringe because no one else seems to share them.
- In the Israel-Palestine context, this means that **sympathy for Palestinians is perceived as dangerous or abnormal**, even among users who feel that sympathy privately.

The result is not just silence - it is **internalized distortion**. A growing number of users begin to **distrust their own moral instincts**.

The Spiral of Silence: Silencing Through Isolation

When users see that pro-Palestinian content is punished - by bans, low reach, harassment, or workplace consequences - they learn to **self-censor**. This is especially true among:

- Students afraid of academic or professional repercussions
- Creators who fear demonetization
- Employees of pro-Israel companies like Oracle who've witnessed coworkers being referred to **mental health resources** for dissent

This aligns with the theory of the **spiral of silence**:

> People are less likely to express an opinion if they fear social isolation or punishment. The fewer people who speak, the stronger the perception that dissent is rare - thus reinforcing the silence.

This is **precisely the environment Hasbara aims to create**.

The Pathologization of Dissent

In recent years, psychological coercion has moved beyond the feed and into the workplace and community. Reports from Oracle during the 2023–2025 Gaza war reveal a deeply disturbing pattern:

- Employees critical of Israeli actions were **referred to mental health support** rather than engaged on the substance of their concerns.

- Executives demanded a "love for Israel" as part of company culture - framing dissent as **emotional instability** or **irrationality**.
- In tech and media spaces, pro-Palestinian views are **pathologized**, while support for Israel is **normalized as rational, civic, and moral**.

This tactic draws from authoritarian playbooks: reframe moral opposition as **mental confusion**, treating resistance not as a political perspective but as a **psychological deviation**.

Emotional Exhaustion and Burnout

Perhaps the most common psychological impact of contemporary Hasbara is **emotional fatigue**:

- Users who try to document atrocities - especially in Gaza - describe feeling like they are **"shouting into the void."**
- Despite evidence, their posts are ignored or deleted.
- Many describe feeling hopeless, anxious, or disconnected from peers who don't seem to care.

This leads to:

- **Digital burnout**: Withdrawal from activism due to constant emotional labor
- **Moral dissociation**: The psychological distancing from trauma as a survival mechanism
- **Compassion fatigue**: Numbness to suffering due to overexposure and perceived futility

In the end, this **psychological erosion of solidarity** is one of Hasbara's most effective tools. Not through censorship alone, but through **exhaustion**.

Infantilization of the Audience

Another key Hasbara strategy is **oversimplification** - framing complex geopolitics through emotionally manipulative tropes:

- **Israel as the perpetual victim**
- **The IDF as the world's "most moral army"**
- **Palestinians as terrorists, or passive victims with no agency**

This emotional framing infantilizes the audience:

- It **discourages critical thinking**
- It **prioritizes emotional loyalty** over factual nuance
- It cultivates **moral binaries** - good vs. evil, us vs. them - leaving no room for context, history, or structural critique

Users are trained not to understand, but to **feel in the correct direction**. And deviation from that emotional script becomes socially punishable.

Hasbara and the West - Lobbying, Lawfare, and the Criminalization of Solidarity

Hasbara does not stop at shaping perception. Its ultimate goal is to **convert perception into power** - into legislation, military funding, trade policy, and legal frameworks that **punish resistance** and **reward complicity**.

In the West - particularly the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and France - Hasbara has evolved into a **political instrument**. It is deployed not just through viral videos or influencer campaigns, but through **lobbying, lawfare, academic repression, and the surveillance of civil society**.

Lobbying Infrastructure: The Engine Room of Western Hasbara

The most powerful extension of Hasbara in the West is its **lobbying infrastructure**, particularly in the United States. Organizations like:

- **AIPAC** (American Israel Public Affairs Committee)
- **ADL** (Anti-Defamation League)
- **StandWithUs**
- **The Israeli-American Council**
- And numerous lesser-known PACs

...form an interconnected network that:

- **Influences elections**
- **Shapes U.S. foreign policy toward Israel**
- **Drafts legislation to suppress the BDS movement**
- **Pushes for antisemitism definitions** that equate anti-Zionism with hate speech

These groups are not merely advocacy organizations - they are **policy engineers**, deeply embedded in U.S. political infrastructure.

Financial Leverage:

- AIPAC alone spent over **$100 million** in the 2022 and 2024 U.S. election cycles, backing candidates who pledged unwavering support for Israel - even as the death toll in Gaza mounted.
- Political donations are used as a **litmus test for loyalty to Israel**. Larry Ellison, for example, reportedly **vetted political candidates** based on their stance on Israel before offering financial backing.

Candidate Discipline:

- Candidates critical of Israeli policy - like **Ilhan Omar**, **Rashida Tlaib**, or **Jamaal Bowman** - face coordinated smear campaigns, disinformation attacks, and primary challenges backed by millions in Hasbara-aligned money.

This level of influence ensures that **U.S. foreign policy remains locked in support of Israel**, regardless of public opinion, legal violations, or human rights concerns.

Lawfare: Turning Solidarity Into a Crime

Hasbara's next frontier in the West is **lawfare** - the use of legal systems to criminalize and intimidate supporters of Palestinian rights.

BDS Criminalization:

- As of 2025, **36 U.S. states** have passed laws or executive orders penalizing individuals or businesses that participate in **Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS)** activities against Israel.

- These laws, many written in partnership with Israeli lobbying groups, often:

    - Require contractors to sign **anti-BDS pledges**
    - Penalize students or faculty for pro-Palestinian activism
    - Withhold public funding from organizations deemed "anti-Israel"

Redefining Antisemitism:

- Western governments are increasingly adopting the **IHRA (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance) definition of antisemitism**, which includes criticism of Israel as a potential hate crime.
- Critics argue this **weaponizes the charge of antisemitism** to silence political discourse and academic freedom.
- In Germany and France, this definition has already led to **police crackdowns** on pro-Palestinian rallies, banned protests, and investigations into NGOs.

Institutional Censorship:

- **University professors**, especially in the U.S. and U.K., face growing risk for teaching Palestinian history or expressing support for decolonization movements.
- Organizations like **Canary Mission** maintain public blacklists of students and scholars who advocate for Palestinian rights - lists often used by employers and immigration officers.

Surveillance and Policing of Solidarity Movements

In parallel with lawfare, Hasbara-aligned governments and institutions have increasingly adopted **counterterrorism language** to surveil and intimidate pro-Palestinian organizing.

Campus Surveillance:

- University chapters of **Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP)** are monitored, infiltrated, or suspended under pressure from donors and lobbying groups.
- Campus activists are branded as **radicals or security threats**, especially after periods of escalated violence in Gaza or the West Bank.

NGO Intimidation:

- Aid groups, human rights monitors, and even UN agencies are routinely accused of "supporting terrorism" if they document Israeli abuses.
- The **IDF and Israeli foreign ministry** have been tied to smear campaigns targeting humanitarian workers and reporters - especially those operating in Gaza or Jerusalem.

Travel Bans and Visa Revocations:

- Palestinian advocates, academics, and journalists are denied entry to Western countries, flagged at borders, or barred from speaking engagements under vague accusations of "extremism" or "terrorist sympathies."

In short, **activism itself is being redefined as a threat** - not because it poses a risk to public safety, but because it threatens narrative control.

Cultural Warfare: Erasing Palestinian Legitimacy

The state-backed suppression of solidarity is reinforced by a **wider cultural project** to erase Palestinian legitimacy altogether.

Academic Repression:

- Courses on settler colonialism, apartheid, or indigenous resistance are defunded or politically targeted if they include Palestine.
- Conferences are canceled, speakers are deplatformed, and scholarly publications are censored under pressure from Hasbara-aligned funders.

Media Sanitation:

- Western media institutions continue to:

    - Frame Israeli aggression as "self-defense"
    - Avoid using terms like **occupation**, **ethnic cleansing**, or **apartheid**
    - Platform Hasbara "experts" over Palestinian scholars

- Journalists who challenge this framing are reprimanded, removed from assignments, or face online harassment campaigns.

Cultural Blacklisting:

- Artists, filmmakers, and musicians who express support for Palestine are **de-invited, blacklisted, or punished**, especially in the U.S. and U.K. festival circuits.
- Major cultural funders often require indirect **"anti-BDS" compliance**, tying funding to political silence.

Resistance and Exposure - Breaking the Hasbara Machine

Hasbara thrives on control: of media, of messaging, of perception. It relies on overwhelming the information ecosystem with its version of reality while silencing competing narratives through lawfare, censorship, and psychological coercion.

But even the most sophisticated propaganda system has **limits** - and **cracks**.

Despite Hasbara's dominance across Western institutions and digital platforms, a global counter-narrative has emerged. It is decentralized, digitally native, morally grounded, and often driven by those with no institutional power - journalists, activists, artists, survivors, and technologists committed to **truth-telling under erasure**.

The Power of Witnessing: Journalism as Resistance

One of the most potent forms of resistance to Hasbara is the act of **bearing witness** - especially in real time.

Citizen Journalism:

- In the 2023–2025 Gaza wars, much of what the world knows did not come from mainstream outlets, but from **direct video footage** captured by Palestinians and shared via social media.
- These raw testimonies - mothers grieving, bombed hospitals, injured children - cut through sanitized narratives and reached millions, often **before they could be censored**.

Investigative Reporting:

- Outlets like *+972 Magazine*, *The Intercept*, *Middle East Eye*, and *Electronic Intifada* continue to document:

    - Israeli military disinformation campaigns
    - Surveillance technologies used against Palestinians
    - Western complicity in arms sales and censorship

- Independent journalists on platforms like Substack and Patreon have bypassed editorial restrictions to publish critical reporting censored elsewhere.

Archival Activism:

- Collectives like **Forensic Architecture** and **Visualizing Palestine** use data, mapping, and OSINT (Open Source Intelligence) to create **irrefutable, documented records** of Israeli war crimes, land seizures, and apartheid policies - resources that are now used in international legal filings and human rights reports.

Tech Sovereignty: Building Beyond the Platforms

Recognizing that mainstream platforms like X, TikTok, and Instagram are now deeply compromised, many technologists and communities are turning to **decentralized and ethical alternatives**. Two of the most notable are **Mastodon** and **UpScrolled**.

Mastodon: Decentralized Microblogging

Mastodon is part of the **Fediverse** - a network of decentralized, user-controlled social platforms. Unlike X, Mastodon is **not owned by a billionaire**, does not serve ads, and does not algorithmically curate content.

- **Local moderation** means pro-Palestinian content is less likely to be algorithmically buried or banned.
- Many Mastodon instances explicitly support **anti-colonial, anti-apartheid, and pro-justice** frameworks.
- Journalists and organizers who've been deplatformed on X have **re-established presence on Mastodon**, using it as a safer hub for archiving and amplifying resistance.

Mastodon isn't a perfect solution - it has a smaller user base and limited reach - but it represents a **model for digital solidarity infrastructure** that resists corporate capture and algorithmic bias.

UpScrolled: Human-Centered Social News

UpScrolled is a growing alternative to traditional newsfeed apps, with an emphasis on:

- **Algorithmic transparency**
- **Community-driven content curation**
- **Mental health-aware design**

Rather than using engagement-maximizing algorithms, UpScrolled empowers users to **choose what they see** and **follow trusted curators**, rather than brands or influencers.

In the context of Hasbara:

- UpScrolled offers a **platform immune to saturation tactics** and content flooding.
- It is being used by **media educators and activists** to share unfiltered updates, especially during content blackouts on other platforms.
- Its focus on **intentional information consumption** creates space for **nuance**, **history**, and **ethical witnessing**.

While still emerging, UpScrolled represents an **ethos of digital resistance** - where the feed becomes a space for reflection, not coercion.

Collective Memory Projects

Hasbara depends on historical erasure: of the **Nakba**, of past massacres, of decades of dispossession. In response, a new generation of creators is working to build **counter-histories** that preserve Palestinian experience and re-inscribe memory into the digital commons.

Digital Memorials and Art:

- Artists and coders have created **interactive maps of destroyed villages**, virtual memorials for the dead in Gaza, and archives of colonial violence tied to global imperial history.
- Projects like **Decolonize Palestine** and **Palestinian Archive** curate texts, images, and oral histories that resist simplification and historical amnesia.

Community Education:

- Grassroots educators are hosting teach-ins, reading groups, and online courses to **reclaim historical context** and **challenge propaganda narratives**.
- Zine collectives and digital libraries have emerged as informal but powerful tools for **political re-education** outside institutions.

Legal and Institutional Pushback

Even within compromised systems, Hasbara is facing growing resistance:

Human Rights Legal Action:

- Groups like **Al-Haq**, **Adalah**, and **Defense for Children International-Palestine** are using Hasbara's own distortions as evidence in **international court proceedings**, including genocide and apartheid cases.

University Organizing:

- Students continue to defy bans on Palestine solidarity through protest, occupation, and litigation.
- Legal coalitions have successfully **challenged anti-BDS laws** in U.S. courts, arguing they violate constitutional free speech protections.

Whistleblower Exposure:

- Former employees of social media companies and NGOs are now **leaking internal documents**, revealing how algorithms were tweaked and content moderation policies crafted in coordination with Israeli lobbying pressure.

Global Solidarity: Reconnecting the Struggle

Perhaps most powerfully, the global resistance to Hasbara is **connecting Palestine to other liberation movements**:

- Indigenous communities recognize shared patterns of **settler colonialism**
- Black liberation movements name the shared logic of **police militarization**
- Anti-apartheid veterans in South Africa call out **Israel's replication of their former oppressors' playbook**

This **intersectional solidarity** makes it harder for Hasbara to isolate and stigmatize Palestinian resistance. It repositions Palestine not as a unique case of conflict, but as **a focal point in the global struggle against empire, surveillance, and injustice**.

What Cannot Be Unseen - Truth, Memory, and the Collapse of the Narrative Monopoly

For decades, Israel's Hasbara machinery operated with remarkable success. It projected a tightly managed image: a democratic state under siege, a moral army acting in self-defense, a Western ally beset by irrational hatred. This narrative did not merely exist alongside reality - it replaced it, seeping into textbooks, headlines, policies, and emotional reflexes.

But narratives, like regimes, can collapse.

And in the past two years, something irreversible has happened.

Despite billions spent on public relations, influencer campaigns, algorithmic manipulation, legal suppression, and institutional capture, **the truth has broken through**. Not because it was allowed to - but because it was **forced through the cracks**, carried by survivors, documented by witnesses, and amplified by networks of ordinary people who refused to look away.

What we've seen in Gaza, in the West Bank, in Jerusalem - what we've learned from whistleblowers, from digital investigators, from historians and children and poets - **cannot be unseen**.

It has changed the discourse.

And it has changed **us**.

The Collapse of the Narrative Monopoly

Hasbara once operated with near-total control over the dominant discourse in the West. It didn't just win debates - it **set the terms of what could be debated**.

But that monopoly has fractured.

- **Social media ruptured the gatekeeping structure**, even as Israel scrambled to re-assert control through acquisitions and moderation pressure.
- **Citizen journalism flooded timelines with unsanitized reality**, making it harder to look away from war crimes cloaked in "defense."
- **Palestinian historians, artists, and activists** took their rightful place in global discourse, refusing to be spoken *about* instead of *to*.

Yes, platforms like X and TikTok have since been repurposed to suppress that rupture - but the damage to the dominant narrative is done. Hasbara can still distort. But it can no longer **erase**.

A Global Moral Recalibration

For many, the last two years have served as a moral awakening:

- **What was once framed as complex is now understood as colonial.**
- **What was once seen as "conflict" is now understood as apartheid.**
- **What was once painted as defense is now recognized as domination.**

We have seen children dying live on stream, journalists murdered in cold blood, hospitals turned to rubble - and the justifications crumble in real time.

We have also seen people rise up across borders, connecting Palestine to global struggles against **racism, surveillance, militarism, and state violence**.

This is not a passing moment. It is a **moral recalibration** - and Hasbara has no algorithm powerful enough to reverse it.

Memory as Resistance

At the heart of Hasbara is a simple goal: **erasure**.

- Erasure of the **Nakba**
- Erasure of **colonial violence**
- Erasure of **Palestinian humanity**
- Erasure of those who dare to remember and name what they've seen

And so the antidote - the most radical act - is to **remember**.

To archive. To cite. To witness. To teach. To speak, even when it's unpopular. Especially when it's unpopular.

Memory is not passive. It is a weapon. One that cannot be bought, buried, or branded out of existence.

The Work Ahead: From Narrative Resistance to Structural Change

Exposing Hasbara is only the first step.

The real task lies in:

- **Decolonizing education** so that future generations are no longer raised in ignorance
- **Challenging corporate media and tech monopolies** that have become complicit in war propaganda
- **Demanding accountability** for the crimes masked by PR
- **Supporting Palestinian liberation** not just rhetorically, but materially

We must ask ourselves not just what truths we now see - but **what responsibilities those truths place on us**.

What Has Been Seen Cannot Be Unseen

There is no going back.

The images are burned into the timeline of global consciousness. The names of the dead live in our feeds, our poems, our protests, our policies. The history can no longer be rewritten in real-time without resistance.

The collapse of the narrative monopoly is not just a media story. It is a story about **what kind of world we are willing to live in**, and whether we are prepared to see it clearly - even when that clarity costs us comfort.

And once seen clearly, we cannot unsee.

Once heard, we cannot pretend we were deaf.

Once learned, we cannot return to ignorance.

References & Further Reading
Books and Academic Sources

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- Khalidi, Rashid. *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine*. Metropolitan Books, 2020.
- Erakat, Noura. *Justice for Some: Law and the Question of Palestine*. Stanford University Press, 2019.
- Herman, Edward S., and Noam Chomsky. *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. Pantheon, 1988.
- Fuchs, Christian. *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*. Sage Publications, 2021.
- Morozov, Evgeny. *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*. PublicAffairs, 2011.

Journalistic and Investigative Reporting

- +972 Magazine - www.972mag.com In-depth investigations into Israeli military policy, Hasbara, digital surveillance, and the occupation.
- *The Intercept* - www.theintercept.com Investigations into U.S. complicity, lobbying influence, and tech platform manipulation.
- *Middle East Eye* - www.middleeasteye.net On-the-ground reporting and media analysis across the region.
- *Electronic Intifada* - www.electronicintifada.net Independent Palestinian journalism exposing disinformation and rights abuses.
- *The Guardian*: "TikTok suppresses Palestinian content during Gaza bombings, creators say." (2023)
- *Wired*: "X is Now a Weapon in the Israel-Palestine Information War." (2024)
- *The New York Times*: "Larry Ellison's Influence in Washington Grows as Oracle Expands." (2025)

- *Haaretz*: "How the Israeli Foreign Ministry Funds Digital Propaganda Campaigns." (2023)

Official Documents and Leaks

- **2019 Israeli Ministry of Strategic Affairs tender** for a covert digital campaign: ~3 million NIS budget
- **IHRA Definition of Antisemitism** (adopted and challenged globally): www.holocaustremembrance.com
- **AIPAC 2024 Lobbying Disclosures**: OpenSecrets.org
- **Twitter/X Community Notes Guidelines** and Musk statements (archived via Internet Archive and Tech Policy Center)
- **Oracle Employee Open Letter**, internal protest regarding pro-Israel corporate culture (leaked in 2025 via TechLeaks)

Platform Studies & Tech Analysis

- **Forensic Architecture**: www.forensic-architecture.org Multimedia investigations into Israeli war crimes and narrative suppression.
- **Visualizing Palestine**: www.visualizingpalestine.org Infographics and data-driven narratives challenging Hasbara framing.
- **AlgorithmWatch**: www.algorithmwatch.org Studies on political bias in content moderation and algorithmic amplification.
- **Mastodon Documentation**: docs.joinmastodon.org For understanding how decentralized moderation supports resistance media.
- **UpScrolled (Beta)**: www.upscrolled.org Early-stage platform experimenting with ethical social media design and decolonized curation.

Legal and Human Rights Resources

- **Al-Haq**: www.alhaq.org - Palestinian human rights legal NGO
- **Adalah**: www.adalah.org - Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel
- **Defense for Children International – Palestine**: www.dci-palestine.org
- **Human Rights Watch**: Reports on Israel's apartheid practices (2021–2025)
- **Amnesty International**: "Israel's Apartheid Against Palestinians" (2022)

Activist and Educational Resources

- **Decolonize Palestine**: www.decolonizepalestine.com Open-source, citation-heavy breakdowns of key issues like Hasbara, BDS, and Nakba denial.
- **Jewish Voice for Peace**: www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org Leading anti-Zionist Jewish organization challenging U.S. policy and Israeli apartheid.
- **BDS Movement Official Site**: www.bdsmovement.net Resources, campaign toolkits, and legal updates about boycott advocacy.
- **Palestine Legal**: www.palestinelegal.org U.S.-based legal support group defending the rights of activists and students.

Further Reading Lists and Curated Archives

- "**Reading Palestine**" syllabus by Columbia Students for Justice in Palestine (2024)
- "**Digital Apartheid**: A Reader on Algorithmic Bias and Israel" (TechSolidarity, 2025)
- "**Platform Censorship and Political Bias**" - MIT Media Lab Journal (Spring 2025)

For Archival and Long-Term Research

- **Internet Archive / Wayback Machine** - to access deleted or censored material
- **Palestinian Digital Archive**: www.palarchive.org
- **Nakba Map Project**: www.nakbamap.com
- **Israel-Palestine Timeline** (IFAmericansKnew.org): www.ifamericansknew.org