The Truth, Lies, and Telegram: False and Misleading Information from Telegram and Its Impact on U.S. Perceptions Regarding the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Senior Thesis

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts

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May 2025

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Acknowledgements:

This project would not have been possible without the support of my family, friends, and mentors at Brandeis University. I want to thank my two advisors, Dr. Shai Feldman and Dr. Steven Wilson, to whom I am forever grateful.

I dedicate this thesis to three people: my father, Marvin Mark Berchin; my mother, Giulia Francesca Panciera; and my grandfather, Franco Panciera. Their relentless love, support, and wisdom have guided me through the toughest times. This journey would have been impossible without them. *Ad maiora semper…*

Questo progetto non sarebbe stato possibile senza il supporto della mia famiglia, dei miei amici e dei miei mentori a Brandeis. Voglio ringraziare i due relatori di questa tesi, il Dott. Shai Feldman e il Dott. Steven Wilson, ai quali sono e sarò per sempre grato.

Dedico questa tesi a tre persone: mio padre, Marvin Mark Berchin; mia madre, Giulia Francesca Panciera; e mio nonno, Franco Panciera. Il loro amore incondizionato, il loro sostegno, la loro guida e saggezza mi hanno accompagnato e motivato nei momenti più difficili. Senza di loro, il percorso che oggi seguo sarebbe stato irraggiungibile. *Ad maiora semper…*

Chapter 1: Introduction and Methodology

1.1 Introduction:

The United States Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is the bureau responsible for the country's national security and public safety. It releases an annual Homeland Threat Assessment, a report that lists the greatest threats to the security of the American people. In 2024, the DHS's top threats to the country included "nation-state efforts to malignly influence US audiences", terrorism, and illegal drugs crossing through the southern border as the most prominent threats to American National Security (DHS, 2024). The aforementioned US audiences are American social media users active on different platforms, including X (formerly known as Twitter), YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, WhatsApp, and many others.

"Good" news, stories, and movements can and have begun on and with the help of social media. One example is the #MeToo movement that shed light on the experiences of survivors of Sexual Assault. However, the same applies to "bad" information, purposely or accidentally incorrect, misconstrued, fabricated, and hateful messages that try to influence public opinion for malevolent reasons. In a decade-spanning, emotionally charged geopolitical issue like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, millions seek to inform themselves on developments through a wide range of sources, from traditional news outlets to social media platforms.

The American Psychological Association defines Misinformation as sharing false or inaccurate information ***without intentionally*** misleading or getting facts wrong; Disinformation, on the other hand, is the spread of false information that is ***intentionally*** intended to mislead people with information that is not true (American Psychological Association, n.d.). Both plague social media and have serious online and offline consequences, but are frequently and incorrectly used interchangeably.

The very first challenge in analyzing the data collected for this thesis lies in understanding the motivation behind the administrators running the channels analyzed and spreading Misinformation, Disinformation, or both. While true that both phenomena have their distinct characteristics, they can be collectively labeled as false and misleading information (FMI), since

they are both forms of media that are presented as fact to consumers looking to stay informed, regardless of their intention.

This thesis makes two arguments. Firstly, Telegram's inherent features, which are elaborated in Chapter Two, give bad-faith actors the ability to continuously disseminate FMI without any consequences. Secondly, it argues that FMI on social media is a serious National Security threat to Democratic societies where citizens rely on the information fed through a free press, freedom of expression, and a lack of censorship are both ingrained in the society and guide its political decisions.

The greatest challenge in this undergraduate thesis lies in measuring changes in perception, since quantifying such changes is hard to obtain without conducting an in-depth and expensive survey, making it harder to establish a causal relationship. Unfortunately, this thesis cannot prove a direct causal relationship between the consumption of FMI and changes in American perception. Therefore, it's recommended that future research surrounding the intersection of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, social media, politics, and public opinion conducted by students, social scientists, and anyone in between should explore the relationship between FMI and changing American perceptions more deeply. This could be done either qualitatively through an analysis of American online discussions or quantitatively through survey methods of social media use and their opinions on the conflict.

To circumvent the challenge outlined above, this thesis uses Google Trends as a tool to measure and visualize the impact of FMI surrounding the October 7th War on American online engagement with topics and events regarding the most recent round of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Google Trends is a free tool that anybody owning a device that connects to the Internet can use. The platform tracks the popularity of the billions of different search terms people input while using Google and can display trends in interest for specific keywords and search terms, providing data from hours ago to years in the past, making it essential for tracking the long-term or short-term interest certain search terms yield. Tracking and analyzing online interaction through spikes in search queries on Google indicates greater engagement with, and a degree of curiosity and openness to consume information that has been grossly misconstrued and

completely fabricated to mislead Americans and attempt to change their perceptions regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

This first chapter briefly introduces the thesis, including the following methodology section that covers the research methods conducted. The second chapter summarizes the revolution in communications technologies, and by extension, social media platforms, and their profound effects on how people communicate and share information. This chapter also includes critical information on what makes Telegram fundamentally different from other social media platforms.

The third chapter covers the original research and qualitative analysis conducted of the Telegram channels chosen is divided into two parts and will be elaborated on in the following section that elaborates on the methodology used. Chapter Four focuses on the implications of Chapter Three's findings and recommendations to potentially make Telegram less conducive to bad faith actors seeking to exploit the platform's features for their deceptive activities with harmful intentions. Screenshots of the chats analyzed mentioned in the footnotes can be found in Appendix 1which follows the end of the fourth chapter.

This thesis is written assuming that the reader either possesses a general understanding or a certain degree of familiarity with the context surrounding the war between Israel and Hamas that began after the attacks on October 7th, 2023. Given the complexity and rapidly evolving nature of this conflict, it would be unreasonable for the reader to go through a detailed documentation of every one of the war's developments and the actions taken by the actors, regional, international, and non-governmental, involved in this war in the main body of the thesis.

Appendix 2 is included since not all readers may be fully informed about the timeline, scope, and events that have unfolded in the war thus far by providing a comprehensive summary of the important developments that occurred on and off the battlefield during Israel's ongoing nineteen-month war on Hamas in Gaza. It recounts the actions taken by regional powers, international actors, and non-governmental organizations involved in the war. Together, these summaries can hopefully equip readers, especially those less familiar with certain specifics of the conflict, with

enough necessary context to better understand the references, analysis, and arguments presented in the main chapters of this thesis.

1.2 Methodology:

As mentioned in the Introduction section, the research and analysis conducted on the Telegram channels chosen is divided into two parts. The first part involved collecting, reporting on, tracking, coding, and disproving content that is FMI found on these channels. 19 channels were selected and analyzed over several weeks; the chats published by each channel were extracted and analyzed using Telegram's "chat export" feature, which collected all of the media shared from these channels from October 6th, 2023, to February 14th, 2025.

This timeline was chosen so that the information extracted from the chat export feature would include all of the media these channels posted immediately before news of Hamas' operation broke on October 7th, while the week of February 14th marked the week after the fifteen-month anniversary of the start of the war. This time frame allowed for analysis of how content and narratives developed over time, from the initial outbreak of the conflict to later stages, so that any potential changes in messaging could be identified.

The channels selected were sampled to try to include as wide a range of perspectives and roles as possible of Telegram discussing and covering the war between Israel and Hamas. It includes channels that commit themselves to coverage and geopolitical and war-related topics by regularly posting updates, images, videos, and commentary. Then there are channels with large followings, if not hundreds of thousands of subscribers, entailing a greater degree of visibility that may allow these channels to amplify and reinforce certain narratives surrounding the war and its actors. Lastly, there are the more radical channels, whose administrators and followers may not be representative of the average Telegram user but help offer insight into the type of fringe, hateful, and conspiratorial messaging found on the platform. This range of channels provides insight into how different types of actors engaged with the conflict over time.

The channels analyzed were selected in four different ways. The first involved conducting a Google search along the lines of "where to get the best news on (Palestine/Israel/the Middle

East/Geopolitics) on Telegram." The results of these searches led to other social media platforms, such as Reddit or X, where other users posed the same question and received feedback with links to some of the larger channels analyzed. Two examples of channels found this way are Resistance News Network and Gaza Now in English, which appeared as two of the top search results[1].

Another way that channels were selected was by searching for the Telegram channels of political commentators that had been "deplatformed" from other popular social media platforms. This led to the channels owned and operated by political pundits like Nick Fuentes and Jackson Hinkle, whose outspoken views led to the termination of their accounts that had garnered tens of thousands of followers before migrating to platforms with more privacy and close to no rules or regulations surrounding content moderation.

A third way was by observing and tracking the content that the above channels forwarded, shared, and pinned messages or links to other channels that fit their ideological mold; clicking these links enabled the option to join these other related channels. A fourth way these channels were selected enabled the discovery of channels with smaller audiences that would have otherwise been more difficult to find, involved using one of the Telegram application's unique built-in attributes: the Suggested Channel feature.

After joining any channel using the methods described above, recommendations for other channels with similar content appeared. This created a "rabbit-hole" effect, in which joining one channel led to suggestions for other like-minded channels or ones that covered the same geopolitical niche. Taking advantage of this feature made it easy to move from one channel to several others with overlapping themes, while increasing the chance of encountering more extreme content. Joining these suggested channels also replicated an authentic Telegram user's experience, highlighting how quickly and easily someone can be drawn into a network of related, but harmful channels, a danger that will be elaborated on further in the recommendations section in the fourth chapter.

[1] Screenshot available in Appendix 1

A multi-step process that included content analysis and search trend data was used to identify and analyze the spread of false or misleading information from Telegram. The first step after selecting the channels involved exporting their chats using the chat-export feature. This preserved and enabled access to all text media, images, and exactly when each message was posted, for offline review.

Over multiple weeks, the exported chats from each channel were manually analyzed to search for posts that appeared exaggerated, implausible, or suspicious. Examples of such content include sensational claims about specific events that occurred throughout the war, or the outright promotion of conspiracy theories. When such content appeared, the claims were cross-verified using fact-checking services like Snopes, reverse image search tools like Google Images, and reporting from credible news outlets and organizations.

Once content observed from the exported Telegram chats was confirmed to be false, misleading, or exaggerated, it was necessary to create certain search queries that were based on keywords or phrases that made up the false claims observed. These search terms were later entered into Google Trends to examine how online search interest related to each false story evolved, which helped demonstrate how the fake stories shared on Telegram were picked up more broadly in the United States through changes in American online engagement, as reflected in the rise of search terms relating to the false and misleading content. Google Trends enables the user to select a specific timeframe for the search terms they wish to analyze.

This thesis uses one of three timelines to try and understand how FMI has affected American online engagement through increased interest in fabricated or misconstrued stories relating to the October 7th War, through interest in certain search queries that grew throughout the conflict. The different time frames provide a view of recent and long-term trends in American interest relating to false and misleading information surrounding the current war and broader Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the increased volume of search terms relating to the fake or misconstrued stories.

The “past five years” range, the largest time range besides the 2004 to present option, provides a broader view of search term interest over time; this enables the identification of medium-term patterns or recurring spikes in interest relating to political or social events over a longer period. A custom two-year range from late February/early March 2023 to late February/early March 2025 was used to analyze search interest patterns in the months leading up to the outbreak of and during the October 7th war, demonstrating spikes in interest and attention to events tied to the war as it progressed. Lastly, the “past 12 months” range was included to demonstrate more recent trends in online engagement by capturing short-term growth or emerging patterns in interest that wouldn’t be visible in longer timelines.

After a user searches for a term on Google Trends and sets their desired timeframe, a graph is generated that displays the inserted search term’s popularity over time. The numbers next to the search terms at the top of the graph are presented on a scale from 0 to 100. A value of 100 is the metric that indicates peak popularity for the term; a value of 50 means that the term is half as popular, while a score of 0 means there was not enough available data for the term.

A line trending downward means that a search term's relative popularity is decreasing, which does not mean that the total number of searches for that term is decreasing, but that its popularity compared to other searches is shrinking. However, a surge in search interest in the case of this thesis would demonstrate the American public to engagement with false and misleading information, which gives critical insight on how quickly and effectively FMI campaigns can spread and amplify false narratives that seek to distort the American public’s understanding of the war and their perceptions surrounding the actors involved.

Using Google Trends has its inherent advantages and disadvantages in social science research. This debate has been discussed in depth by many researchers interested in public opinion and its effect on voting patterns or political mobilization, such as the paper by Lorenz et al. (2022), who used Google Trends to study the perceived threats of immigration in Germany. One disadvantage of using Google Trends, as outlined by the authors, lies in how the data collected is completely anonymous, meaning that it does not allow for the individual-level analysis available in traditional surveys. An additional limitation is that the same topic may be searched using

different terms based on an individual user's educational or language background, making it more difficult to standardize interpretation (Lorenz et al., 2022, p.195).

However, there are three important advantages of using Google Trends in this thesis. One of the most important advantages is that the search query data obtained from Google Trends can be geographically restricted to an area of the user's choosing, meaning that the data generated only displays the number of search queries in the United States. This filtering is invaluable in a project such as this thesis that focuses exclusively on how American online engagement rates with searches about FMI surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have increased.

Secondly, Google remains the search engine hegemon, both globally and in the United States, and is used by tens of millions of Americans daily. This is reflected by the company controlling 88.01% of the United States' search engine market share as of September 2024 (Oberlo Staff, 2024). Lastly, unlike in traditional face-to-face surveys, the people making Google searches are less influenced by any external social pressures in their answers; while making search queries about potentially sensitive topics, the respondent feels more protected by their anonymity and privacy through a Google Search compared to being asked about in a survey (Lorenz et al., 2022, p.195).

With the methodology now complete, the next chapter will cover the revolution in communications technologies, what sets Telegram apart from other social media platforms, and the already existing dangers that can amplify the reach of FMI across different platforms

Chapter 2: On the Internet, Social Media, Telegram, and Their Political Implications

On December 5th, 2000, a science correspondent for the Daily Mail named James Chapman wrote an article reporting that the Internet might be a "passing fad." In 2005, the same year Facebook first launched, only 5% of American adults used some form of social media; as of 2023, the number has skyrocketed to two hundred and thirty-six million Americans (Maryville University, 2020). Today, Mr. Chapman has an X account with over nine thousand followers, while his former employer has digitized their once exclusively printed paper newspapers and garnered millions of followers across different social media platforms on the Internet.

2.1 What makes the Internet and social media different?

What separates social media and the Internet from all previous communications technologies is the total cost of transmission in relation to the number of people the transmission can reach, which used to be correlated to how much money an entity or individual wanted to pay to transmit a message. Some technologies were limited in the number of people a message could reach due to their inherent qualities; a telephone call, for example, can only reach a limited number of listeners.

Messages shared on radio and television, while reaching an exponentially higher number of listeners, could only be accessed if someone flipped to the right channel or station, and cost a fortune to open, own, and operate. The Internet and social media are unlike any of the previously mentioned communications technologies for one unique reason: a person only needs to pay for a single device, meaning a single purchase, that can connect to the Internet to transmit a message. Once online, they can "publish" or communicate a message with as many other people using the platform.

In older communication technologies, the "arrows of conversation" were either completely one-directional, in the way a news anchor speaks to many listeners who cannot respond in real time, or simply between a sender and recipient. The arrows of conversation on the Internet and social media are multi-directional and all potentially reciprocal, meaning that any user on a social

media platform can communicate with any other user regardless of geographical limits (Shirky, 2009, p.90). An example of this can be observed through the use of email, which lets any person on Earth with a valid email address share and spam messages without the consent of recipients.

Thanks to social media, humanity has a means through which people can create, share, and consume media on the same platform without limits on the number of people they can reach. Clay Shirky was among the first people to recognize the Internet and social media's potential in organizing groups and forming movements. In *Here Comes Everybody*, Shirky highlights how society is not just the product of its members but also the product of its constituent groups, since human beings are inherently social creatures who have relied on group efforts among networks of people for survival since the Stone Age (Shirky, 2009, p.14). Shirky realized that with the diffusion of the Internet, which enables connection to social media platforms, we live in an era in which our ability to educate, share, cooperate, and mobilize in groups has completely changed. Forming groups has become much easier due to the cost of creating a new group or joining existing ones has not fallen bit by bit, but wholly collapsed.

Media industries have suffered the most from the collapse of the transmission cost. It used to be difficult and costly to deliver images, words, paper, sound, and video from media creators to consumers, prompting large media businesses to work to overcome these problems (Shirky, 2009, p.59). As a result, these businesses exerted great control over the media while making lots of money from the listening, watching, or reading public. Today, control of the press is no longer in the hands of such professionals or gatekeepers; the ability to assume the role of both the journalist and publisher of a story by sharing words or video media enables individual users to "break the news" of events occurring worldwide. It is now open to anyone with a device connecting to the Internet and an account on a platform to share the media they captured; a process known as Amateurization. Once a user is connected to the Internet, they can access platforms that are both globally used and free to access, once equipped with an appropriate device, to write and publish to their heart's content (Shirky, 2009, p.60).

The word *news*, as pointed out by Shirky, has meant two different things. It meant addressing important newsworthy events and updates, like the assassination of a political figure, but also

includes events discussed by the press. Since the coming of the Internet and social media platforms, news and newsworthy events have been made known to the public with the same impact as the traditional press. Nowadays, conventional news outlets have covered news broken or announced on alternative digital platforms first. While the reputation of these traditional news outlets is still above that of alternative information outlets, these established corporations failed to recognize that blogs and digital journalism operated on social media platforms are not alternative publishing sites, but publishing alternatives (Shirky, 2009, p.66).

The power that comes from being able to freely learn, speak, and connect with others online is a central theme to *Here Comes Everybody*, since once a group's internal communication is improved, it completely changes what the group is capable of. While the Internet allows for the aforementioned mass Amateurization of publishing and the improvement of communication between members of groups, it also creates an unprecedented marketplace for all kinds of information and ideas that can be found freely and instantly.

This phenomenon is known as the "Long-Tail Effect," a theory first put forward by Chris Anderson in 2004. Anderson claimed that since the Internet eliminated the transaction cost of buying goods, retailers could take on the risk of selling niche items to traditionally smaller consumer bases instead of just focusing on bestsellers and a few super popular items (Anderson, 2004). Because search tools help people find niche products, an online "store" like Amazon can profit from selling large numbers of niche items that can be seen instantly with the click of a button that physical stores couldn't stock.

This concept can also be applied to online political content, as the Internet and social media have enabled people with niche, sometimes extreme, political views to find each other and form communities that transcend geographic boundaries. This niche content can strengthen fringe political movements that might not have survived in a pre-Internet era, given the difficulties they would have faced in communicating with each other openly and publicly when collectively organizing. These fringe groups can use and reap the benefits of the Internet the same way that any other user can. This means it has enabled people who have such views to quickly find others

who share their ideas, effectively communicate with them to organize political action, and use the Internet to spread their ideas to other users.

2.2 Why Wasn't the Alarm Raised Earlier?

As stated earlier, this thesis seeks to raise awareness of the fact that false and misleading information spread on social media is a serious threat to Democracies and free societies, where citizens rely on the information obtained through a free press, freedom of expression, and a lack of censorship when guiding their political decisions. This entails understanding why and criticizing how FMI on social media was completely neglected by National Security scholars throughout the West. An example of such authors is the memorandum by Gabi Siboni and Ofer Assaf, whose joint authorship of *Guidelines for a National Cyber Strategy*, published in 2016, offers a much more traditional understanding of cyber threats.

Siboni and Assaf categorize cyber threats as security or criminal threats, with the main difference being the motivation to harm. The former is motivated by politics or security, while the latter has criminal intentions, such as monetary profit, extortion, theft, and fraud. They address three types of cyberattacks that both nations and the private sector must brace for.

The first is a Computer Network Attack (CNA), an attack aimed at damaging a computer or network by preventing the operating systems from functioning normally, including denial of service or defacing of the site, the deletion of data, halting operation of the computer, and paralyzing computer-supported processes in the organization under attack. These attacks are led by Advanced Persistent Threats (APTs), an identified group of hackers or computer criminals that can penetrate an organization or individual's computer system and mine personal data (Siboni et al.,2016, p.10).

The second attack is Computer Network Exploitation (CNE), which aims to collect data and spy on unsuspecting actors, including necessary information about the structure of the network and the computers, to later launch a CNA attack. This data collection can be used for harmful reasons, such as collecting credit card numbers, email passwords, or other personal identity

information. Another type of data collection includes stealing commercial or institutional information, research and development, or military and state secrets.

The third type of cyberattack discussed by Siboni and Assaf is only mentioned briefly, and its effects are wrongly classified as being "generally limited in time and do not cause real damage" (Siboni et al.,2016, p.21): Computer Network Influence (CNI) attacks. These attacks are designed to create a feeling of insecurity, lack of control, harm to sovereignty, and lack of ability to protect the normative way of life. The war of narratives on social media and the harms that come from false and misleading information aimed at affecting public opinion can create feelings of insecurity and threats to everyday life. This is especially concerning when one understands the ease social media enables potentially dangerous groups to organize and share information. The considerations above were completely neglected by Siboni and Assaf, and many other national security experts.

This does not mean that Siboni and Assaf make no relevant contributions worth covering. Besides providing comprehensive explanations of different cyberthreats, their recommendations for Israel are extremely relevant since they encourage the country not to differentiate between these spaces, but rather to integrate them, something that the current Trump administration has decided not to do, as outlined in Chapter Four. However, considering that the World Economic Forum named the rapid spread of misinformation online among the top 10 perils to society in 2014, along with the Arab Spring cementing its legacy as one of the first mass-political movements brought to life thanks in great part to social media, their silence is surprising and difficult to understand.

This neglect and the vulnerabilities this thinking has caused have had some serious consequences. Some prominent examples range from Russia's Internet Research Agency's disinformation campaigns that interfered in the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections, to FMI surrounding the effects of Coronavirus and the COVID-19 vaccine. These are just a few of the recent, real-life consequences of people depending on social media for information, just to be bamboozled by false and misleading information spread accidentally or purposely.

The kinds of content shared on social media are ever changing, as are the threats that users face when navigating these platforms for information, which are more complex and harmful today than when Susser and Assaf wrote their memorandum. While using disinformation to sow seeds of discord and confusion in enemy nations is not new, the pace with which this information is spread and the ensuing chaos caused by its growth is a new phenomenon, making it the latest phase in propaganda.

Automation, or the use of bots to complete tasks, and the advancements made to algorithms are two new developments that exacerbate the problems with FMI on social media. These tools give a small group of people access to a megaphone where they spread abusive and false information into mainstream online environments, with rapid cycles of sharing, repurposing, and further dissemination ensue. This introduces us to another important term referenced throughout this research project, which was introduced in Wolley et al.'s (2019) book Computational Propaganda. *Computational Propaganda* is the use of algorithms, automation, and human curation to purposefully manage, distribute, and spread misleading information over social media networks

At the center of the issue of Computational Propaganda lies the problem of Bots. Bots are automated programs that real people employ to engage real users on social media, behaving either partially or fully autonomously. Simply put, they are software applications that automatically perform specific tasks quickly and at scale (Datadome, 2024). Some examples of bots being used in the most basic of everyday activities are chatbots and search engine bots.

A chatbot engages a user with conversational interactions using Artificial Intelligence (AI) to generate responses to the user's questions, such as the one used by Domino's Pizza to help customers with online orders. A search engine bot does not engage in a conversation with the user by assisting them in scanning and indexing web content to retrieve and display existing information from across the Internet. These kinds of bots are employed by search engines like Google, which use bots to improve the results of one's search.

To give an idea at just how much of a role bots have played online, a security firm named Incapsula published findings in 2015 showing that bots generate half of the Internet's web traffic, estimating that over ⅓ of Twitter users are bots attempting to pass as real people (Wolley et al. 2019, Pg.7). While the examples above may seem harmless, some of the same functions that bots employ in helping users can also be used for problematic purposes, primarily when they are used to imitate human users on social media platforms. This problem is further exacerbated when considering the influence that Political and Social Bots have had throughout cyberspace over the past ten years.

Social Bots are programmed to pass as genuine human users and behave like real people by automatically generating posts and responses to human users in online conversations. This is dangerous as it can snowball into the bandwagon effect, a cognitive bias that leads us to adopt ways of thinking, working, and acting simply because others are doing it. Bots are complex and difficult to distinguish from real users since they maintain a parallel presence on various social media sites, mimic human lifestyles, and follow a believable sleep-wake cycle, making it harder to identify them based on output patterns alone. Bots can also be bought relatively cheaply, as armies of bots programmed to either like certain content or repeatedly send specific messages can be found on websites like Fiverr for less than $100[2].

The Different Bots Found in Cyberspace, as per Wolley et al. (2019), include:

- **Impact Bots:** Used to create a mass following for certain people or pages and help them establish a more prominent presence online and are easily detected by programs like BotOrNot

- **Amplifier Bots:** These are used to like, share, and promote certain content. They can also be used for propaganda or promotional purposes.

[2] https://www.fiverr.com/search/gigs?query=social%20bots&source=top-bar&ref_ctx_id=0f6576ec2af042168765ef8bf75dea72&search_in=everywhere&search-autocomplete-original-term=social%20bots

- **Complainer Bots**: These are designed to request the blocking and removal of certain accounts may monitor other accounts' posts for certain terms that do not comply with the social media platform's policy. They can be deployed in mass to report such "breaches in community guidelines" and can be used to censor and deny oppositional voices.

- **Trackers**: Bots used for detection and driving attention towards certain behaviors online

- **Service Bots:** Software or scripts that automate the process of bot account registration by automatically generating name/email addresses or reading CAPTCHAs. These Bots can work with external services to obtain virtual cell phone numbers to bypass the SMS verification necessary to create a social media account. Advanced forms of these bots can even create fake images of Identification documents sent to Social Media companies as proof of a user's "authenticity".

With enough background on social media and the way it engages with politics, and some of the real-life dangers the malevolent use of it can cause, the next section will dive into what specifically makes Telegram unique. This platform has recently gained global popularity for its unique features, but is no exception to the harm social media platforms can pose to democracy when manipulated by bad-faith actors.

2.3 What sets Telegram apart?

Telegram is a messaging app launched in 2013 by Pavel and Nikolai Durov is one of the most recent social media platforms to rise in popularity and notoriety; as of 2025, it has over one billion monthly active users (Backlinko Team, 2025). Like other social media and messaging platforms, Telegram can be accessed on smartphones, computers, and web browsers, through which users can share different forms of digital media, from manifestos and conversations to videos, animated stickers, and GIFs.

What sets this platform apart from the others mentioned above is its emphasis on privacy. Unlike other popular messaging platforms like WhatsApp, which has faced backlash for sharing users' data with its parent company Meta, Telegram offers users a much more secure and private

service. Through the application's “secret chat” feature, a user's chats are protected from any outsiders who might try to access the media that is being shared on the platform through end-to-end encryption; this means that only the users involved in the chat or part of the channel can access their messages. Chats in this function are not stored on Telegram's cloud but on local devices, meaning that even Telegram itself cannot read messages sent as secret chats. Users can even order the media they share on the platform to “self-destruct” after a set amount of time or after they have been read or opened by the recipient, meaning the media will disappear from both users' devices[3].

Pavel Durov also helped found the Russian version of Facebook called VKontakte (VK) in 2006. Durov's story and motivations for creating Telegram embody the changing nature of the Internet within Russia, especially vis-à-vis an increasingly authoritarian Vladimir Putin and concerns surrounding the privacy of online activity. Durov's problems with the Russian state began following the legislative elections in 2011. Many political leaders and ordinary citizens were opposed to the results, alleging that the election was interfered with by United Russia, the ruling party led by Vladimir Putin. This led to a level of mass mobilization that had not been seen in Russia since the fall of the Soviet Union (BBC News, 2011).

As the Russian authorities arrested thousands of protesters throughout the country, they also demanded that Durov shut down opposition politicians' accounts on VK, which Durov refused to do. Recognizing the political power that VK could wield, the Russian government slowly began closing in on the platform in the years that followed. By 2013, it was reported that 48% of the company was in the hands of businesspeople with direct ties to Putin (Hakim, 2014). Just a year later, with the rise of the Euromaidan protests and the Russian military's eventual invasion of the Crimean Peninsula, Durov was approached by the FSB, Russia's Federal Security Service, and successor to the KGB.

The FSB demanded that Durov give up information on VK users who organized protests and shared information regarding the Euromaidan protest movement with users on VK, which Durov refused to do (Monaghan, 2014). In 2014, VK had amassed 240 million users, but Durov

[3] https://telegram.org/faq#q-how-is-telegram-different-from-whatsapp

announced that he was stepping down as the company's leader after selling the rest of his shares to another close associate of Putin's; he fled Russia to Germany soon after, stating he had no plans to return to Russia, describing the country and its government as being "incompatible with Internet business at the moment" (Reuters Staff, 2014).

Given Telegram's emphasis on privacy through end-to-end encryption, the platform makes it possible for people in countries where freedom of speech is suppressed to directly share and communicate information through direct messages or membership in larger channels without worrying about their governments spying on them. However, given Telegram's clear “hands off” approach when it comes to moderating content such as hate speech and calls for violence, it has been the go-to social media platform for terrorist groups and extremist entities throughout the globe.

One of the most prominent examples of this is the Islamic State’s (ISIS) use of Telegram to spread propaganda, plan attacks, and recruit new members. When asked about what he thought about groups like the Islamic State actively operating on his platform, Durov answered by saying that “the right for privacy is more important [to Telegram] than our fear of bad things happening, like terrorism” (CEP Staff, 2024). Less than a few months after Durov made this comment, ISIS carried out a devastating series of coordinated attacks in Paris, France, killing 130 people on November 13, 2015. Shortly after the attack, Telegram announced that it had shut down 78 public channels used by ISIS members and supporters in 12 different languages (Mackey, 2015). Still, many criticized this decision as being too little, too late.

In recent years, many extremist right-wing groups and personalities have found a haven on Telegram, particularly groups based in the United States and across Europe. With the shutdown of a platform previously used by many such extremists called Parler and the banning of Donald Trump's Twitter account following the January 6 Insurrection, the Internet witnessed a great migration by right-wing extremists to Telegram.

The founder of the English Defense League, a populist and Islamophobic organization, dubbed Tommy Robison, whose real name is Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, also migrated to and grew an

audience on Telegram after he was banned from major social media networks; however, his X account was reactivated by Elon Musk (Hern, 2024). In Germany, an extremist group that still believes that the German state is under Allied occupation 80 years after the end of World War 2, called the Reichsbürger Group, made use of Telegram in their attempted coup in 2022 (Axelrod, 2024). These examples are testaments of just how real a threat that content spread on Telegram can be due to the uncensored and unmonitored messages and media it enables users to share.

When it comes to Telegram's role in this new phase of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, many critics have been quick to point out that false and misleading content and media published on the platform do not exclusively remain on Telegram but have the potential to spread to other platforms as well (Rawnsley & Ramirez, 2023). A prime example came only a few days after the start of the war on October 9th, 2023. Jenin News, a Palestinian-based Telegram channel that has had a prominent role in reporting on the effects of the war on Palestinians, published a fake story claiming the Saint Porphyrius Greek Orthodox church in Gaza had been destroyed by Israeli airstrikes. This claim spread like wildfire across different Telegram channels before reaching platforms like X, where many users "verified" and disseminated the false claim that the church had been destroyed. As the story spread through cyberspace, Saint Porphyrius church took it upon itself to release a message on its Facebook page letting many concerned users know that the church was "untouched and operating in service of the community and our congregation" (Koltai et al., 2023).

Much of the violence that Hamas militants recorded themselves committing during the October 7 attacks was posted to such Telegram channels, resulting in a substantial backlash against Telegram for allowing the group and its armed brigades to maintain a presence online despite being banned from most social media platforms. When asked why Telegram still allowed Hamas to operate on his platform following the attacks, Pavel Durov said these channels "serve as a unique source of first-hand information for researchers, journalists and fact-checkers" (O'Sullivan & Fung, 2023).

One such example is the Telegram channel operated by one of Hamas' military wings, the al-Qassam Brigades; this channel was reported to have had around 200,000 subscribers and saw its

audience more than double to over 400,000 users following the October 7 attacks. After weeks of complaints and anger over Durov's apparent indifference to letting what both the United States and European Union categorize as a terrorist group, Telegram gave in and decided to take down *some* channels that were affiliated with Hamas. One of these channels was the al-Qassam Brigades channel, which grew to a following of over 700,000 subscribers, many of whom joined after the attack before it was permanently shut down (Fung & Duffy, 2023).

While bigger channels that were either Hamas-run or affiliated may have been shut down, many other problematic channels have not been affected by this crackdown and gained more subscribers as the audiences of the shutdown channels migrated to smaller ones. The impact of this content shared by Israeli, Palestinian, and American Telegram groups alike will be the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Treading Through Telegram's War of Narratives

3.1 Channel Table: Data on the analyzed channels obtained from TG Stat as of 3/5/2025

Channel Name and Handle (@_____)	# of people subscribed	Language	Focus	Date created	Average reach per 1 post	% of subscribers reading channel's posts	Geolocation	Total Posts
Apartheid Review (@apartheidreview)	626	English	Israel/Palestine	Feb 25, 2023	112	18%	USA	3,260
Exposing Zionists Scum (@exposingzionist)	5,539	English	Israel/Palestine	Jan 16, 2023	222	5%	Russia	16,337
Fashposting (@Fashposting)	9,060	English	US politics (both domestic & foreign policy)	Jan 13, 2021	2,786	31%	USA	3,671
Fashwave (@Fashwave3)	6,151	English	US politics (both domestic & foreign policy)	Jan 13, 2021	2,992	49%	USA	2,701
Gaza Now English (@gazaalanpa)	210,405	English	Israel/Palestine	May 16, 2021	38,214	19%	World	7,917
Jackson Hinkle (@jacksonhinkle)	40,507	English	US politics (both domestic & foreign policy)	Jul 3, 2022	10,582	27%	USA	2,653
"Israel" is a war criminal (@wc_israel)	19,584	English	Israel/Palestine	Jan 1, 2022	803	5%	USA	53,168
ISNAD Palestine (@IsnadPalestin)	53,324	Arabic	Israel/Palestine	Oct 20, 2023	4,818	9%	World	6,940
Pure news and videos on Telegram (@sirtonimcrazy)	18,268	Hebrew	Israel/Palestine	March 22, 2022	3,830	21%	Israel	4,482

Nick Fuentes (@nickjfuentes)	67,332	English	US politics, domestic, & foreign policy	June 19, 2019	25,576	38%	USA	13,519
Murder the Media (@MurderTheMedia)	15,437	English	US politics, domestic & foreign policy	Feb 6 2020	2,106	14%	USA	32,145
Vincent James (@RealVincentJames)	35,178	English	US politics, domestic, & foreign policy	Aug 31, 2019	7,402	21%	USA	18,012
Resistance New Network (@PalestineResist)	172,303	English	Israel/Palestine	Apr 28, 2022	4,552	3%	World	73,227
The Shadow's Unapologetic Right Wing (@TheBigBadShadow)	325,062	Hebrew	Israel/Palestine	Jun 26, 2017	27,846	9%	Israel	116,781
"The Cabinet- elimination of terrorists online" (@cabinetisrael)	18,430	Hebrew	Israel/Palestine	Jun 1, 2024	892	5%	Israel	41,227
Denis Charkov (@dennisnews)	30,802	Hebrew	Israel/Palestine	Mar 3, 2020	1,203	4%	Israel	30,910
News Star Without Censorship (@Israe007records)	30,056	Hebrew	Israel/Palestine	Oct 28, 2023	1,641	6%	Israel	5,885
World Pravda (@worldpravda)	43,608	English	International and Global Events	Aug 8, 2022	5,345	13%	USA	20,726
Rise of the Global South (@RiseGS)	31,436	English	International and Global Events	Mar 7, 2023	3,531	12%	USA	21,680

3.2 Introduction:

As mentioned in the methodology, 19 channels were selected and subsequently analyzed over several weeks to produce the following chapter. The chats were extracted and analyzed using Telegram's "chat export" feature, which collected all the media shared from these channels from

October 6th, 2023, to February 14th, 2025. These 19 channels communicated with their subscribers in one of the following three languages: Arabic, English, and Hebrew. Non-English channels were translated into English using the translation feature available to Telegram Premium subscribers for four dollars a month. The analytics presented in the table above **(Chapter 3.1)** were collected using TGStat, a free website that tracks and reports on different useful analytics that can indicate a channel's growth, how much the audience engages with the content shared, and its geolocation.

The channels analyzed were selected in four different ways: conducting a Google search along the lines of "where to get the best news on (Palestine/Israel/the Middle East/Geopolitics) on Telegram"; individually searching up the Telegram channels of political commentators that had been "deplatformed" from more popular and conventional social media platforms; observing and tracking the content that the first channels selected forwarded, shared and pinned messages or links to other channels that fit their ideological mold; and using Telegram unique built-in Suggested Channel feature.

A multi-step process was used to identify and analyze the spread of false or misleading information from Telegram channels related to the October 7th war. After picking the selected channels and exporting their chat histories, the exported chats from each channel were manually analyzed to search for posts that appeared exaggerated, implausible, or suspicious. When such content appeared, the claims made were cross-verified using a combination of fact-checking services, reverse image search tools, and reporting from credible news outlets and organizations. Once such content was officially confirmed to be false, misleading, or exaggerated, search queries based on keywords or phrases that made up the false claims were created and entered into Google Trends.

Google Trends enables one to select a specific timeframe of the search terms they wish to observe and analyze. The selection of the timeframes used in the Google Trends analysis was chosen to balance broader trends with any immediate shifts in interest. The three ranges selected were the "past five years" range, a custom two-year range, from late February/early March 2023 to late February/early March 2025, and the "past 12 months" range. Together, these different

ranges provide a view of both recent and long-term trends in American interest relating to false and misleading information surrounding the current war and the broader Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the volume of search queries relating to the fake or misconstrued stories that were searched.

The analyzed channels were classified and grouped into one of the following four categories: American Focused Channels, World Focused Channels, Israeli Focused Channels, and Palestinian Focused Channels. These categories were chosen based either on the channels' raison d'être, which for a channel like Gaza News Now is fairly self-explanatory, or on the content the channels would share, helping determine their focus. Screenshots of the content they shared that will be the focus of the analysis mentioned in the footnotes throughout the chapter are available in Appendix 1.

World Focused Channels were channels that would post updates on a wide range of geopolitical events, issues, tensions, and conflicts, in addition to developments and footage of the current war between Israel and Hamas. These ranged from covering developments in the West from the leadup to the 2024 American Presidential decisions to developments occurring within the member countries of the European Union; updates and footage on the war between Russia and Ukraine; China's activities in Southern and Eastern Asia, especially regarding Taiwan; to events occurring throughout Africa, especially regarding the activities of the new military regimes in the Sahel region that have seized control of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso.

The content shared by American Focused Channels ranged from updates to commentary made by political pundits. The media shared, published, and forwarded by these channels centered around domestic American politics in the lead-up to the 2024 Presidential elections, domestic and foreign policy decisions undertaken by the Biden Administration, and the second Trump Administration following January 20th, 2025.

Israeli and Palestinian-focused Channels would share content that concentrated on developments surrounding the respective side they claimed to represent or align with. These channels offered extensive coverage of the war between Israel and Hamas, from sharing video footage of the

October 7th Attacks and their effects on the Israeli communities of the Gaza envelope, to real-time videos of Israeli operations in the Gaza Strip. They committed each other to covering the war in its entirety, meaning that when the regional aspect of the war intensified with exchanges of back-and-forth strikes between Israel and Lebanon, Iraq, Yemen, and eventually Iran, they would cover these developments and their repercussions as well.

3.2.1 Expectations & Common Themes

Even though these channels may seem completely different at face value, they share some common themes worth discussing before diving into the individual analysis covered in this chapter. The first similarity is the trend regarding total posts and overall user engagement.

The more a channel posts, the less overall engagement it retains, as proven through the percentage of subscribers reading an individual channel's posts. One potential explanation for this phenomenon is that the more a channel posts in a given day, the less a user will want to interact with its content to avoid being constantly bombarded with information. This is known as social media content overload. It happens when a viewer feels overwhelmed by floods of online content and information, which could prompt users to filter for content they consider more valuable or relevant to their interests, which hinders the overall engagement with a channel's posts (Georgiadis, 2022).

This doesn't necessarily mean that such channels are lacking viewership or influence. Take two of the largest channels selected, *the Shadow's Unapologetic Right Wing* and *Resistance News Network*, as examples. Both of these channels have amassed hundreds of thousands of subscribers, but have relatively low percentages of subscribers reading their posts. Multiplying the percentages by each channel's subscriber count is enough to make someone realize that even "only" 3% of the subscribers actively reading Resistance News Network's posts means that over five thousand people are actively engaging with each of their posts daily. The same also applied to almost thirty thousand subscribers who regularly interact with the content shared on the "Shadow's" channel.

At one point or another, almost all of the channels analyzed also forwarded or relayed updates and notifications from the Israeli Tzofar application's Tzeva Adom (Red Color) alerts, which updates Israeli citizens in real time through phone notifications about impending rocket fire into Israel, also providing maps of where in Israel the projectiles are being fired towards. While each channel shares these updates, they do so for different reasons. Israeli channels would forward these messages to warn other Israelis about imminent rocket attacks.

Non-Israeli channels used these updates for one of three purposes. The first is to demonstrate the resilience of Hamas and other resistance groups in Gaza through their ability to continue to strike into Israeli territory despite intense Israeli air operations and ground incursions into the Strip[4]. The second purpose is to put the Iron Dome's ability to intercept projectiles fired into Israel into question by following up on a forwarded alert message with video or image proof of impacts into Israel[5]. The third is to use the notifications and map as a supporting visual to amplify and celebrate the fact that Israel is being attacked[6].

The most important common theme regards the content regularly posted on these channels. Before thoroughly analyzing what was posted, the expectation was for the content shared on these channels to incorporate one or a mix of the following three themes. The first is a tandem of messages sent by the channel's administrators, inaccurately commenting on developments regarding the October 7th war with extreme bias. The second is the channel administrators focusing their time on sharing false or misleading content to misinform viewers. Lastly were attempts to coordinate with subscribers following the channel to disseminate the false information shared on a channel to other platforms in coordinated FMI campaigns.

The significant time spent analyzing the content posted by these channels revealed the opposite. Regardless of their language or focus, many channels forwarded and republished information that was truthful by reputable news sources. Regarding content that involved coverage of the war, channels would share and forward breaking news stories from globally renowned news

[4]Screenshots available in Appendix 1
[5]Screenshots available in Appendix 1
[6]Screenshot available in Appendix 1

agencies like CNN, the Washington Post, Al-Jazeera, Haaretz, Y-Net, the New York Times, the BBC, and many others.

This can have extremely negative effects on viewers seeking to inform themselves on the conflict through these channels, due to Telegram's rise as an attractive alternative to mainstream media's reporting on geopolitical conflicts and how quickly on-the-ground coverage can be obtained and relayed by different channels. This mixture of legitimate news can create a false sense of trustworthiness and integrity.

A naive observer joining the channels above could be inclined to believe the content being shared without fact-checking due to the prevalence of reliable sources and official speeches or press releases published by political and military spokespeople, and statements made by other world leaders regarding the conflict. By consistently forwarding information from well-established news sources and commenting on them, these channels build an image of reliability, making it easier to introduce false and misleading information without arousing any suspicion from subscribers in an attempt to alter how and recondition their perceptions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

3.3 Telegram Channel Analysis:

3.3.1 American and "World-focused" Channels

There are a total of eight American and world-focused channels analyzed: Fashposting, Fashwave, Jackson Hinkle, Vincent James, Nick Fuentes, Murder the Media, World Pravda, and Rise of the Global South. These channels are against the mainstream media and present themselves as alternative outlets through which Americans can receive news and updates about topics they claim are being censored or underreported.

Different characteristics separate these eight channels. The first category is the first six channels mentioned, which are American-focused channels. These accounts and the personalities that administer them advocate for a revisionist restructuring of US alliances and criticize how

America engages in foreign and domestic policy. The second group is World Pravda and Rise of the Global South, defined as World-focused channels based in America, per the geolocation information provided on TGStat. They also offer a revisionist lens on a wide array of political topics, ranging from global issues, including the current phase of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

These channels can be further divided into individual media personalities and Anonymous Telegram Networks. Rise of the Global South, World Pravda, Murder the Media, Fashwave, and Fashposting all fit the category of Anonymous Telegram Networks. These channels do not have a known figurehead running the channel or guiding the kind of content posted in their feeds. They are operated by networks of anonymous Telegram users who share no information about themselves. Channels like Vincent James, Nick Fuentes, and Jackson Hinkle are operated and administered by public figures who have gained notoriety for their outspoken views. Each of these individual media personalities has been banned from mainstream social media sites, where they have garnered tens of thousands of followers, for posting misleading or hateful content that led to the suspension of their accounts.

They have used Telegram in two ways. The first is through the posts they publish directly to their channels, which can be as uncensored and unhinged as they please due to there being no content moderation on Telegram. The second way is to use their channels to promote their shows, videos, and content on alternative platforms. Nick Fuentes was deplatformed from YouTube after violating the platform's rules on hate speech through his conspiratorial content (Thalen, 2021) and has since moved to a video-sharing platform known as Rumble to stream his show called *America First*, which he promotes frequently on his Telegram channel. Jackson Hinkle does the same, and promotes his political talk show *The Dive with Jackson Hinkle* on his Telegram, which is also available on Rumble after being banned from YouTube for spreading misinformation about the war in Ukraine (Alba et al., 2023). Vincent James was also deplatformed from YouTube alongside Fuentes in 2021, but now streams on a different alternative platform called Trovo[7].

[7] https://youtube.fandom.com/wiki/The_Red_Elephants

Another interesting similarity is that all three of these figures have been able to retain accounts on X notwithstanding their bans on other prominent social media sites. Nick Fuentes even had his own X account that was originally suspended in 2021, reinstated by the platform's new owner, Elon Musk, last year as a part of the billionaire's commitment to allow absolute free speech on the platform.

3.3.2 American and "World-focused" Channels Content Analysis:

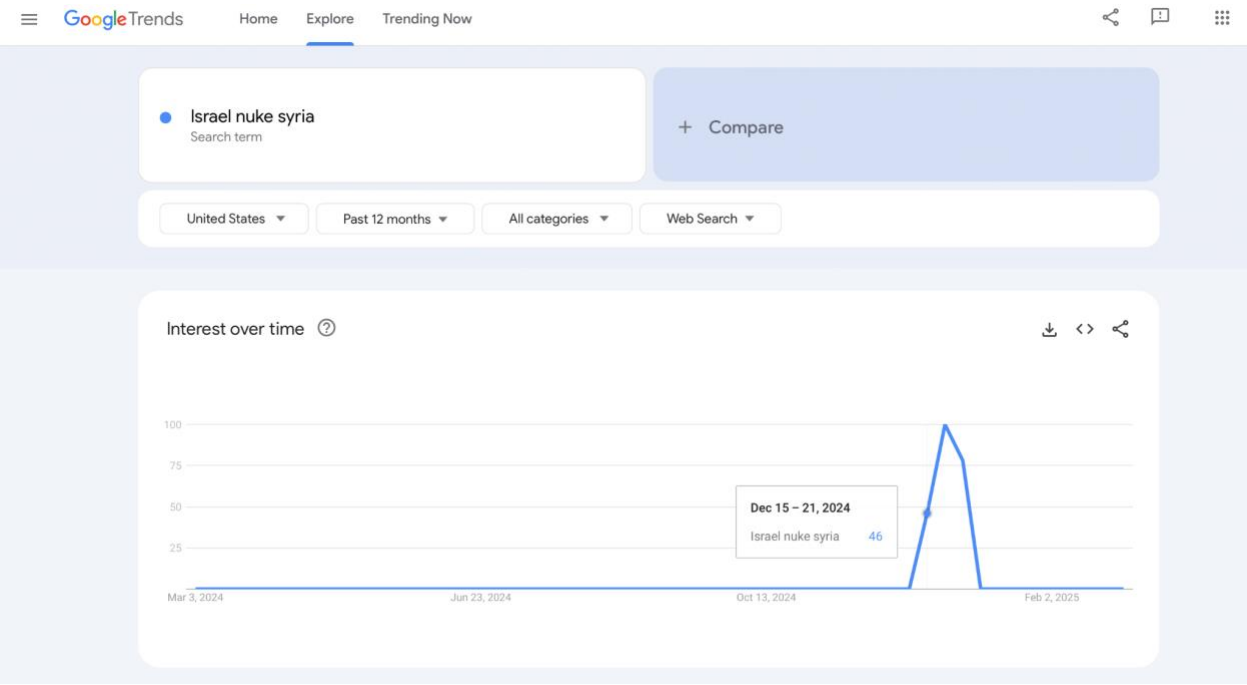
Given the information provided above, it should come as no surprise that some of the content shared on these channels contained extremely loaded, hateful language and outright conspiracy theories. Fashwave and Fashposting are prime examples of this and can be labeled as Nazi sympathetic given the content and theories they each promote in their channels. These accounts have framed this current round of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as an issue that affects the safety and security of the white race in the United States and Europe.

They believe and promote a conspiracy known as the "Great Replacement Theory" and see both Israel and Jews living in the West as orchestrating a plot to replace the white population of Western nations. These two channels also try to raise awareness of the "Jewish Atrocity Propaganda," claiming that Israel's explanation of what took place during the October 7th attacks is completely fabricated to justify its war in Gaza. Fashwave forwarded a claim surrounding Jewish Atrocity Propaganda that prompted viewers to connect the phenomenon to the Holocaust by forwarding a message posted by Mike Peinovich, a prominent American Neo-Nazi, about how Jews then had tricked the world into believing the extent of the death inflicted on them by the Nazis in concentration camps[8].

A claim made by Fashposting will be the first case study on FMI affecting American perceptions surrounding the latest round of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. On December 25th, 2024, Fashposting forwarded an article published by India.com with the caption "Did Israel drop a small nuclear bomb in Tartus, Syria?" The forwarded article speculated Israel had dropped a

[8] Screenshots available in Appendix 1

small nuclear bomb on the Syrian port city of Tartus during airstrikes on the city that occurred on December 16th. The article cited a report put out by the European Union's Radioactive Environmental Monitoring pointing to an increase in the amount of radiation around in Turkey and Cyprus after the attack (Sen, 2024).



Link: https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?geo=US&q=Israel%20nuke%20syria&hl=en

(date set= 3/6/2024-3/6/2025)

This claim is completely false and was debunked after a report was released by the Institute for Science & International Security. This report explained that the increases in radiation were due were within normal background fluctuations of radiation, and that the reported magnitude 3 earthquake that came as a result of the bombing, which was used as evidence to point to the fact there was a nuclear attack was caused by Israel having hit a deposit of weapons and explosives in Tartus, was in line with past large conventional explosions (Albright et al., 2025).

The information obtained on Google Trends shows a surge in the number of searches surrounding whether Israel had nuked Syria, the week Israel struck Tartus, the week of December 16^{th,} received a value of 46 out of 100. However, the search term peaked in popularity

with a value of 100 the same week Fashposting published their coverage of the story and remained a high-interest topic a week after they originally posted, achieving a value of 78 out of 100. The fact that the greatest spike in searches occurred a week after the event took place implies that these searches were driven by the spread of FMI surrounding what happened at Tartus, such as the one made by Fashposting. Even though the Institute for Science & International Security's report does an amazing job of clearing the air surrounding this grave accusation; however, it came too late as the report was published in February of this year.

While refraining from outright Holocaust denial, Jackson Hinkle shared similar claims as both Fashposting and Fashwave, stating that Israel was purposefully engaging in the publication of atrocity propaganda. Hinkle skyrocketed to fame in 2023 for his outspokenly anti-Israel positions among American political commentators in the early days of the war. He openly challenged another well-known American political pundit, Ben Shapiro, on X by stating that an image the latter had shared displaying the charred remains of a victim of the October 7th attacks, presumably a child, was generated by Artificial Intelligence[9]. This somehow garnered the attention of the state of Israel's X account, who replied to this interaction by trying to shame Hinkle, only for him to turn to Telegram and mobilize his followers to "ratio" (a situation on social media in which often negative comment outweighs the likes) the state of Israel's post.

His message mobilized his followers, leading to this post to be viewed over seven million times, and generating over nine thousand overwhelmingly negative comments thanks to Hinkle's orchestration of this "ratio" campaign. However, it turns out that the claim Hinkle made about the image being generated by AI was a complete lie. German news outlet DW uploaded the image using the same AI detection website Hinkle used, only to yield the opposite result. A.I. expert Hany Farid backed this finding by stating that the image was most likely genuine and that he could not find any discrepancies that would indicate it was artificially generated (Eisele & Steinwehr, 2023).

Moving onto a different American and World channel, the second case study in this section covers a claim published by Vincent James. On October 16th, 2023, James shared a message

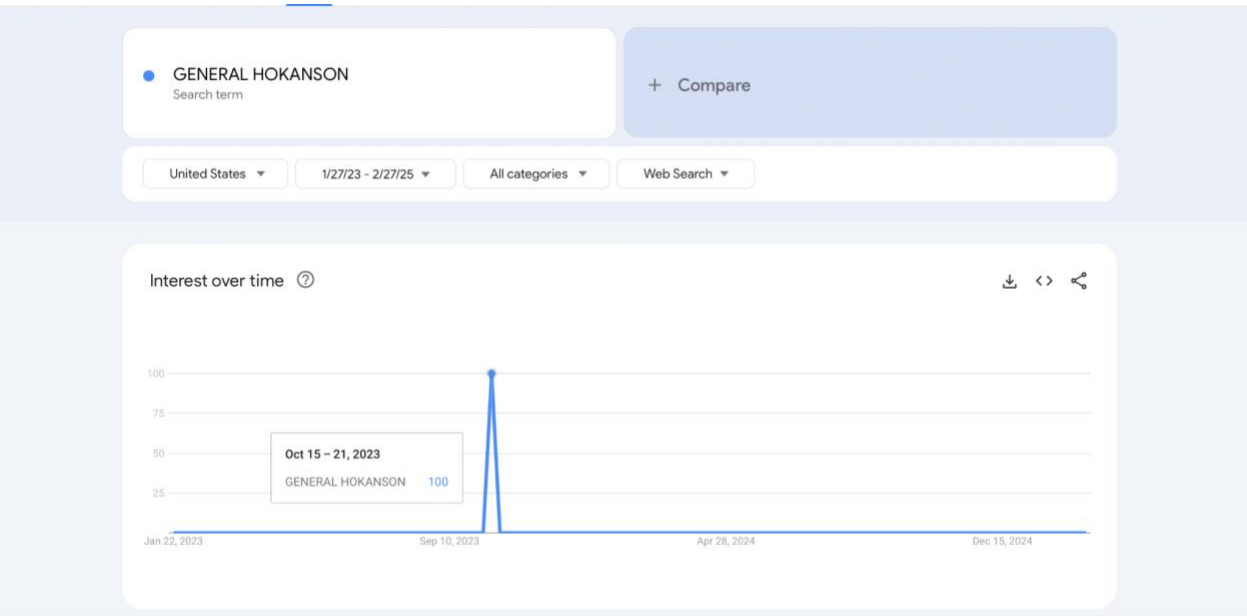
[9] Screenshot available in Appendix 1

with his subscribers containing a screenshot of an allegedly leaked email sent from now-retired General Daniel R. Hokanson, former Chief of the National Guard Bureau in 2023. In this email, Hokanson appears concerned about the growing Antisemitism among the enlisted troops who are openly stating they're against Israel and "not willing to put their lives on the line for them"[10]. James adds his commentary by stating that email explains the salience of pro-Israel propaganda in the mainstream media, accusing them of trying to artificially create support for Israel that is non-existent in America.

This screenshot taken by James originates from an article published on Tasnim News Agency, which was published a day before he made these claims on his personal Telegram channel. Tasnim News Agency is a media entity that is affiliated with Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps; has been labeled as "Questionable" news source by Media Bias Fact Check due to the platform's promotion of state propaganda, conspiracy theories and overall use of poor sources in their publications (Media Bias Fact Check, 2023).

In the article published by Tasnim, they claim that the email was obtained by a cyber group "affiliated with the Resistance" that revealed "an important fact from within the American military bodies" (Tasnim News Agency, 2023). Not only have both General Hokanson and the National Guard denied that this email was authentic, but multiple military experts like Colin Smith, a RAND Corporation Senior International and Defense Researcher, also doubted it was legitimate. Smith stated that the wording, structure, and formatting of this leaked memo were inconsistent with usual and official communications, making the authenticity of the communication very dubious (Payne, 2023).

[10] Screenshot available in Appendix 1



Link:https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=2023-01-27%202025-02-27&geo=US&q=GENERAL%20HOKANSON

(date set= 1/27/2023-2/27/2025)

The data pulled from Google Trends shows a huge spike in interest in searches for "General Hokanson" from October 15th to October 21st. The timing of the surge could mean that public interest in General Hokanson was largely driven by the controversy surrounding the hoax, as users searched for his name to verify the memo's authenticity and understand if the letter was the position undertaken by a high-ranking official in the US military.

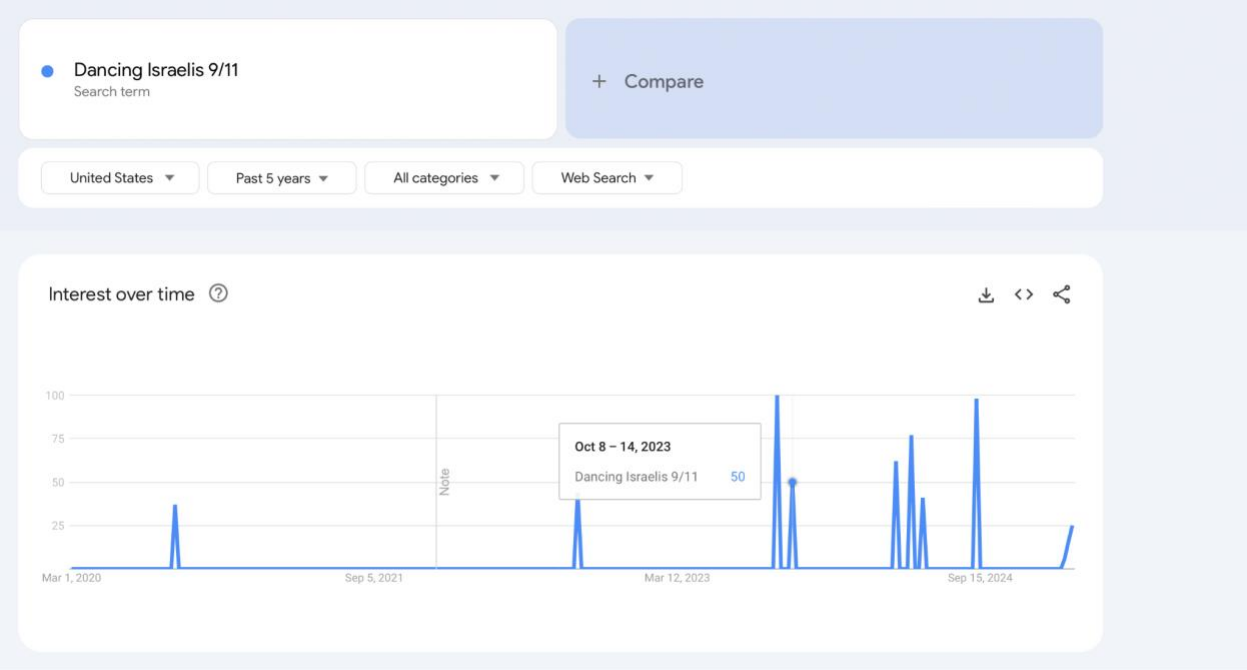
This case is unique in two ways. Firstly, it proves that Telegram channel administrators like Vincent James will use and relay information published by semi-official news networks like Tasnim without questioning whether the information is legitimate and share it with their audience. It also represents a trend not considered at the beginning of this thesis. In this situation, a government outlet with explicit bias against the US, which is case affiliated with an organization the State Department has designated a foreign terrorist organization, can amplify the reach of their FMI by relying on pundits like Vincent James to do their dirty work for them on Telegram and other social media platforms.

The third case study covers a topic that was first noticed when analyzing World Pravda, which is also mentioned throughout Vincent James' and Nick Fuentes' channels: the story of the "Dancing Israelis" of the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center. The theory originates from an eyewitness account given by a woman named Maria, who saw the events of the attack unfold from her apartment in New Jersey, when she noticed that a group of men in her building's parking lot seemed to be celebrating the attack, taking pictures or video or of themselves with the Twin Towers burning in the background (ABC News, 2002). Maria reported this incident to the FBI, who found the men she had recorded and identified them all as Israeli nationals, and later quickly brought the suspects into custody for questioning.

This is the basis of the Dancing Israelis conspiracy, which claims that these five men were not just bystanders, but were rather part of a covert Israeli operation that orchestrated the attacks to pull the United States into starting wars in the Middle East to unseat regimes that posed a threat to Israel. Followers of this theory believe that the 9/11 attacks helped Israel to deal with nations that posed a threat to it, such as Saddam Hussein's Iraq, by having the US military do their dirty work for them.

An FBI memo released only a few weeks after the attack stated that the bureau's Newark and New York Divisions' investigation into the incident found that none of the Israelis had information or prior knowledge regarding the bombing of the World Trade Center, nor were they involved in intelligence gathering activities while in the United States. They were eventually charged for overstaying their visas and deported to Israel (Kaplan, 2023).

The claim of the men dancing comes from a very questionable source itself, since the first person to mention this detail wasn't the woman who tipped off the FBI. Rather, it originates from USA Today article that compiled a series of reactions of the attacks in the Arab World, including the father of September 11th hijacker Mohammed Atta, who complained about how Americans were neglecting the fact that, "the FBI seized a number of Jews while they were dancing in celebration over the incidents" (Cox, 2001).



Link:https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=today%205-y&geo=US&q=Dancing%20Israelis%209%2F11

(date set= "last 5 years"- 3/7/2020-3/7/2025)

Though the tragedy of the September 11th attacks and the investigation of these five men occurred more than twenty years ago, this conspiracy theory has persisted and even grown in notoriety since, as demonstrated by the Google Trends graph above. There are small and spread-out spikes ranging from the high 30s to low 40 values in the weeks of September 11th in 2020 and 2022. The first massive spike in search terms containing "Dancing Israelis 9/11" in 2023 garnered a value of 100. However, instead of falling out of relevancy as in previous years, the term popularity grew in relevance and interest among Americans as the October 7th War began. This is observed during the weeks between October 8-15, immediately following the October 7 attacks, and three other times throughout 2024 before spiking to a value of 98 the week of September 11th of 2024.

This case is unique, as it demonstrates how Telegram can bring the resurgence of older conspiracies and apply them to contemporary conflicts. World Pravda has posted about the Dancing Israelis theory twice on their channel, with both posts containing the same body of text copied and pasted; these were posted once on the day before September 11th in 2023, and once more on the attacks' 23rd anniversary in 2024[11]. Nick Fuentes promoted the conspiracy on his

[11] Screenshot available in Appendix 1

channel and lauded how the hashtag "Dancing Israelis" made it to X's trending tab with over 14,000 posts containing the hashtag the day after September 11th, 2023[12].

This theory is being promoted again with a specific goal in mind: to influence American views of Israel and American foreign policy regarding Israel. By repackaging the Dancing Israelis conspiracy in the context of the October 7th war, Israel can be portrayed as a malicious state seeking to exploit the US for its gain. It is in this context that bad faith actors try to convince the American public, through a well-layered and complicated theory of two things. The first is that Israel was involved in the 9/11 attacks, the most brutal attack on US soil, and is not the great ally that many perceive it to be, but rather a conniving enemy. The second is that, just like in 9/11, Israel has once again fabricated an atrocity (in this case, the October 7th attacks) to drag the United States into fighting its battles against its adversaries in the Middle East at the expense of American money, influence, and blood.

3.3.3 Palestinian Focused Channels:

A total of six Palestinian focused channels were analyzed: Gaza Now in English, Exposing Zionist Scum, Resistance News Network, Israel is a War Criminal, Apartheid Review, and ISNAD Palestine. The content these channels shared is geared to international audiences and is meant to raise awareness on what has occurred in Gaza throughout the war. These channels maintain that violent resistance against Israel is the best way to obtain Palestinian self-determination and freedom, and defend Hamas' actions taken on October 7th as a legitimate form of resistance and not an act of terrorism.

All of these Palestinian-focused channels are Anonymous Telegram Networks. The most insight any of these channels gave into who administered them came from Gaza Now English, which stated in one of their earliest posts that their team consists of thirteen correspondents in Palestine, one in the West Bank, one in Jerusalem, one in a predominantly Arab town within Northern

[12] Screenshot available in Appendix 1

Israel called Shafar Amr (which the groups defines as the occupied Palestinian interior), two in Jordan, three in Cairo, three in Istanbul, and two in Brussels.

All six channels can also be divided into different categories, the first are mouthpiece channels, such as Resistance News Network and Gaza Now in English. Both channels are defined as mouthpiece channels due to the content they predominantly post, presenting themselves to viewers as alternative media platforms through which people can feel the pulse of the Palestinian resistance.

The first way they act as mouthpieces is by publishing different kinds of "on the ground" footage, ranging from videos of operations conducted and recorded by Hamas and other groups engaging in fighting Israeli forces in the Strip to sharing videos of the destruction inflicted by Israeli forces in Gaza. The second reason they are mouthpiece channels is by consistently forwarding, sharing, and summarizing statements made by offices or spokespeople representing resistance groups inside and outside Gaza. They can use Telegram to share such content to audiences living in countries where this material would be difficult to access because these organizations are classified as foreign terrorist organizations in countries like the United States and the European Union.

Resistance News Network was the most prominent example of a mouthpiece channel. The group began each official announcement made by any Palestinian or International resistance group with an emoji, followed by a colon whenever administrators would forward or summarize their statements, which made quantifying the number of such messages easy. From October 6th 2023 to February 28th, 2025, the channel posted 5794 messages containing "🟡🟢 Hezbollah:", 3465 announcements containing " 🟢 Martyr Izz El-Din Al-Qassam Brigades:", 1772 messages containing "🟢 Hamas:", 849 messages containing ⚫ Palestinian Islamic Jihad:", 529 messages containing "🇾🇪 Ansarallah:", 496 announcements containing "🔴 Martyr Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades:", and 334 announcements by the containing "⚔️ Al-Nasser Salah Al-Din Brigades:". This means that, on average, throughout 511 days, the channel would post a statement from one or more of the groups named above 25 times per day.

Unlike the previous two channels, “Israel is a war Criminal” and “Exposing Zionists Scum” post memes, commentary, conspiracies and hate speech against Jews in addition to relaying messages from resistance groups and on the ground updates. This places them in a separate category from Resistance News Network and Gaza Now, as mouthpiece channels actively present themselves as official news sources to viewers and typically refrain from posting such things so blatantly.

Israel is a War Criminal was the only English-speaking channel analyzed that promoted ways to donate money to resistance groups, giving viewers instructions on bypassing restrictions placed on channels banned on Telegram. On six separate occasions from March to August 2024, the channel forwarded messages from the Al-Qassam Brigades’ new Telegram channel. As outlined at the end of chapter one, Al-Qassam's original channel with a following of around 700,000 people was purged a few weeks into the war. These messages gave viewers detailed instructions on how to bypass the restrictions on accessing their channel while sharing an email address (fund@alqassam.ps) through which people could contact the group directly if interested in donating to their cause[13]. Collecting and sending funds to the Al-Qassam Brigades is illegal in countries like the US, Canada, the EU, the UK, New Zealand, and Australia, since each of these nations has designated the group or its parent organization, Hamas, as a terrorist organization.

Exposing Zionists Scum raised eyebrows for many reasons, among them is the unique kinds of FMI the channel would share. One such example includes a fabricated quote from a recording of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu from 1990, in which he calls the United States a golden calf that Israel will “suck dry until there is nothing left but the world's biggest welfare state that we will create and control”[14]. This is a completely fabricated and unfounded quote that originated from a website known for promoting antisemitic conspiracy theories called Veterans Today (Perry Cook, 2024).

The channel also uniquely made use of AI-generated imagery, where an image can be seen of a series of tents with Israeli flags, to show the extent of Israelis who were displaced in Northern

[13] Screenshot available in Appendix 1
[14]Screenshot available in Appendix 1

Israel[15]. Even though the content posted by the group also consists of certain on-the-ground updates, the channel flooded their feed with Antisemitic memes and conspiracies, going as far as to share the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, one of the key sources used in Hitler's Mein Kampf, multiple times. The channel posted a message on February 14th, 2024, that invoked the aforementioned Great Replacement Theory, posted in some of the American channels analyzed[16].

The reason this raises a few questions is due to Exposing Zionist Scum being the only channel analyzed that is geolocated in Russia. Russia has been found to have organized and coordinated FMI campaigns in the past through the state-sponsored Internet Research Agency (IRA), with the objective of sowing discord in countries Russia deems enemies. This most prominent example of this was in the 2016 US presidential election, in which the IRA used social media to stoke divisions around emotionally charged issues with racist undertones, specifically targeting African-Americans (US Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, 2019). It would be difficult, if not impossible to know *who* exactly is behind Exposing Zionist Scum, as it could very well be a single person or collection of individuals acting alone. However, the channel's posts match the divisive and gratuitously offensive content shared by past IRA campaigns.

There are two main outliers among this selection of channels: ISNAD Palestine and Apartheid Review. Besides being the only channel that communicated to its subscribers in Arabic, ISNAD was the only channel whose primary purpose was the dissemination of content and information to spread on Israeli social media to create and promote a sense of defeat within Israeli society. The channel is a well-established, hierarchical network of thousands of Arabic-speaking volunteers from around the world whose mission is to alter the way that Israelis view the current war. They do this by impersonating Israelis through fake Hebrew-language accounts and engaging real Israelis by creating and amplifying certain hashtags to give the illusion that a certain topic is trending or directly engaging other Israeli users. The channel has gone as far as to provide viewers with free and basic Hebrew lessons to make their messaging disseminated on

[15]Screenshot available in Appendix 1
[16] Screenshot available in Appendix 1

Israeli social media even more believable[17]. This opens a whole new realm of questions regarding coordinated false and misleading information campaigns, and whether there are any groups currently using Telegram to operate a similar campaign as ISNADs against American social media users.

Apartheid Review was the channel with the smallest number of subscribers, only totaling over six hundred people. It assumes the role of a more American-facing channel geared towards posting updates on the war in Gaza, also highlighting the actions taken by American politicians, businesses, and the US government concerning the October 7th war. The channel would frequently post pictures or videos of either Israeli soldiers or civilians celebrating alongside videos of homeless people in the United States, posing the question of why the US seemed to care so much about arming a different nation while neglecting its citizens. Posts would contain captions such as "Israeli Zionists are having fun and celebrating everywhere with your taxes while American people seeking to get the money everywhere to live with fewer problems"[18].

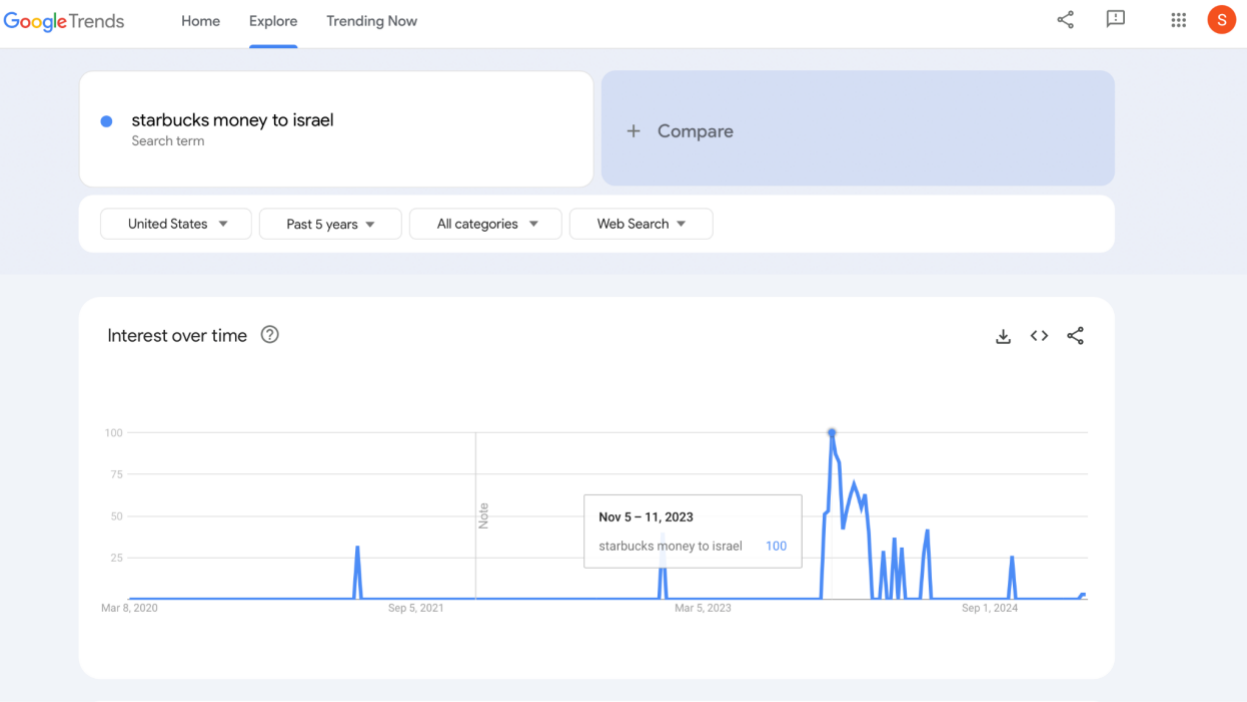
These statements try to take advantage of the fact that the average person does not understand how US aid sent to Israel works. Most of the aid Israel receives from the US is in the form of military aid through the Foreign Military Financing Program, which totals around $3.3 billion a year; this aid does not give Israel a $3 billion blank check funded by American taxpayers to spend it as it please, because Israel must use the money to purchase U.S. military equipment and services (Masters & Merrow, 2024). The idea is that Israel uses these funds to buy American-made weapons, equipment, and services, which is supposed to benefit the U.S. defense industry by supporting American jobs and manufacturing. Other channels would post similar messages, such as a claim made by "Israel is a War Criminal" in November of 2023 that claimed that the US is paying for Israeli healthcare and education through aid[19], such claims are much more common on Apartheid Review, given the channel's aforementioned American focus.

[17] Screenshot available in Appendix 1
[18] Screenshot available in Appendix 1
[19] Screenshot available in Appendix 1

3.3.4 Palestinian Focused Channels Content Analysis:

The first case study of this section covers a post shared by Apartheid Review on August 15, 2024, in which they claim Starbucks' income has been spent on supporting the Israeli invasions of Gaza[20]. This claim originates from a letter written by then CEO Howard Schultz dated to 2006 in which he admits that portions of the revenue generated by the company is donated through the Jerusalem Fund of Aish HaTorah to sponsor Israeli military arms fairs "to strengthen the special connection between the American, European and Israeli defense industries" (Mikkelson, 2006).

This letter is a complete farce that was posted as a joke on an online forum by a user named Andrew Winkler, who admitted he had written the letter and lied about how Starbucks was financing the Israeli army with its profits. Nevertheless, this story has spread like wildfire and has been one of the reasons many globally, including in the United States, have been boycotting the company since the beginning of the October 7th war.



Link:https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=today%205-y&geo=US&q=starbucks%20money%20to%20israel&hl=en-US

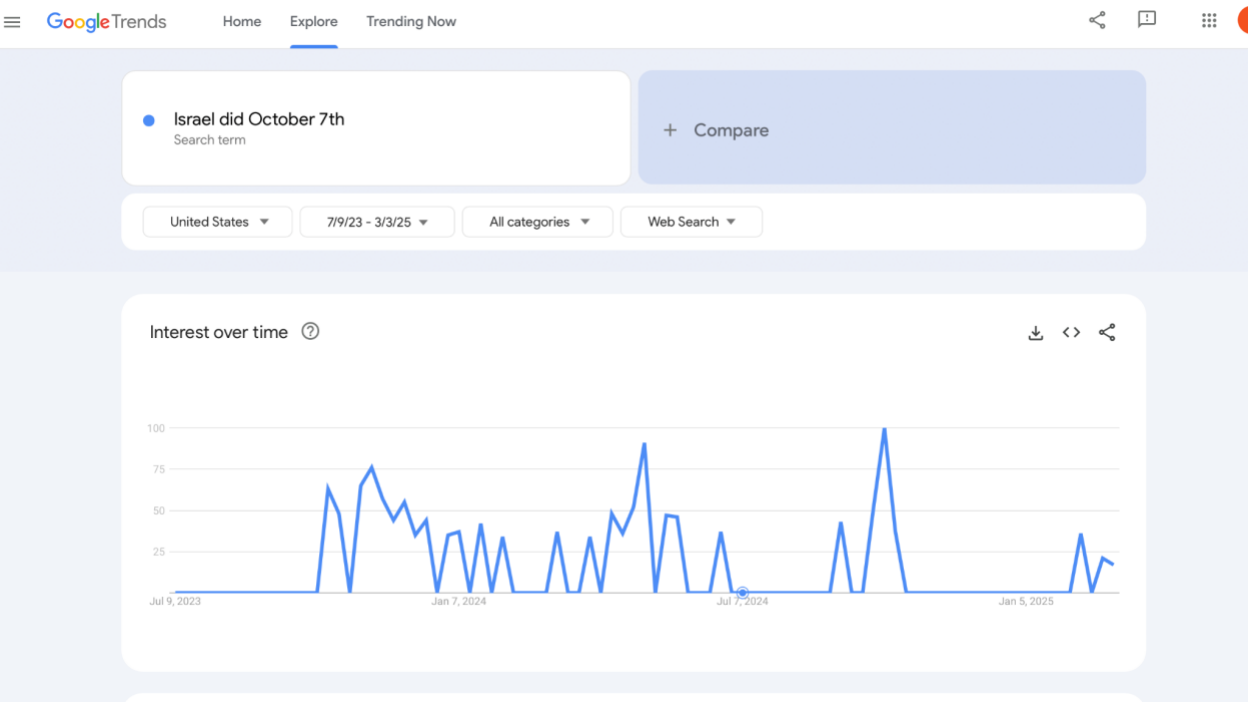
(date set= "last 5 years"- 3/8/2020-3/8/2025)

[20] Screenshot available in Appendix 1

The data from Google Trends reveals some interesting information about how and why Telegram channels post FMI. As demonstrated through the graph above, while the term did see some interest in prior years, the biggest spikes in popularity surrounding the "Starbucks money to Israel" search term occurred at the start of the war, coinciding with a controversial event in October 2023. The Starbucks Workers United posted a tweet reading "Solidarity with Palestine!" the day of the October 7th attack, leading Starbucks to file a lawsuit against the union for trademark infringement, leading to the start of the boycott Starbucks movement in the US and around the world and the resurgence of older FMI, as seen with the "Dancing Israelis" theory in the previous section.

Another interesting point is how the search term shows no interest in the entire month of August, the same month Apartheid Review posted their claims, making this case study especially unique. It's the first one to not post false or misleading information as the story develops, as was the case with the aforementioned nuking of Tartus and the fake letter attributed to General Hokanson. Instead, it was posted when the noise surrounding Starbucks started to die down, potentially in an attempt to breathe new life into this piece of FMI and bring it back to relevance. The boycott has negatively impacted Starbucks since the war, as the boycott movement has caused sales at US locations to drop 3%, the biggest fall since the COVID pandemic and the 2008 Recession (Sherman, 2024).

Each of these channels has also cast doubt on what happened on October 7th and posted a series of different claims surrounding the attack to prove it. One of the most salient narratives repeated across each of these channels is that Israel purposefully attacked its civilians on October 7th in a "false flag" attack. Footage of Israeli helicopters firing at cars and people has been misused to prove that Israel indiscriminately killed its civilians and has been spread widely across social media platforms to promote the idea that Israel planned the attacks as an excuse to wage the current war in Gaza. However, this footage originates from the IDF's own X account and has nothing to do with the 7/10 attacks, instead, it shows the Israeli Air Force's helicopters striking targets in different neighborhoods of Gaza (Norton, 2024).



Link:https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=2023-07-09%202025-03-03&geo=US&q=Israel%20did%20October%207th&hl=en

(date set= 7/9/2023-3/3/2025)

The Hannibal Directive is an order that allows IDF soldiers to use force to prevent other soldiers from being taken into captivity and has been used by these groups as evidence of Israel's deliberate harm to its civilians. On July 7, 2024, Haaretz released a bombshell report after interviewing both soldiers and mid to senior-level officers who revealed the IDF had indeed ordered the Hannibal directive, which placed the lives of both soldiers and civilians taken captive at great risk.

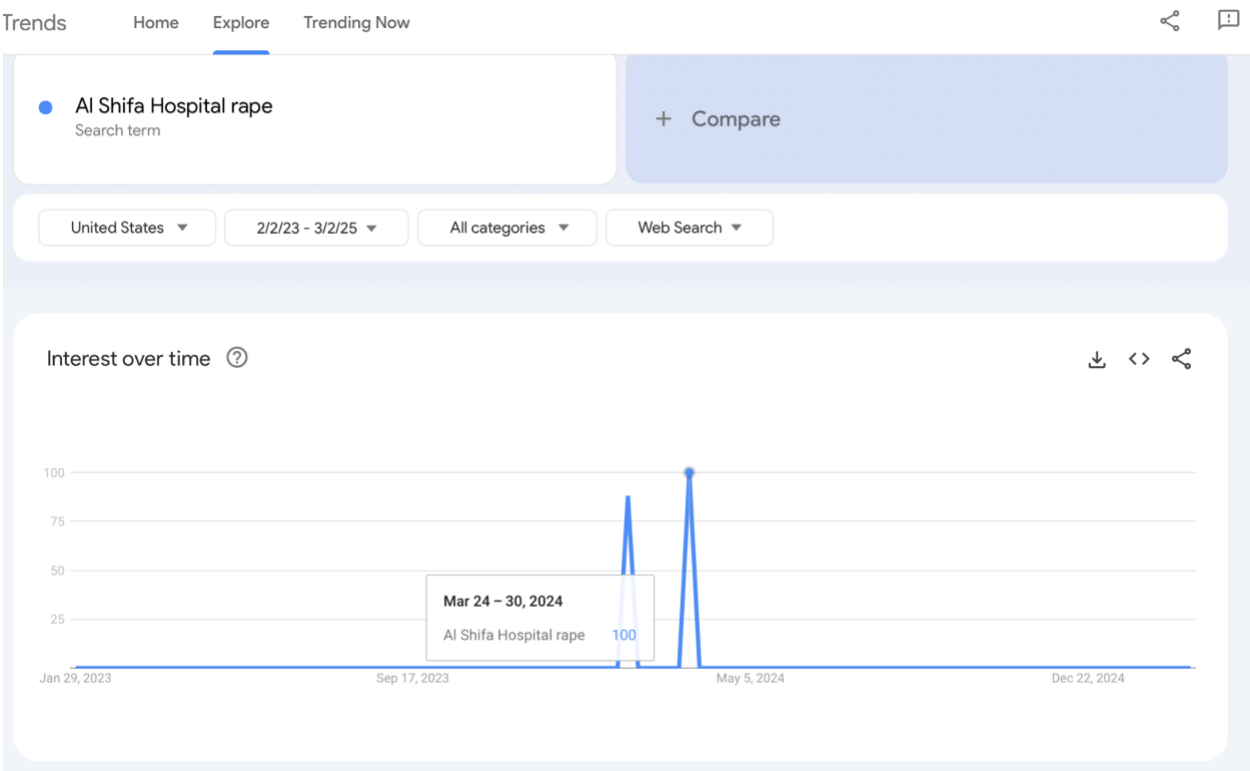
What's interesting is that many channels mentioned Israel's enactment of the Hannibal directive on October 7th as proof to back up the fake stories of Israel purposefully mowing down hundreds of its civilians. An example is found in Gaza Now in English, in which they relay a Hamas commentary on the events of October 7th where the group states: "In addition to the Israeli military's intelligence failure on Oct. 7, it committed a massacre against civilians, when one of its Apache's targeted them in a music festival which 4,000 people participated" [21].

[21] Screenshot available in Appendix 1

The Google Trends graph shows that the most significant and persistent engagement with the search term “Israel did October 7th” occurred months before the Haaretz report was released in July. This demonstrates the influence of false and misleading information campaigns on these Telegram channels that blamed Israel for orchestrating the October 7th attacks, as these stories had already gained much traction and garnered great American interest before any official confirmation was released.

Another claim lies in the active denial of Hamas’ sexual violence against Israelis during the attacks. This was done in two main ways, either by forwarding messages by Hamas that deny the claims as lies spread by the “Zionist propaganda machine” or stating that Israel has failed to produce any evidence that wide-spread rape occurred on the 7th of October. Instead, these channels have sought to distort the narratives of Hamas’ sexual assault on Israelis by flipping the story on its head through claims that IDF solders involved in the operation actively raped Palestinians during their operations in the Gaza Strip.

This is exemplified through the story of Jamila al-Hissi, a Gazan woman who was present at the Al-Shifa hospital during the second round of Israeli operations on March 5th, 2024, but was able to leave after six days. Before Israel withdrew from the hospital on April 1st, al-Hissi made international headlines by telling Al-Jazeera journalists in a video interview that IDF soldiers had raped women during their operation in the hospital. Israel immediately denied these claims, and after a few days and an internal investigation conducted by Hamas, al-Hissi came clean and admitted to having lied, but justified her actions by saying her goal was to “arouse the nation’s fervor and brotherhood” through the story (TOI Staff, 2024). While Al-Jazeera took down the video interview, news outlets like Middle East Eye and WAFA News Agency have yet to remove this story from their social media platforms.



Link:https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=2023-02-02%202025-03-02&geo=US&q=Al%20Shifa%20Hospital%20rape&hl=en

(date set= 2/2/2023-3/2/2025)

The Google Trends graph generated from the search term "Al-Shifa Hospital rape" reveals two spikes in interest, the first of which happened in between February 11th to the 18th, which at first glance, may seem out of place considering the context laid out above. The reason behind this spike in interest can be attributed to how accusations of war crimes taking place near the hospital before the Israeli operation in March were widespread at this point, as on February 12th, the Palestinian Red Crescent accused Israel of intentionally targeting and killing two of the organization's paramedics (The Palestine Red Crescent Society, 2024).

Besides leading to an overall increase in attention around the Al-Shifa hospital could have prompted Americans to search for other claims of other potential war crimes committed by the Israeli army, including sexual assault. The second and largest spike, garnering a value of 100 came the day after al-Hissi's interview was published by Al-Jazeera, which was shared on Telegram channels like Resistance News Network, Gaza Now English and Israel is a War Criminal, as well as a wide array of social media platforms in the days that followed. These

channels' role in amplifying this fake story explains the burst in the term's popularity from March 24th to the 30th.

3.3.5 Israeli Focused Channels:

This thesis analyzed five Israeli Telegram channels: The Shadow's Unapologetic Right Wing (הימין הלא מתנצל של הצל), Dennis Charkov, The Cabinet- Elimination of Terrorists Online (הקבינט חיסול מחבלים ברשת -), News Star Without Censorship (כוכב החדשות ללא צנזורה), and Pure News and Videos on Telegram (בטלגרם נטו חדשות וסירטונים). All five of these channels posted in Hebrew, which was translated with the help of Telegram Premium's real-time translation feature.

Similar to the American examples covered earlier, these channels are split between Autonomous Telegram Networks and individual media personalities. The two individual media personalities are Denis Charkov, a comedian, and the administrator of the Shadow's Unapologetic Right Wing, Yoav Eliassi, a famous Israeli rapper. These two men are entertainers turned political commentators and embody the Amateurization of publishing, as the idea of a rapper or comedian owning and operating their own news platforms would have been inconceivable before social media.

Overall, these channels focused on posting lots of on-the-ground news and updates, such as videos of Israeli operations in the Gaza Strip, notifications shared by Israeli officials and different military and political spokespeople, and updates from the Tzofar application's Tzeva Adom (Red Color) alerts. It was made clear from the start of analyzing these five Israeli channels were far more inward-facing than the other channels studied, as the content they publish seems to be exclusively aimed towards an Israeli audience.

Besides only communicating in Hebrew, some channels like Pure News and Videos on Telegram and the Shadow's Unapologetic Right Wing would publish content unrelated to covering the conflict, to share Black Friday coupons and deals shared by other Telegram channels available to Israeli customers on online shopping websites like AliExpress[22]. Eliassi even promoted lucrative

[22] Screenshot available in Appendix 1

savings on guns by sharing a deal on firearms and accessories produced by CAA tactical solutions, a prominent weapons manufacturer in Israel, through a WhatsApp chat he shares with his tens of thousands of followers[23].

The Israeli focus of these channels affected the kinds of false and misleading information found. One example is a series of false claims surrounding the Biden Administration, President Biden, and Vice President Kamala Harris. On October 9th, 2023, Eliassi posted a message in tandem with a political cartoon where he claimed that money President Biden was set to transfer to Iran, a total of $6 billion in frozen assets to the country in exchange for six American citizens being held by the regime, were used by the Islamic Republic to fund the October 7th attacks[24]. This claim is patently false. Iran had not used a single penny from the $6 billion before or on October 7th, as the money had been deposited into a Qatari bank account being overseen by the nations, which, alongside American officials, reported that Iran had not accessed any of the money (Jacobson & Putterman, 2023). Nevertheless, this false claim was parroted by many, including some Republicans in Congress who tried to link the transfer of these funds to the 7/10, and tried to place the blame for the attacks on President Biden.

Eliassi held onto this misconception in the months that followed his post in October, mentioning and pairing it with another piece of FMI on February 1st, 2024. This post came in the context of President Biden's decision to impose sanctions against four Israeli settlers who were accused of attacking Palestinians, barring these individuals from (Evans & Bateman, 2024). In this post, Eliassi states that “Biden transfers the sanctions he lifted from the Iranians and puts them on the settlements” in addition to saying that “there are no Jews who harm Arabs, there simply are none!”[25]. A quick Google search can confirm that what Eliassi claims is completely false. The United Nations’ Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported that from October 7th to December 31st, 2024, it tracked 1,860 incidents of Israeli settler violence against Palestinians living in the West Bank (UNOCHA, 2025).

[23] Screenshot available in Appendix 1
[24] Screenshot available in Appendix 1
[25] Screenshot available in Appendix 1

Another fake story regarding the Biden administration was published by The Cabinet on August 1st, 2024. This post came in the context of Kamala Harris replacing Joe Biden as the Democratic nominee for the 2024 elections and was forwarded from another Israeli Telegram channel named "The Right Way". It consists of an image of a young Kamala Harris kissing then-San Francisco mayor Willie Brown, with the caption reading "The image that Kamala is trying to hide! Kamala Harris was 29 when she had an affair with Willie Brown, when he was 60 and the married mayor of San Francisco who promoted her and gave her 2 government jobs and a car as a gift"[26].

This claim is misleading for several reasons. It suggests that Harris was trying to hide her relationship with Brown, which was not an affair since he and his wife had been estranged for almost a decade, and then rewarded her with government positions. Brown and Harris' relationship was no secret. While he did appoint Harris to a position in the California Medical Assistance Commission, this is a far cry from her using this relationship to help her climb the political ladder as implied in the post, since she was elected District Attorney of San Francisco in almost five years after they had finished dating (Spencer, 2024). Both this example and Eliassi's post demonstrate a wider trend in the Israeli channels analyzed; they are trying to convince Israelis that Biden was against them and that they would be much better off with Trump in office.

The most common thread linking the content posted by these channels was the constant dehumanization of Palestinians. These messages did not discriminate between civilians or militants, and took the form of memes, messages, and comments on videos of Gaza's destruction or casualties of Israeli operations. Mocking the death of an infant by comparing their corpse to E.T.[27], calling attempts to pull out injured Gazan's from rubble and the transportation of dead bodies as "garbage disposal"[28], asking for the complete demolition of Gaza, either by bombing or organizing a line of bulldozers and excavators[29], claiming that there are no innocent civilians in

[26]Screenshot available in Appendix 1
[27]Screenshot available in Appendix 1
[28]Screenshot available in Appendix 1
[29] Screenshot available in Appendix 1

Gaza, and calling Gazans Chimpanzees[30] are just some of the messages posted to these channels, the smallest of which has a whopping following of over 10,000 subscribers.

One of the more uniquely disturbing posts collected came from Yoav Eliassi's channel three days after October 7th in which he promoted a trending prank in which Israelis randomly called citizens in Gaza using a specific cell phone prefix to threaten them with fake reports that the air force was headed towards their homes[31]. Eliassi went as far as offering to raffle a prize to whoever sent such an audio recording, turning this twisted joke into a competition; at the time of writing this section, the post has been viewed more than 100,000 times and generated lots of positive reaction, as can be seen in the reactions to Eliassi's challenge.

Overall, this kind of content reflects a wider trend in Israeli society, which was quantified in a poll conducted in July 2024 by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, led by Dr. Khalil Shikaki. This survey found that when Israeli Jews were asked about the "other side's level of humanity" they gave Palestinians an average score of 14/100, with over half (51%) giving a score of zero, and only 2.7% of respondents giving a score of 80 or higher (Shikaki & Rosler, 2024). These statistics reflect one of the biggest difficulties in the realization and implementation of a two-state solution, as convincing both Israeli and Palestinian publics that a diplomatic and negotiated way to solve the conflict has become increasingly difficult every year that has followed the end of the Second Intifada in 2006 and Hamas' violent takeover of Gaza in 2007.

3.3.6 Israeli Focused Channels Content Analysis:

Unlike the case studies covered throughout Chapter Three, the Israeli channels are different from the previous examples, given the inherent difference in *who* the Israeli Telegram channels appeal to, which impacts the kinds of false and misleading information disseminated. Nevertheless, some themes and stories covered by these channels made their way to the United States.

The first such example ties into the theme of dehumanization and regards attempts of these Israeli channels to popularize a phenomenon referred to as "Pallywood". It is a combination of

[30]Screenshot available in Appendix 1
[31]Screenshot available in Appendix 1

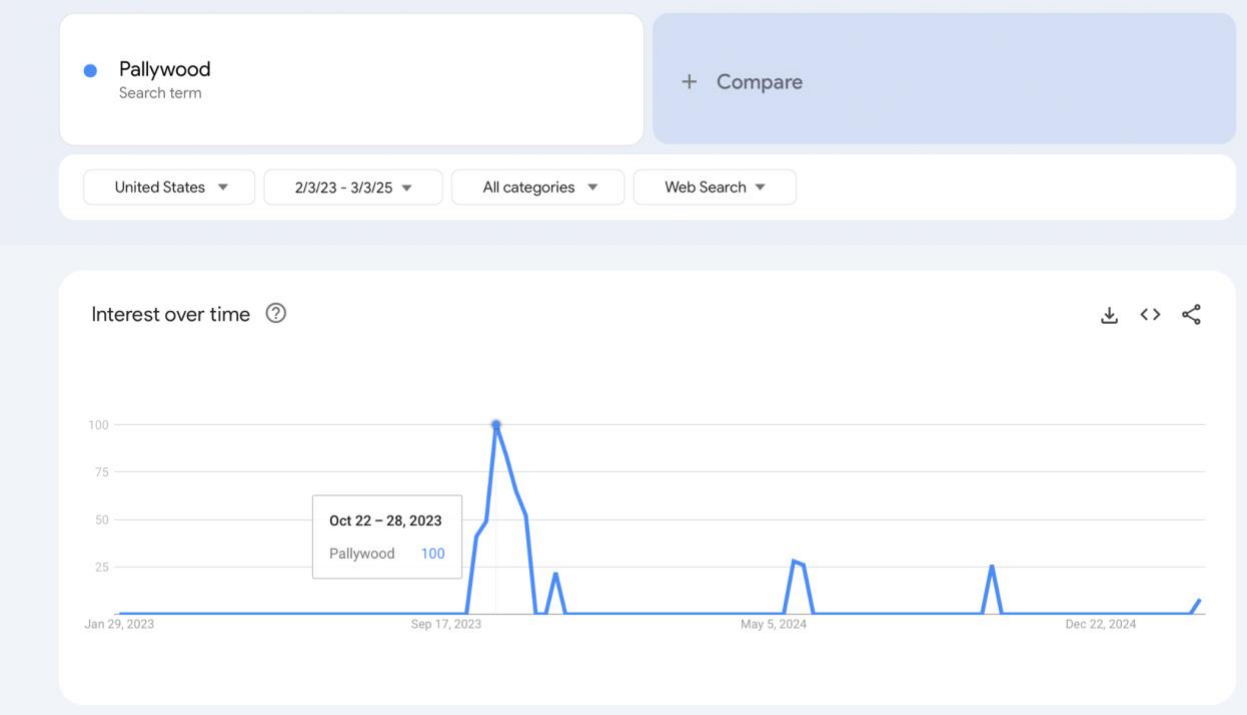
the words Palestine and Hollywood to convince others that videos shared online of the destruction in Gaza and the plight of its citizens circulating and shared online are either staged or exaggerated. The term implies that these videos and images posted online from Gaza are staged propaganda productions orchestrated by Hamas or its supporters. The goal of Pallywood from the Israeli perspective is to pull at the world's heartstrings by using crisis actors, who pretend to be part of a staged disaster to show the world an inaccurate and embellished reality as to what is happening in Gaza, to alienate Israel internationally, increase external pressures on it to end the war, or both.

An individual targeted by the Pallywood campaign is Saleh Al-Jafarawi, who has documented his time in Gaza to the world through his various social media pages with millions of followers. He first rose to prominence online after people compiled a video, he published celebrating the October 7th attacks, followed by footage of him crying as a result of Israel's first operations in Gaza, leading many social media users to give him the nickname Mr. FAFO, an acronym for Fuck Around and Find Out (Perets, 2025). While Al-Jafarawi has been lauded by some as one of the few Palestinian journalists who "have provided raw, unfiltered coverage of Israel's war on Gaza" by some (The New Arab Staff, 2025), his accounts on Instagram were suspended on March 9th, 2025. He is being accused by both the Palestinian Health Ministry in Ramallah and many citizens of Gaza of creating and promoting a fake charity campaign to rebuild the Al-Nasr Children's Hospital, only to embezzle the funds he collected (Perets, 2025b).

On October 27th, Pure News and Videos on Telegram forwarded a video of Al-Jafarawi sharing footage of buildings that were bombed in Gaza the day after he had allegedly uploaded footage of him being hospitalized, adding that Al-Jafarawi's footage was helping Israel prove to the world that Pallywood is indeed a real phenomenon[32], being shared by prominent Israeli spokespeople like Yosef Hadad and Hananya Naftali the day prior. The problem with this footage is that the hospitalized man displayed in the video alongside Al-Jafarawi is a completely different person who does not even live in Gaza, named Mohammed Zendiq; the video of his injury was published in July after Israeli forces attacked the Nur Shams refugee camp near the city of Tulkarm (Bullens, 2023). The Google Trends graph below reflects how Pallywood began

[32]Screenshot available in Appendix 1

to emerge in American search queries. The start of American interest surrounding the term began the week after the 7/10 attacks, reaching a score of 48 from the 15th to the 21st of October. However, Pallywood jumped to the highest level of interest the week in which the allegations of Al-Jafarawi's miraculous recovery began to spread and persisted for a week after, with a score of 83 from October 29th to November 4th.



Link:https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=2023-02-03%202025-03-03&geo=US&q=Pallywood&hl=en

(date set= 2/3/2023-3/3/2025)

The case of Pallywood demonstrates that the phenomenon of repackaging older conspiracies to fit the context of the most recent war is not something exclusive to Palestinian or American channels, as was the case with the Starbucks or Dancing Israeli conspiracies. Pallywood is by no means a new concept and was first coined during the Second Intifada in the context surrounding the death of Mohammad al-Dura, a Palestinian child killed by Israeli gunfire in 2000. His death was recorded and published by a freelance journalist working for a French television channel with whom he shared the footage (Ben-David, 2007).

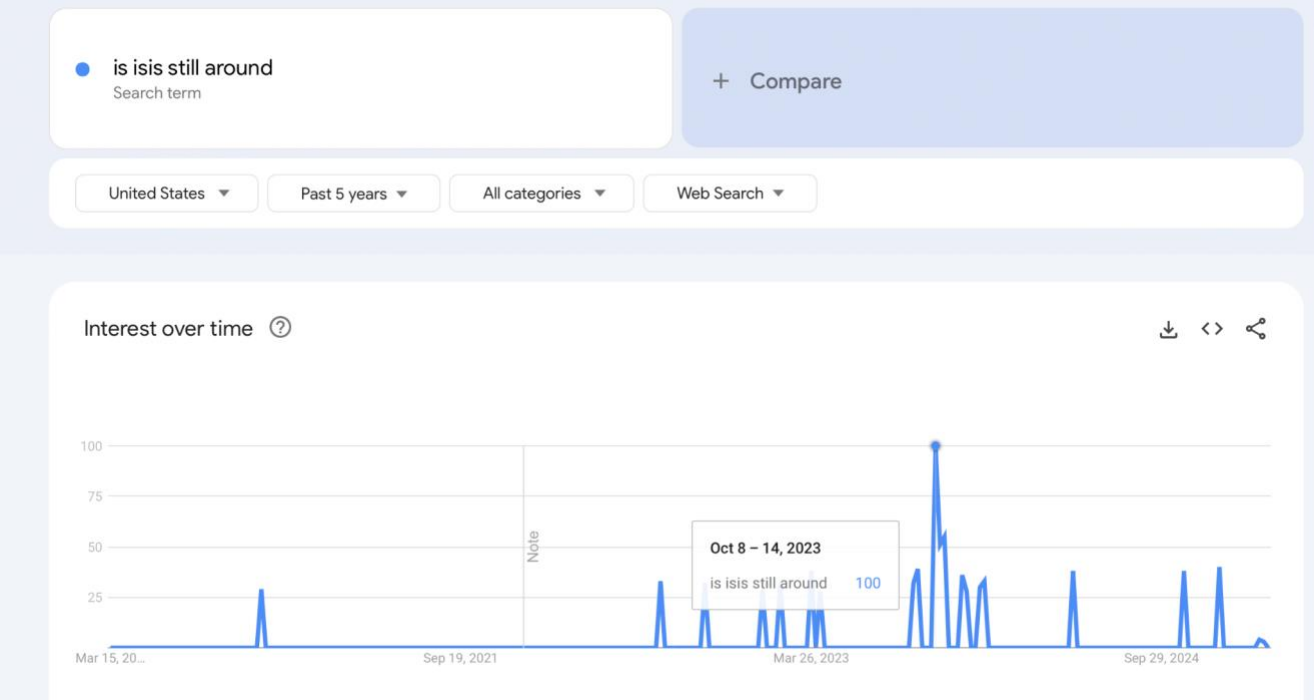
The Second Intifada marked the beginning of the media's global reach in covering the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as multinational media companies broadcasted the conflict's violence

globally to millions of viewers. Al-Dura's death led to an Israeli investigation that concluded Israeli soldiers, while present in the area, were not responsible for his death, leading many pro-Israeli media watchdogs to accuse the freelance journalist of staging the event and framing the event as an example of Pallywood (Ben-David, 2007). This story gained traction to the point that a man in France named Philippe Karsenty said that a French channel had completely fabricated the footage of al-Dura's death, prompting a defamation lawsuit that lasted ten years, and ended with Karsenty being found guilty of defamation and was required to pay a 7,000 euro fine (TOI Staff, 2013).

The second case study involves a popular claim made at the very start of the war, known as the "Hamas is ISIS" campaign. This campaign claims that the Islamic State (ISIS) was either directly involved in or planned the October 7th attacks in coordination with Hamas, or equates Hamas as the Palestinian version of ISIS. Both groups do share some similarities, namely their view of Israel as an occupying enemy that needs to be defeated violently. However, some important distinctions between the two groups completely disprove the false equivalences made by this campaign. Hamas and ISIS are at odds for a series of reasons, the three most important of which are the Islamic State's criticism of Hamas' lack of Sharia based legislation in Gaza, Hamas' alliance and dependence on prominent Shia groups like Hezbollah and the Iranian regime, and Hamas' past participation in democratic elections in 2006, which ISIS views as an un-Islamic concept (Krause, 2023). If that were not enough to separate the two, Hamas has led crackdowns against ISIS supporters in Gaza in the past, arrested dozens of its ISIS sympathizers, and demolished a mosque in Deir el-Balah attended by its supporters (Toameh, 2015).

Nevertheless, there has been a push made by many Israeli officials and pundits to equate the two organizations. The first person to do so was Prime Minister Netanyahu in a joint press conference with former Secretary of State Blinken on October 12, 2023, in which he stated that "Hamas is ISIS, and just as ISIS was crushed, so too will Hamas be crushed" (United States Department of State, 2023). The objective of this campaign is simple: it is used as a way to appeal to American and European audiences as justification for Israel's war against Hamas. The views of the two groups are reflected in the Israeli Telegram channels analyzed, as all five mentioned the term "חמאס-דאעש" (Hamas-ISIS) a total of 47 times from the start of the war to

March 1st, 2025. The first mention of the term came from Eliassi's channel the same day Blinken and Netanyahu made their remarks[33]. Generally, the five channels would use the term while covering the atrocities committed by Hamas on the 7th of October or when discussing or celebrating IDF operations against Hamas in the Gaza Strip.



Link:https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=today%205-y&geo=US&q=is%20isis%20still%20around

(date set= 3/15/2020-3/15/2025)

The Google Trends graph above reveals some interesting data on how the "Hamas is ISIS" campaign could have affected American perceptions at the start of the war. The search term "is ISIS still around" reached the highest level of interest in the past five years was the week of October 8th-14th, the same week the campaign began, and Netanyahu made his joining statement with Secretary Blinken.

This could be because many Americans who had not been as interested or aware of the Islamic State's recent activities, as demonstrated through the lower level of search interest before October 7th, were influenced by this false equivalency between the two made in the news and social media. This drove people to see if ISIS was still active and if the Islamic State had played a role

[33]Screenshot available in Appendix 1

in a brutal attack. The case study also demonstrates how certain Telegram channels follow the narratives laid out by state-sponsored campaigns to amplify their message, in this case, continuing to invoke the false equivalency between ISIS and Hamas while covering developments throughout the war.

3.4 Summary, Implications, Threats, and Concluding Thoughts

The channels analyzed throughout this chapter have shown how Telegram has been used as a platform through which disinformation, conspiracy theories, and revisionist narratives are broadcast and consumed by a wide range of audiences. All of the categories of channels have used Telegram to circulate misleading or outright fake stories that align with the ideology or narrative they sought to push on their audiences.

The American and World-focused channels not only promoted false and misleading claims about Starbucks sending profits to the IDF to that Israel dropped a nuclear bomb on Syria, but also conspiracies like the "Great Replacement Theory" and "Jewish Atrocity Propaganda." Palestinian-focused channels, while often portraying themselves as resistance mouthpieces, engaged in the spread of false and misleading information through fabricated quotes, using AI-generated imagery, and repurposed footage to either falsely connect Israel to atrocities or downplay Hamas's actions. While the Israeli channels were an exception in the way they were more inward-facing by predominantly appealing to Israeli and Hebrew-speaking audiences, they also used FMI to promote government-aligned narratives like "Hamas is ISIS" and "Pallywood," while also frequently engaging in gratuitous dehumanizing language toward Palestinians.

Despite their clear ideological differences, the common theme that bonds these Telegram networks is their weaponization of FMI to shape perceptions and exploit emotionally charged moments to gain influence in the information space. Whether through state-aligned campaigns or the actions of anonymous Telegram networks and deplatformed personalities, these channels have demonstrated how Telegram operates as a separate battleground for narrative warfare, as facts come second to virality and a desire to impact the viewer's perceptions. The patterns identified in this chapter point to a broader issue: Telegram not only enables disinformation to

spread with little resistance, but it is also where bad-faith actors are increasingly adept at using the platform to manipulate public opinion in real time.

Chapter 4: Recommendations and Conclusion

4.1 Conclusion:

The Nazi's were incredibly effective at producing propaganda and disseminating false information both leading up to and during the Second World War. This propaganda justified their vision of how to restore Germany to its former glory, who was to blame for its defeat in World War I, and the way to deal with those deemed responsible for its decline. The father of the Nazi's propaganda operations was Joseph Goebbels, one of Hitler's first and closest allies, who once stated that if "you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it" (Jewish Virtual Library, n.d.). This idea is based on the fact that people regularly lie to each other about smaller matters daily, but hearing someone repeat a "big lie" multiple times would incline people to believe the message more, since, to the average person, it would make no sense for someone to continuously repeat something that sounds unbelievably false without it being at least partially true.

This thesis has shown that the use of the big lie is still alive and well, but is being propelled by a different set of actors. Instead of being a strategy employed by a centralized authority like a state or political party, it is now in the hands of individual actors, who form groups on free to download platforms and applications, acting as alternative sources of news, a clear consequence of the Amateurization of publishing laid out by Shirky in the first chapter. These actors, whether American, Israeli, or Palestinian, pay close attention to American public opinion surrounding certain themes regarding the conflict.

They share and forward breaking news stories from globally renowned sources in tandem with false and misleading information, building an image of reliability that makes it easier to introduce such content without arousing any suspicion from subscribers and engage in the spreading and repetition of FMI in two ways. The first is by republishing older conspiracies and repackaging them to fit the current conflict, while the second is by closely following specific events and taking advantage of the public's interest surrounding them to amplify their narrative. Regardless of the means employed, the goal is to change people's perceptions regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The case studies analyzed in Chapter Three and the information

obtained from Google Trends demonstrated how levels of search term interest show that Americans both interacted with and pursued stories rooted in FMI throughout the war.

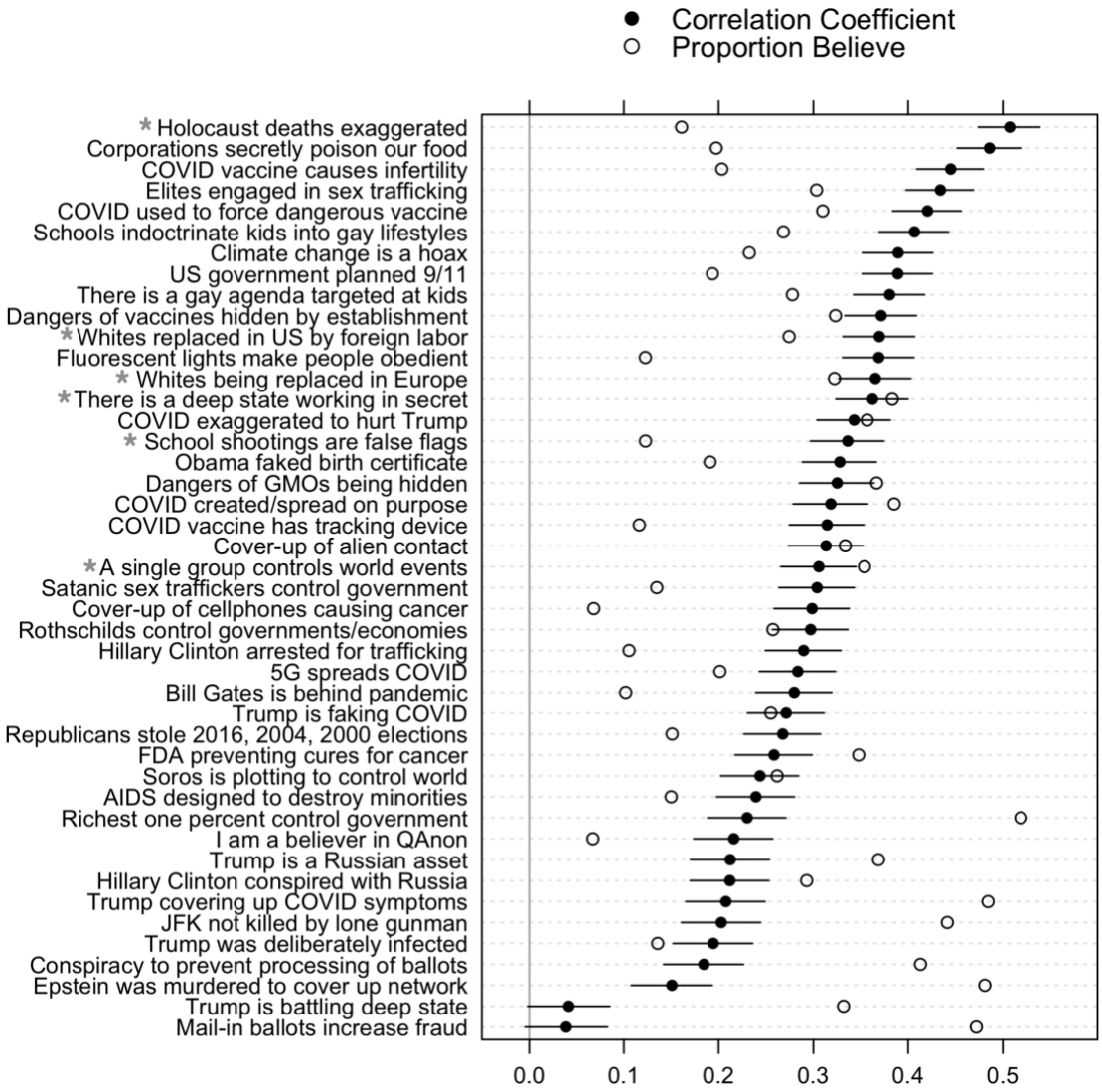
Tangible consequences of false information have been discussed earlier in this thesis. An embodiment of the economic consequences brought as a result of false information can be seen in the impact the boycott Starbucks movement has had on the coffee chain's sales throughout the United States, which have seen their largest drop since the COVID pandemic and the 2008 Recession. However, another source of concern lies in how false information and conspiracies can lead to politically motivated violence. A study written in December 2024 by Enders et al. (2024) published through the Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review, studied the relationship between belief in conspiracy theories and support and engagement in political violence.

The authors selected over 40 conspiracy theories and conducted surveys to see how adhering to these theories would either prompt support or even engagement in violence against others. Enders and his colleagues found that more popular and long-standing conspiracy theories attract a wider group of believers, but are associated with less support or inclination to act violently. However, they also found that believing in conspiracy theories that vilified or scapegoated others had the highest Pearson correlation coefficients, meaning that there was a stronger relationship between believing in that theory and supporting or engaging in violence. They conclude their study by showing how the correlation between support for political violence and the American Conspiracy Thinking Scale has grown positively over the past decade, tripling from a Pearson coefficient of 0.14 in 2012 to 0.43 in 2022.

Some of the very theories Enders et al. studied that demonstrate the greatest potential for violent behavior overlap with some of the same content found and promoted in the Telegram channels studied throughout this thesis, as shown in Figure 1. The theory analyzed by the authors with the highest correlation with political violence of the 44 theories chosen was the belief that the Holocaust was exaggerated, with a correlation coefficient of 0.51 (Enders et al., 2024, p.7). This narrative of fabricated or exaggerated tragedy was found in the American and world-focused

channels that accused Israel or the Jewish people of engaging in “Jewish atrocity propaganda” relating to the October 7th attacks.

Figure 1:



(Enders, Klofstad, & Uscinski, 2024), the correlation between support for political violence and belief in conspiracy theories varies by theory and inversely relates to the popularity of each theory.

Similar theories were promoted by the Palestinian-focused channels that claimed Israel staged the October 7th attacks, share characteristics with some other high-risk theories in the Enders et al. study. These include false flag attacks and conspiracies involving a select few elites

deceptively controlling and orchestrating current events worldwide, all yielded high Pearson correlation coefficients. Lastly comes the Great Replacement Theory promoted by two American-focused channels, Fashwave and Fashposting. The authors asked two questions about this theory, one relating to Europe and the other to the United States, both resulting in a high Pearson coefficient. These findings highlight the danger posed by the content and narratives shared by the Telegram channels studied in this thesis, as they not only spread misinformation and disinformation but also foster attitudes that legitimize and potentially lead to violence.

In February 2025, President Donald Trump decided to dismantle task forces in both the FBI's foreign influence task force and the Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA). Both of these government entities worked to counter foreign influence campaigns that spread misinformation and disinformation on social media to divide and confuse the American people. Most recently, the two worked tirelessly during the 2024 election to both track and publicize influence operations from Russia, China and Iran to reduce their impact on unsuspecting voters; however, in line with the blueprints laid out in Project 2025, the Trump administration decided to close of the election security unit at CISA and well as the FBI's task force in the name of restructuring the Federal Government (Lee Myers et al., 2025).

Many have criticized this move saying that it leaves the US and its citizens defenseless in the face of foreign mis/disinformation campaigns that seek to disrupt the country, particularly leading up to elections; Arizona's Secretary of State Adrian Fontes went as far as to compare the cuts made by the Trump administration to "shutting down the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration ahead of hurricane season" in a letter to the President (Sganga, 2025). Some cybersecurity experts have already noticed increased efforts by state-sponsored actors in attempting to misinform and divide, specifically among the publics of nations allied to the United States. These experts pointed to how throughout April 2025, a network of pro-Russian websites began a campaign with the goal of "undermining confidence in the U.S. defense industry" surrounding American F-35 fighter jets, by spreading rumors that American allies purchasing the warplanes would not have complete control over them (Cooper & Barnes, 2025).

The guardrails that have attempted to protect, and at the very least educate the American public about FMI campaigns, have been removed at a time when certain demographics within the United States access and consume news. The Pew Research Center reports that now, three in every 10 U.S. adults use social media platforms, ranging from Facebook and Instagram to YouTube, to regularly get news (Pew Research Center, 2023).

Of the roughly 30% of Americans who get their news from social media feeds, it was found that young adults under 30 are now just as likely to trust news presented on social media feeds as the headlines from major national news companies (Eddy, 2024). It is also clear that more and more Americans are consuming news from alternative media platforms that enable them to pay more attention to developments specifically surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This is proven by a Harvard-Harris poll conducted in December 2023 showing that 81% of people from the ages of 18-24 and 68% of 25- to 34-year-olds, the same demographics most likely to get their news from social media, also reported they were following the war closely (Harvard CAPS/The Harris Poll, 2023).

This thesis has demonstrated that Telegram is an extremely effective vehicle through which false and misleading information can be found and spread due to its structure, encryption features, and lack of content moderation. All of these inherent factors have helped facilitate the rapid spread of false claims that effectively blur the lines between legitimate reporting and FMI to an audience that increasingly uses alternative media platforms to stay informed. This is especially worrying given the dangers of the social bots covered in the first chapter, which are programmed to behave like real users, automatically debate people in online conversations, remain relatively cheap to access, and could be used to help amplify FMI on other platforms.

In Democracies like the United States, American citizens rely on the information fed through a free press, freedom of expression, and a lack of censorship that acts as a lens that informs citizens and influences their decision on how to guide the country's political decisions when voting. FMI taints this lens by forging a “truth” that, besides requiring significant amounts of time and effort to disprove, can potentially be repeated and shared an infinite number of times through coordinated campaigns or automation to illude people into believing it's true. Unless

something is done to try and curb the spread of false and misleading information originating from Telegram at its root, one should expect the phenomenon of American audiences interacting and engaging with similar media pertaining not only regarding the Israeli Palestinian conflict, but any other geopolitical or domestic flashpoint that involves the United States, to increase.

4.2 Suggestions: How to Limit the Spread of FMI on Telegram?

Telegram has been both lauded and faced harsh criticisms for its stances on free speech, censorship, and privacy. There has been a great debate in many countries surrounding censorship on the Internet and social media, and what content should be censored on these platforms. Those who favor greater censorship on social media argue that a “free” Internet enables a greater exchange of creativity, innovation, and information, claiming that censorship would prevent such things.

Those in favor of Internet restrictions argue that while censorship is terrible and that the Internet and social media can be conducive to spreading positive innovations and ideas, it can also cause harmful and hateful content to spread like wildfire. The content that already gets censored on other social media platforms consists of things that are either entirely illegal or, at the very least, regulated in the real world. These include the sale and distribution of drugs, firearms, other weapons, pornography, and other obscene content. Ultimately, the metaphorical keys that can lock or shut down an account or channel lie in the hands of the platforms themselves or their parent companies.

Some external pressures can influence a platform's decision to censor or not censor content. The first answer lies in these platforms' business model, or how these applications that are free to join and download make enough money to stay profitable. Social media companies make money through advertisers, who pay these platforms to market their products to users online. In recent years, many advertisers have grown more concerned with their brand's image and how customers will perceive them if they market their products on platforms that also host misleading, fake, unpleasant, or even criminal content.

A study involving more than 1000 American consumers conducted by Integral Ad Science (IAS) found that ¾ of the respondents would be favorable towards brands that advertise on sites that spread misinformation; additionally, 71% of consumers would feel less favorable toward a brand that advertises near inappropriate content (IAS, 2024). Given these advertisers' vital role in social media platforms, many have taken a very active approach in restricting, taking down, or even sharing information with local authorities regarding the activities of extremist and violent groups on their platforms.

Telegram is not only in its own lane regarding user privacy and lack of content moderation. Its distinct business model is another characteristic that sets it apart from other social media platforms. Platforms like X, Instagram, and Facebook all track their users' data to provide them with targeted advertisements, which companies pay a lot of money to broadcast on. Telegram refuses to do so, as the idea of Telegram tracking its users' data would go against its raison d'être of providing the most secure and private messaging platform for its users.

Instead, Telegram is kept financially viable through contributions made from the premium subscription feature that enables features like real-time translation or the ability to boost channels, its advertising approach, and its very own Cryptocurrency called Toncoin. This incredibly diverse source of revenue played a key factor in helping Telegram turn a profit for the first time in its history, as the company was able to triple its previous earnings to a total of $1 billion in 2024 (Kaur, 2025). Telegram's diverse portfolio of revenue streams also means that the pressure incurred by advertisers on other social media platforms does not work on Telegram, as the company has less incentive to appease advertisers and give in to their pressure the same way that X or Facebook do.

Another external factor that makes social media platforms take an active role in censoring content comes from legislation and government pressure. The most prominent example is the European Union through the Digital Services Act (DSA), which was fully implemented in February 2024 and applies to all EU member states. It places the responsibility for harmful content spread on social media platforms on the entities that own and operate them. The law requires these platforms to restrict any content that violates either their terms of service or the

laws of an EU member state; additionally, these platforms must “identify risks that are inherent to their platform's design” and features that negatively impact civic discourse, electoral processes, and fundamental rights (Baker, 2024). If these platforms do not comply with the DSA, they can be fined up to 6 percent of their annual global revenue. That means that if TikTok, for example, refuses to abide by the DSA, the platform's parent company, ByteDance, would be fined $966,000,000 based on its global revenue of $16.1 billion in 2023 (Iqbal, 2024).

While the United States has not yet passed legislation that oversees the activities of social media companies to the same extent as the DSA, there have been some efforts to regulate social media platforms at the state level over the past couple of years. In 2023, several states passed legislation requiring age verification and parental consent for minors to access social media platforms, such as New York State's decision ratified the SAFE (Stop Addictive Feeds Exploitation) and the New York Child Data Protection Act.

Both legislations limit how social media companies can interact with minors. The SAFE Act prohibits social media platforms from using their algorithmic feeds on underage users, as they are designed to be addictive and keep these young people on the site as long as possible. The Child Data Protection Act restricts websites from collecting, sharing, or using minors' data without explicit consent unless it is essential for the site to function (Reschke, 2024). However, the laws being passed in the United States mainly concern user privacy instead of the content-focused approach taken by the EU through the DSA.

For there to be any significant change in the harmful effects of social media on American society, more responsibility needs to be placed in the hands of the bad-faith actors using it for negative purposes, as well as the platforms themselves. However, pressuring those with the keys to shut down channels or accounts could lead to significant challenges. Such a move could be interpreted by the people as an attempt by the government to shut down a means through which they access information, which would be greatly frowned upon in free and democratic society. In the past, there has been a push for greater digital literacy to educate people and equip them with the tools to identify false information spread on social media. However, according to a study conducted by scholars at Harvard’s Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics, and Public Policy

found that while digital literacy campaigns do help people identify FMI, they do not stop users from sharing such media; the authors attribute this to the how people tend to neglect considering the accuracy of what they publish, forward, or repost before sharing such content (Sirlin et al, 2021).

Therefore, there needs to be a middle ground approach, through which the negative effects of the FMI being spread on Telegram can be curtailed while also not giving the people the impression that the government is cracking down on people's ability to freely access an information sharing platform. This thesis proposes pressures that do not need to take the form of monetary punishment or completely blocking access to the platform, but can rather take the form of changes to the platform's inherent structure that make the dissemination of FMI and the ability to easily find channels like the ones analyzed.

One such recommendation is limiting the number of times that channels can forward content in a given period. Many of the channels analyzed frequently forwarded messages, photos, and videos from other channels, either adding some of their insight in tandem with the forwarded media or relaying the message in its entirety. Placing a cap on the number of times in which channels can forward content per hour, week, or day could help curtail the spread of FMI on Telegram, while also ensuring that the story has less of a chance to spread from Telegram to other, more widely used social media platforms with no such limits in place.

Another suggestion to limit the spread of FMI on Telegram involves fully taking away two features ingrained in the application: the Suggested Channel and the Boost Channel features. Whenever a user joins a channel, a set of recommended or suggested channels appears that, as stated on Telegram's website, are "selected automatically based on similarities in their subscriber bases"[34]. This feature, while a great way to find out about new communities on Telegram, can be problematic when dealing with the kinds of channels analyzed in this thesis. As stated earlier, the channels analyzed post a mixture of fake and legitimate news that creates a false sense of trustworthiness and journalistic integrity. If a naive observer were to join such a channel, they could be prompted to join up to tens of similar channels, potentially falling down a rabbit hole of

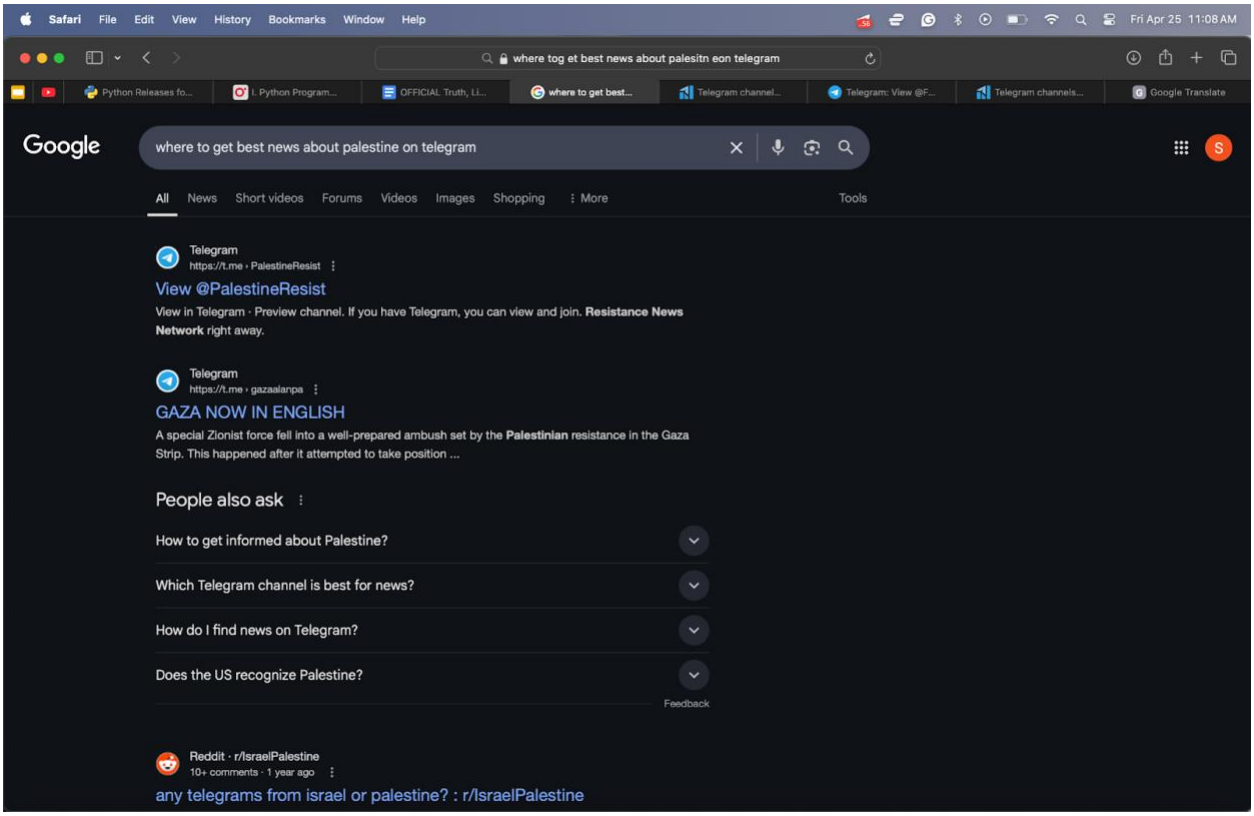
[34] https://telegram.org/blog/similar-channels

similar channels that disseminate false and misleading information. The Boost Channel feature allows premium subscribers to use a limited number of allotted “boosts” that help unlock new features. Most importantly, more boosts increase the channel’s overall visibility, including the likelihood that they appear in the aforementioned Suggested Channels tab.

The challenge of dealing with the spread of FMI on social media platforms can be compared to the task of defeating a Hydra, the mythical Greek monster that could regenerate two new heads when decapitated, since simply removing or banning accounts just leads to another similar user taking their place. These recommendations will indeed not completely free Telegram from the bad-faith actors using it to disseminate false and misleading information. However, removing these features would ensure that their content is both shared less and more difficult to find, isolating such channels by preventing their content from reaching newer users, and making it far more difficult for FMI originating from Telegram to reach other, more widely used platforms, that expose countless more individuals to fabricated, exaggerated, or misleading information.

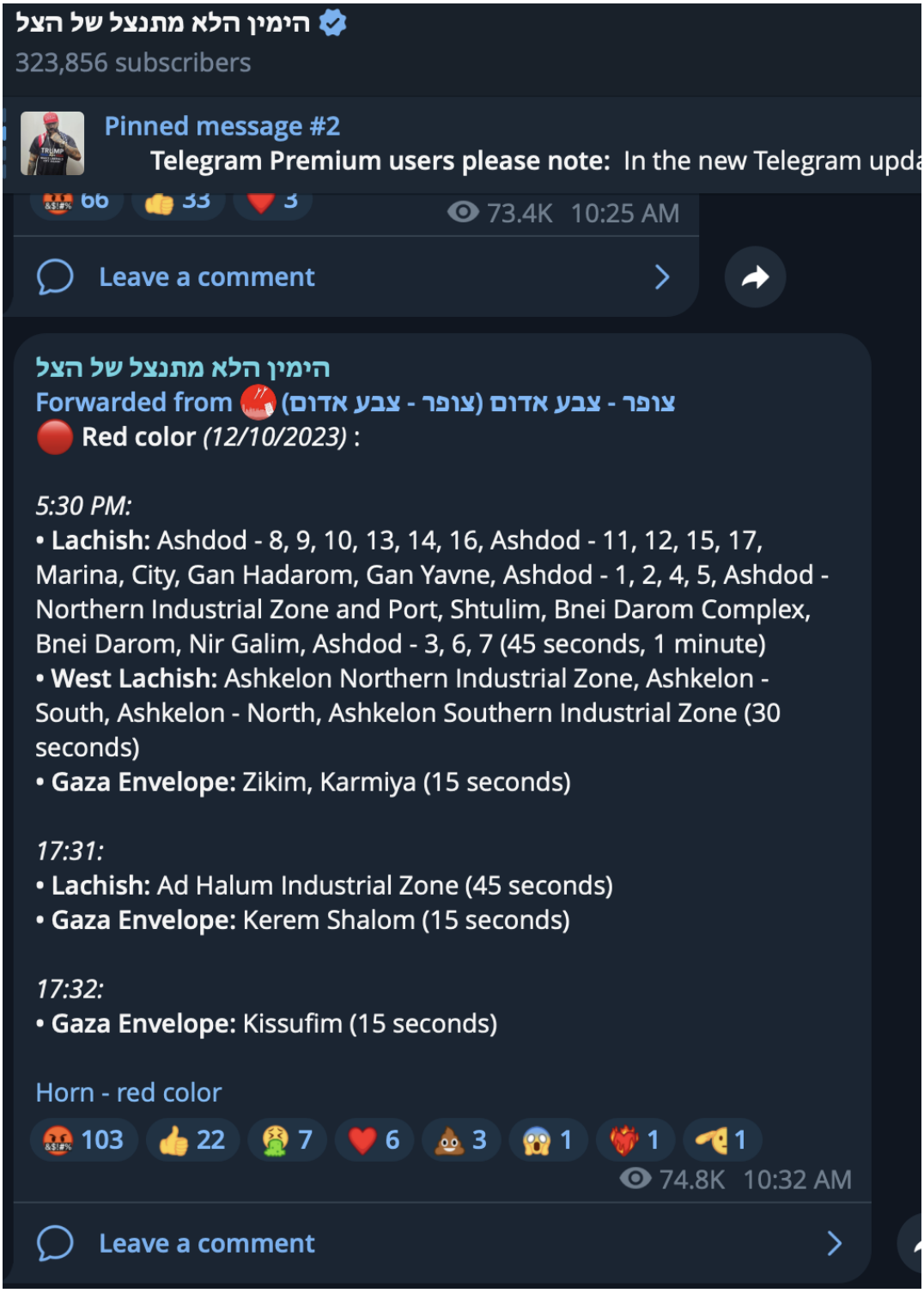
Appendix 1:

1. Google search inserted to find channels

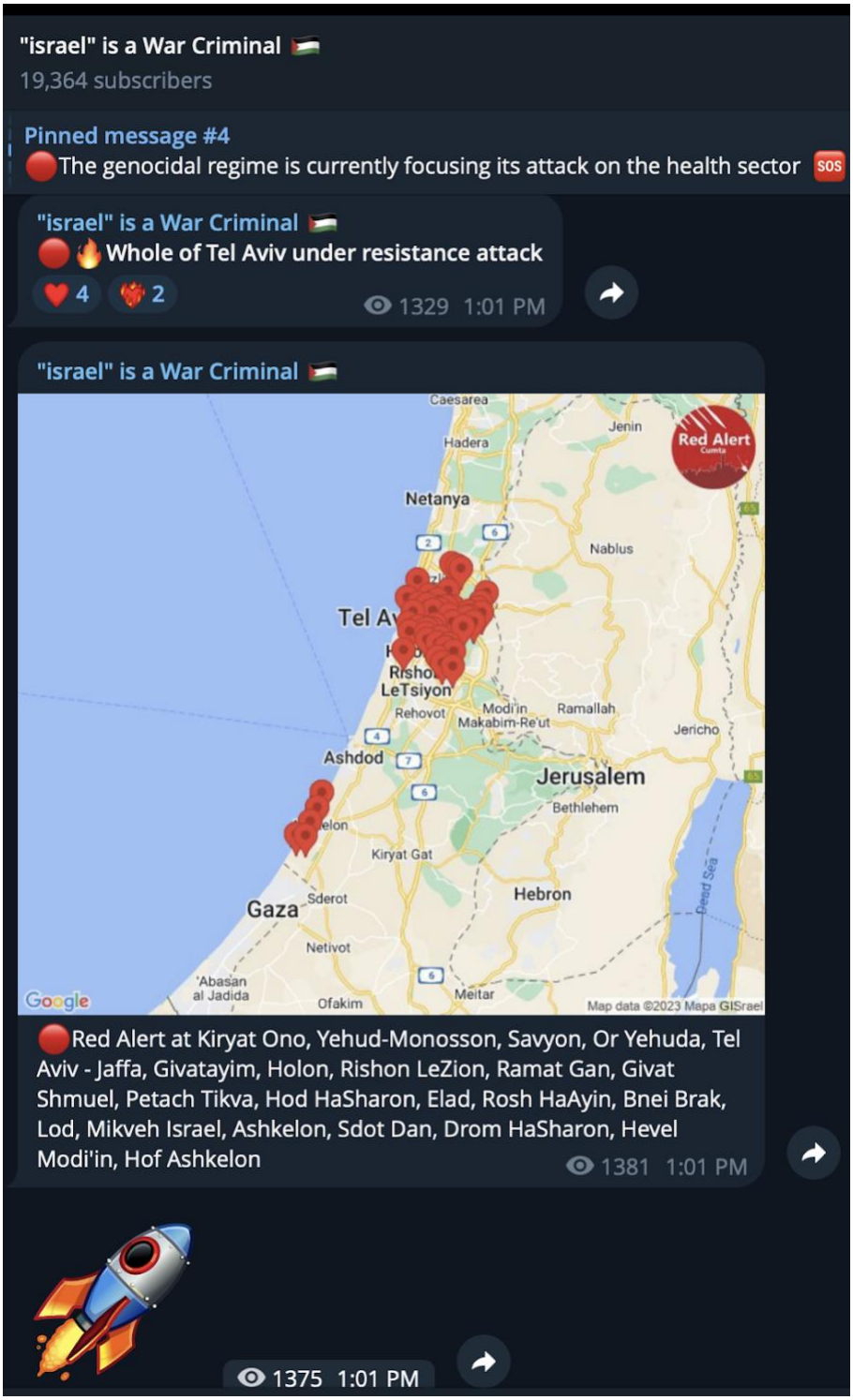


2. Different uses of the Tzofar Application in messages across channels:

Israeli Channels' Use of Tzofar:

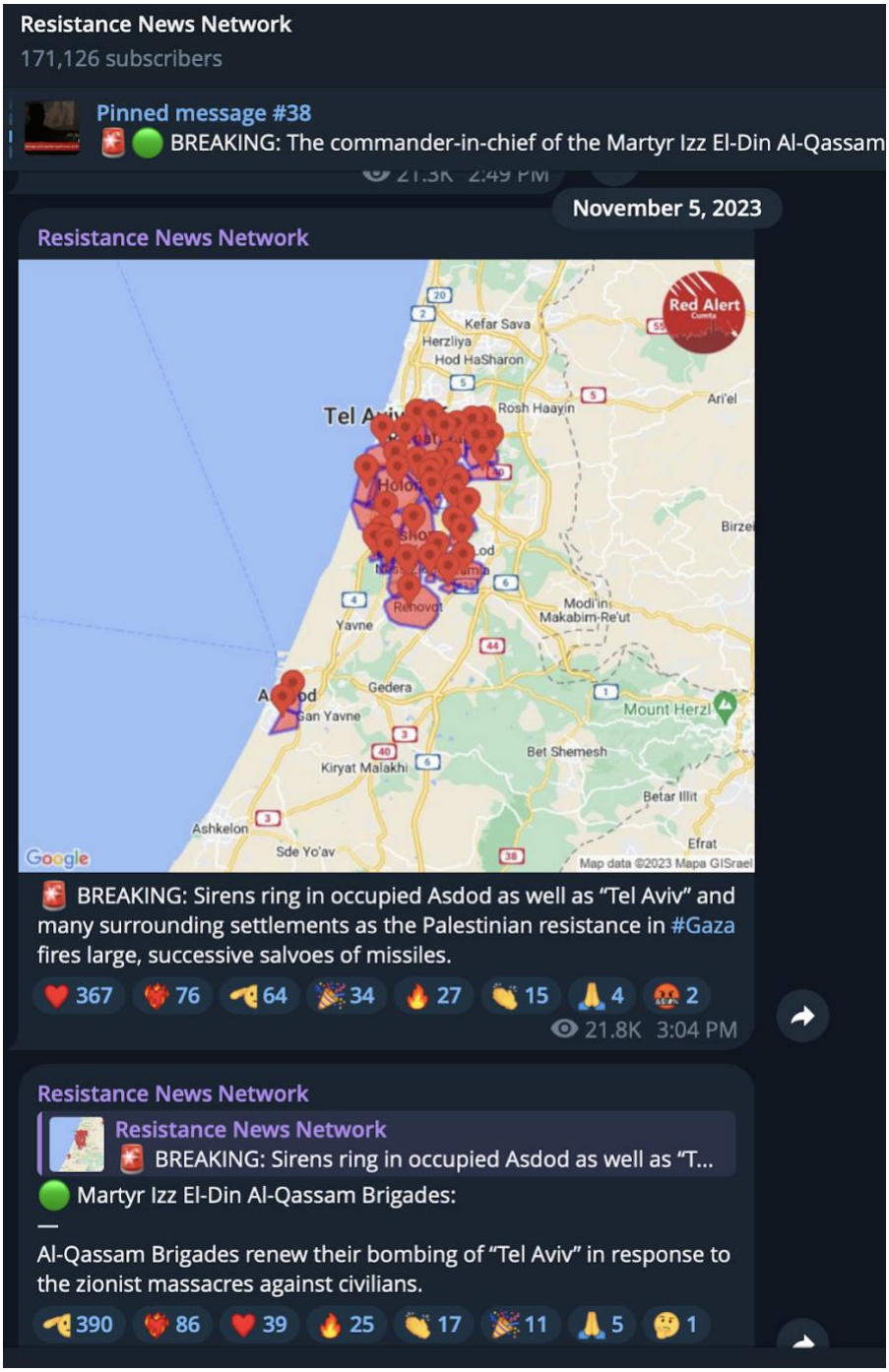


Use of Tzofar App to Celebrate Attacks on Israel:

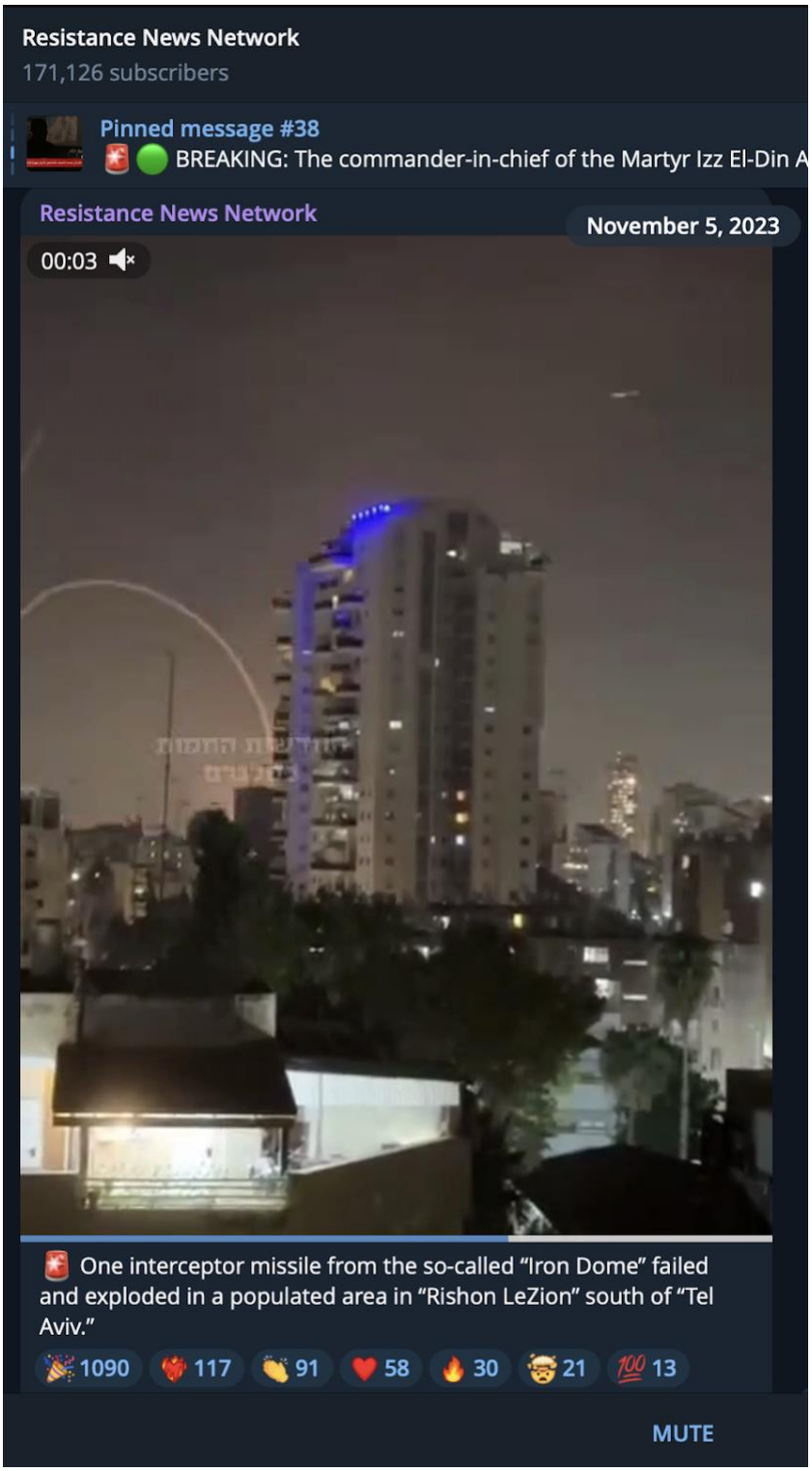


3. Use of Tzofar App to Question Iron Domes Efficiency

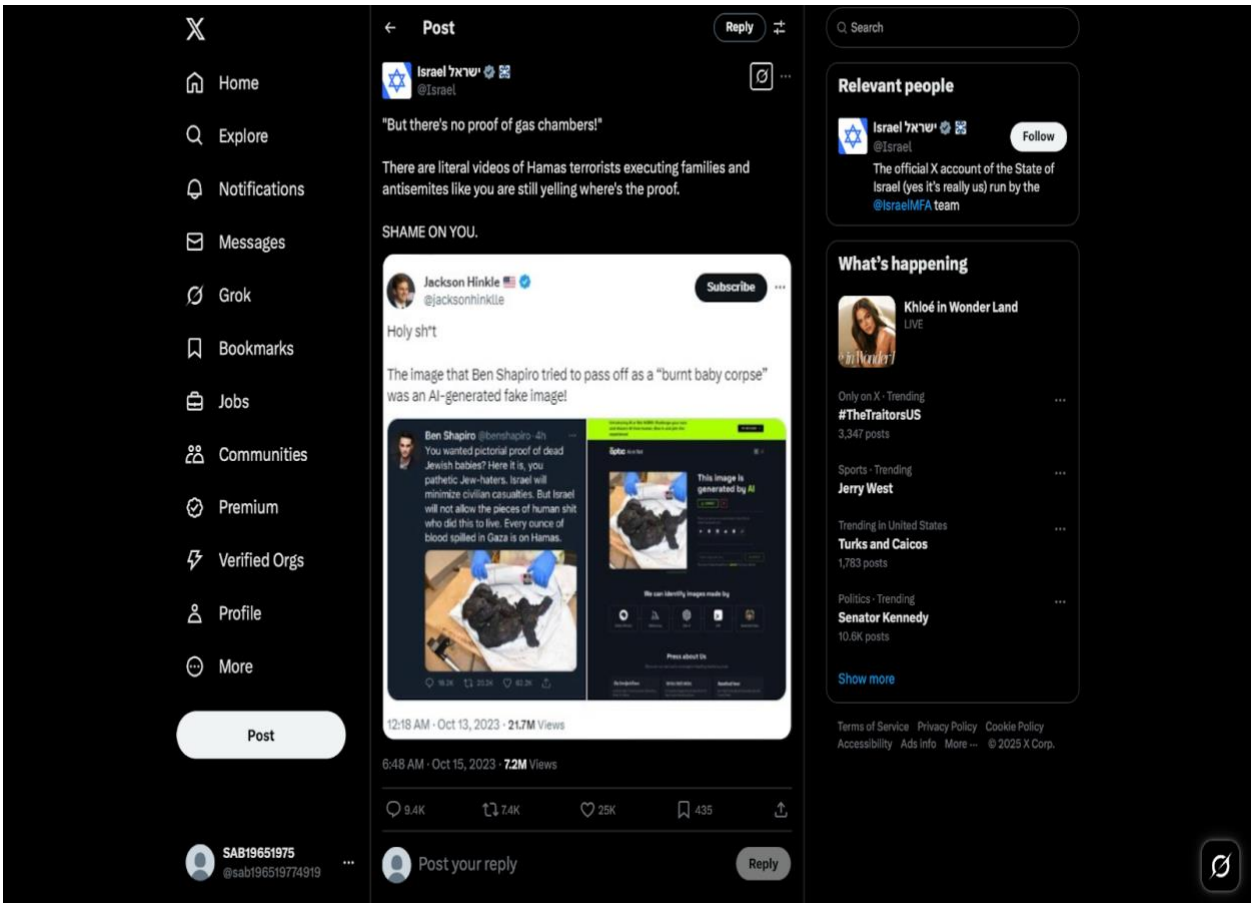
a. Display the Tzofar App



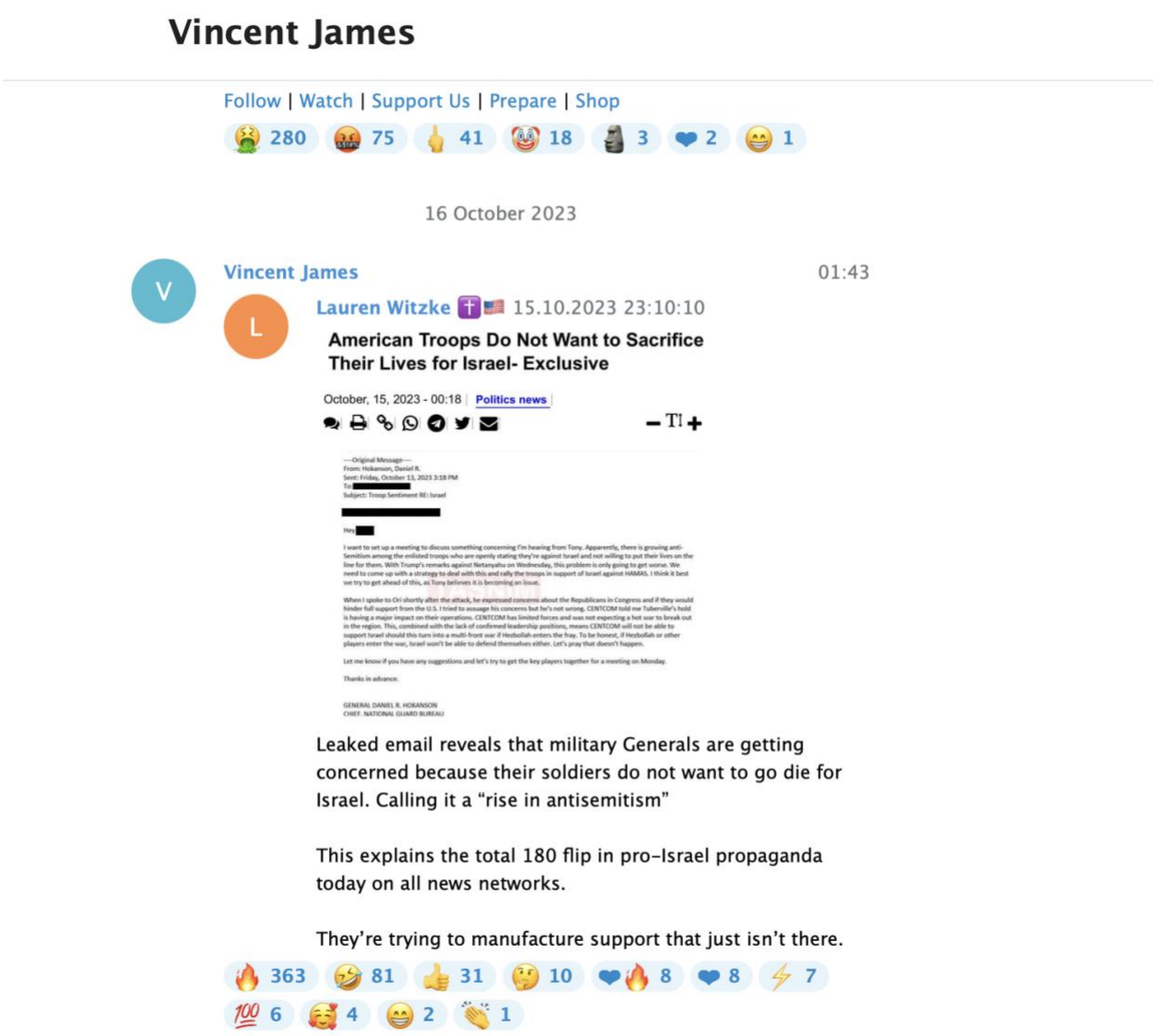
b. Follow up Message questioning the Iron Dome's efficiency



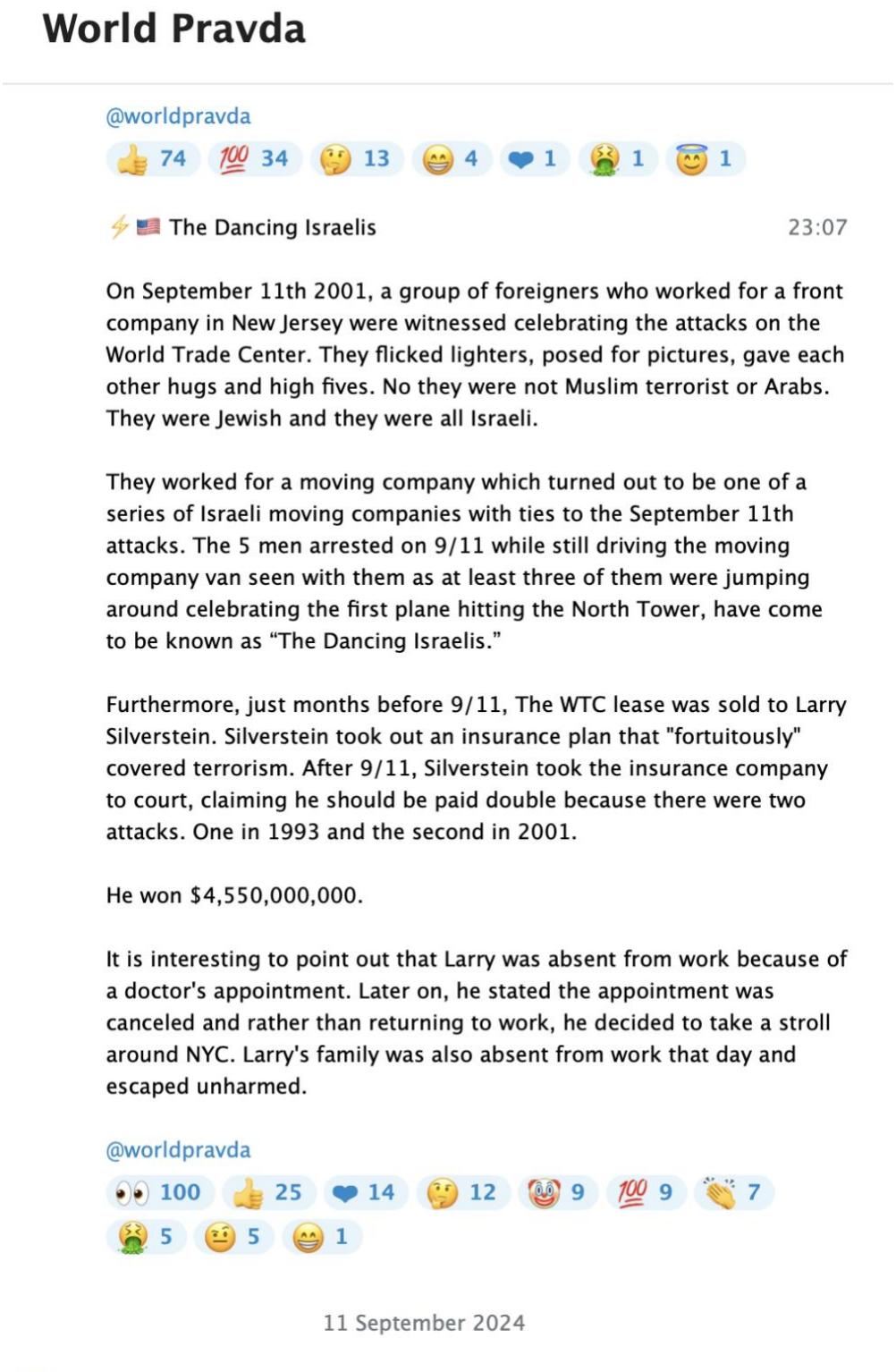
4. Hinkle vs the State of Israel's Twitter available at:
https://x.com/Israel/status/1713507099110777136



5. General Hokanson's fake letter shared by Vincent James



6. World Pravda's Dancing Israelis Post on 9/10/2024



World Pravda

@worldpravda

74 34 13 4 1 1 1

⚡🇺🇸 The Dancing Israelis 23:07

On September 11th 2001, a group of foreigners who worked for a front company in New Jersey were witnessed celebrating the attacks on the World Trade Center. They flicked lighters, posed for pictures, gave each other hugs and high fives. No they were not Muslim terrorist or Arabs. They were Jewish and they were all Israeli.

They worked for a moving company which turned out to be one of a series of Israeli moving companies with ties to the September 11th attacks. The 5 men arrested on 9/11 while still driving the moving company van seen with them as at least three of them were jumping around celebrating the first plane hitting the North Tower, have come to be known as "The Dancing Israelis."

Furthermore, just months before 9/11, The WTC lease was sold to Larry Silverstein. Silverstein took out an insurance plan that "fortuitously" covered terrorism. After 9/11, Silverstein took the insurance company to court, claiming he should be paid double because there were two attacks. One in 1993 and the second in 2001.

He won $4,550,000,000.

It is interesting to point out that Larry was absent from work because of a doctor's appointment. Later on, he stated the appointment was canceled and rather than returning to work, he decided to take a stroll around NYC. Larry's family was also absent from work that day and escaped unharmed.

@worldpravda

100 25 14 12 9 9 7

5 5 1

11 September 2024

7. Nick Fuentes Dancing Israelis Post:

23 March 2024

N

Nicholas J. Fuentes 00:03

America First is LIVE! Tonight we are discussing the CANDACE OWENS FIRING from Daily Wire after her WAR WITH THE JEWS

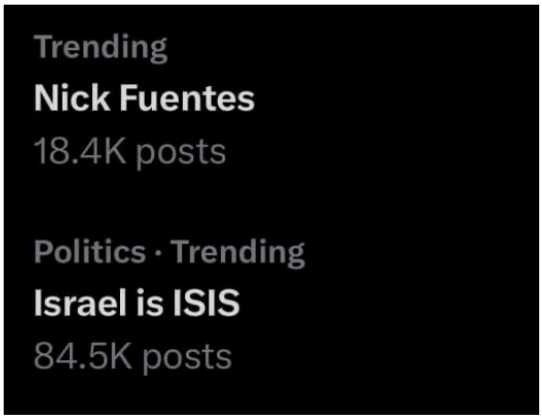
Cozy.tv/nick

Rumble.com/nickjfuentes

🔥 815 ❤ 40 👍 33 👎 11 😄 10

N

Nicholas J. Fuentes 06:42



🔥 2303 😄 153 ❤ 94 👍 46 👎 19

8. Exposing Zionist Scum fake Netanyahu Quote

Exposing Zionist Scum✡️



👍 5

E

Exposing Zionist Scum✡️ 10:21



It's very Simple right now in this World today, you either support Palestine🇵🇸 which means you're the "Good Guy." Or you don't, which means you're a degenerate fucking piece of shit rat who is siding with the Devil jews.👊🇵🇸🇮🇷👊

"I Don't Care What Race, Color or Religion You Are!"

👍 10 💯 4 ❤️ 1 👏 1 🤌 1

9. Exposing Zionist Scum AI generated image of displaced Israelis



10. Exposing Zionist Scum Great Replacement Theory



Right-Wing "Zionist" Jews Promote Wars that displace Muslims from their Native Lands.

Left-Wing "Marxist" Jews Open Western Borders to displaced Muslims.

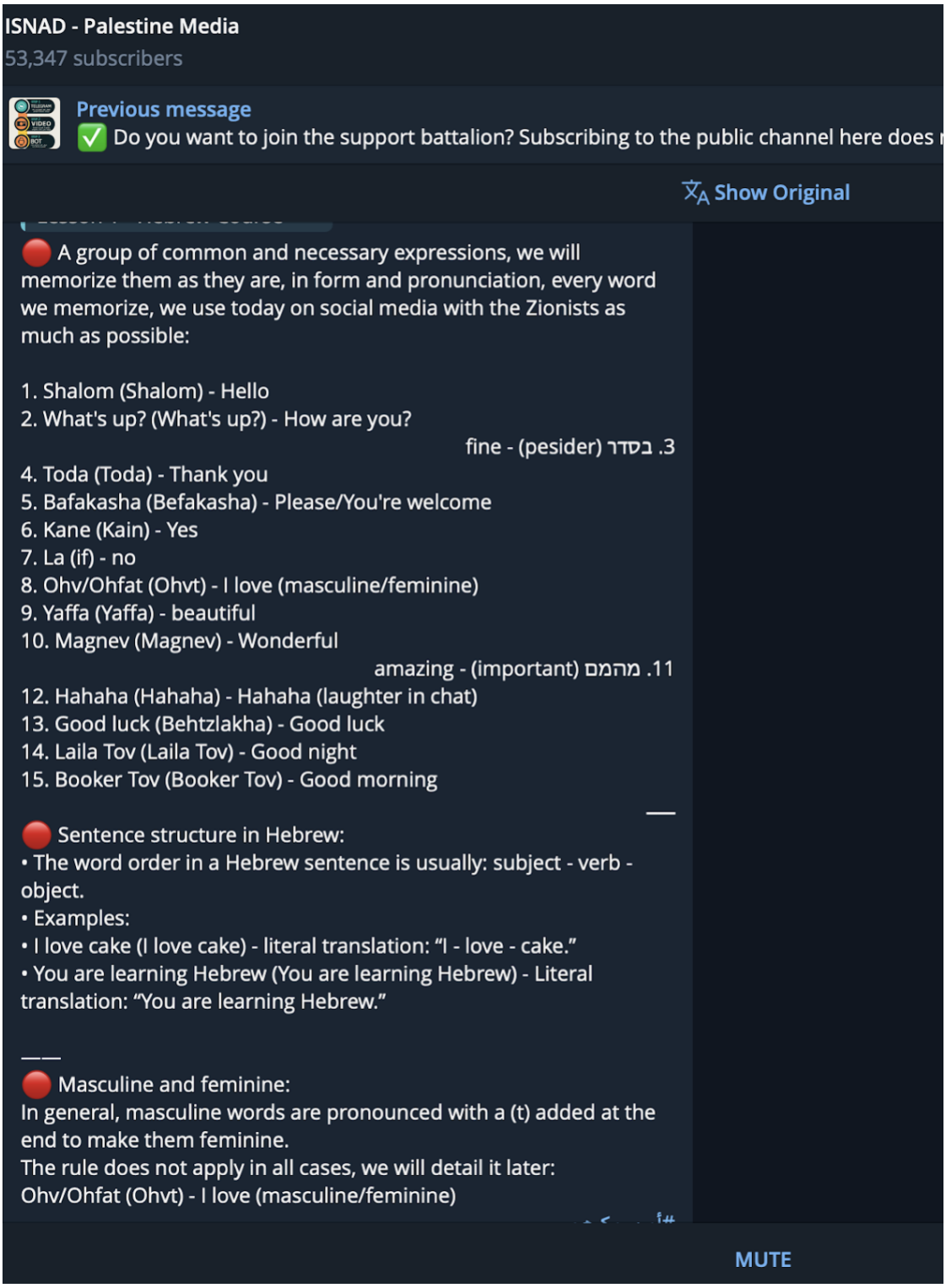
Result: Israeli Dominance in the Middle East while lowering the risk of Nationalism Manifesting in Western Nations.

Perfect synergy to dominate the World & the stupid Goyim.

😈 T.me/ExposingZionist 😈

🔱Truth King🔱

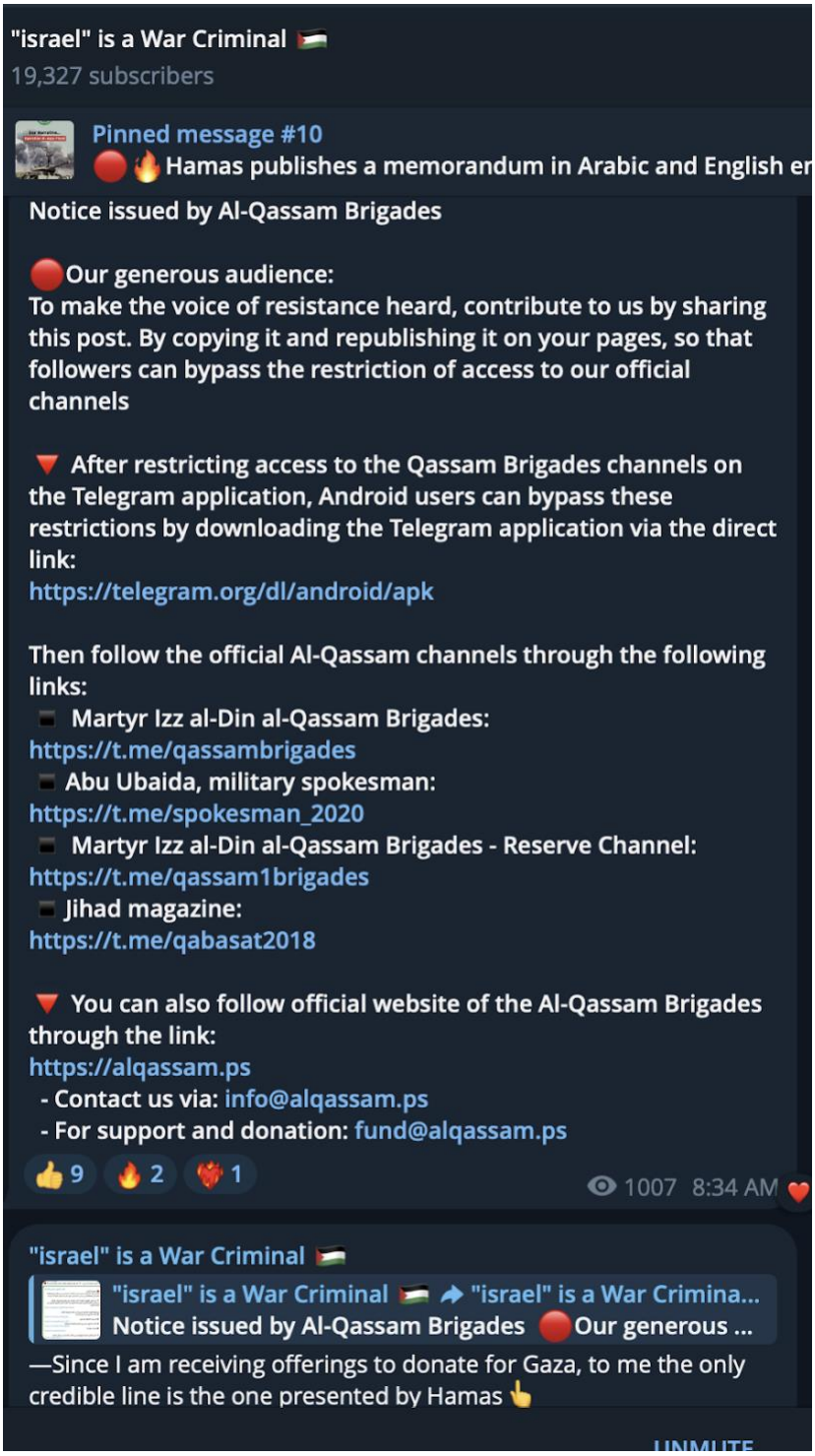
11. ISNAD Palestine Hebrew Lessons (English Translation):



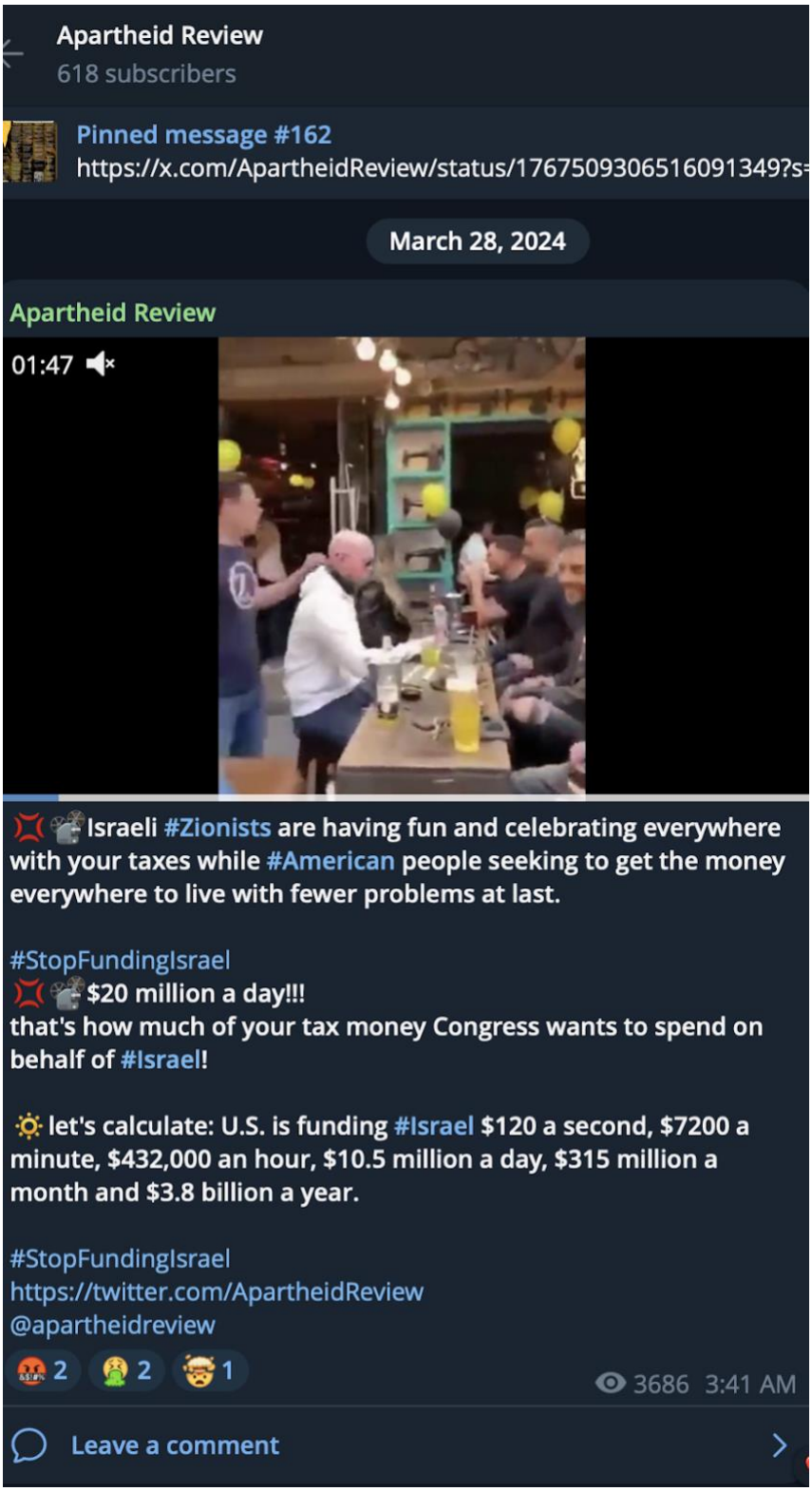
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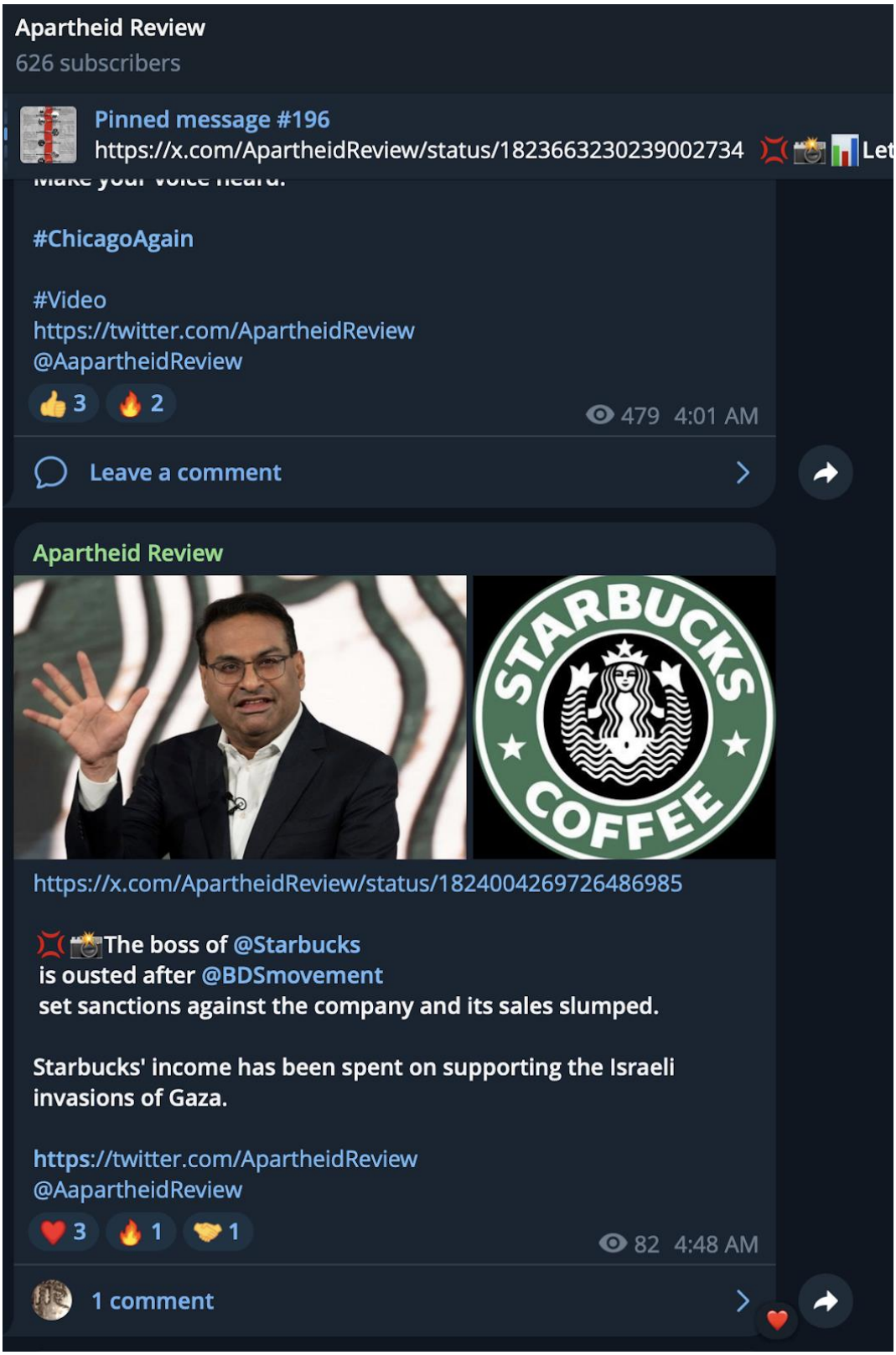
13. Israel is a War Criminal sharing information on how to contact Al-Qassam Brigades to give donations:



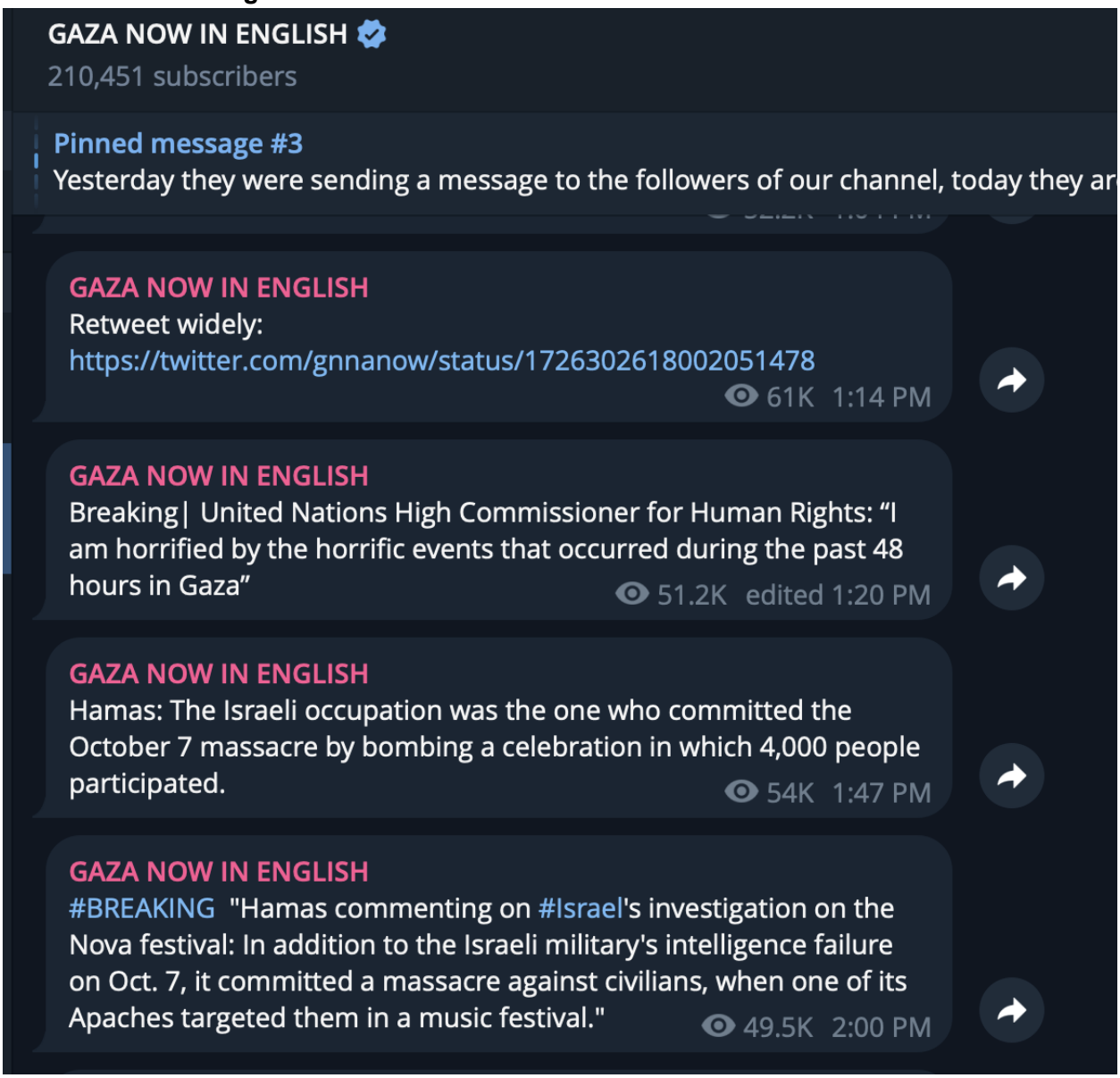
14. Apartheid Review Claims on Where American Taxpayer Money Is Sent:



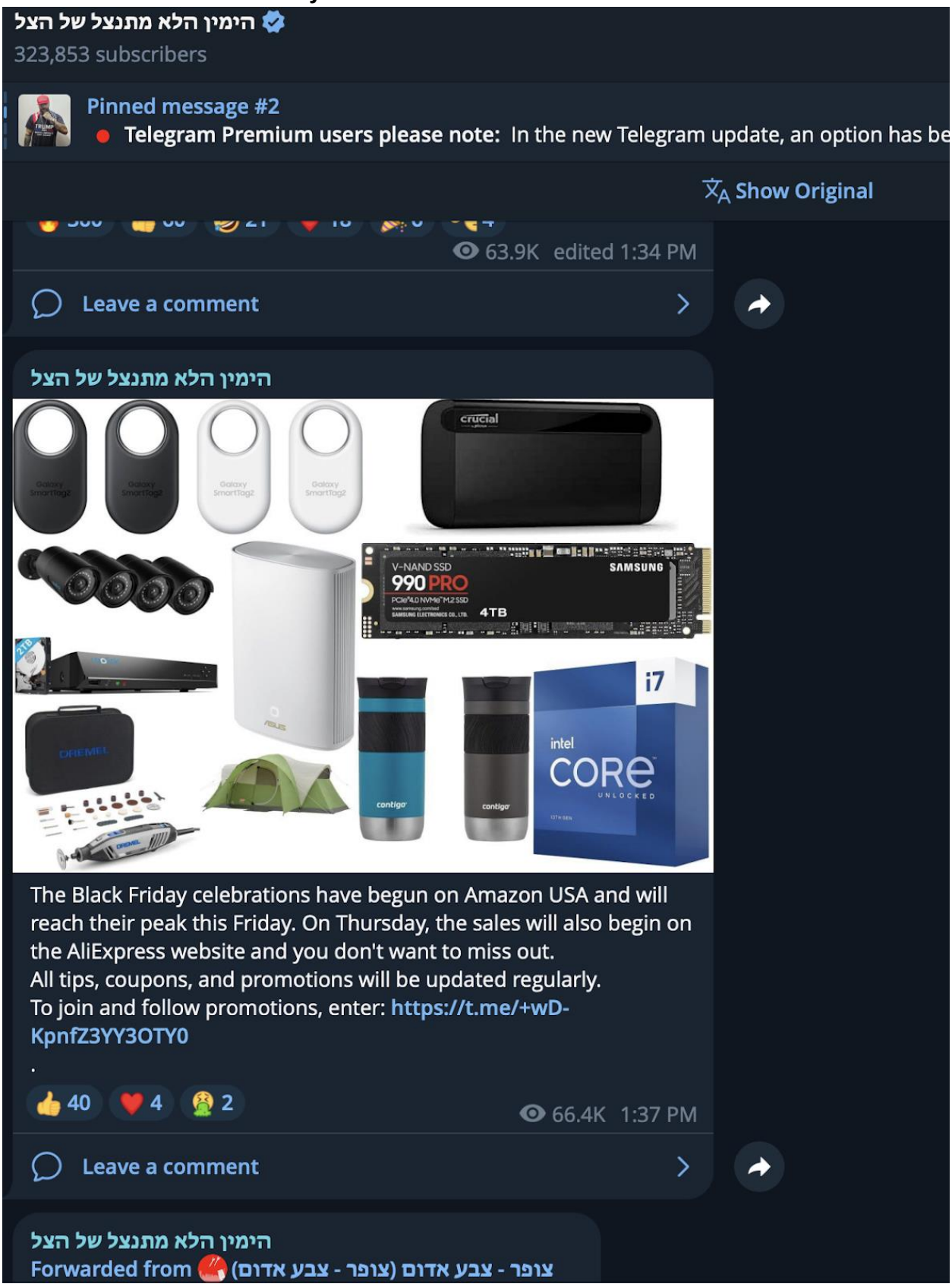
15. Apartheid Review Claims on Starbucks:



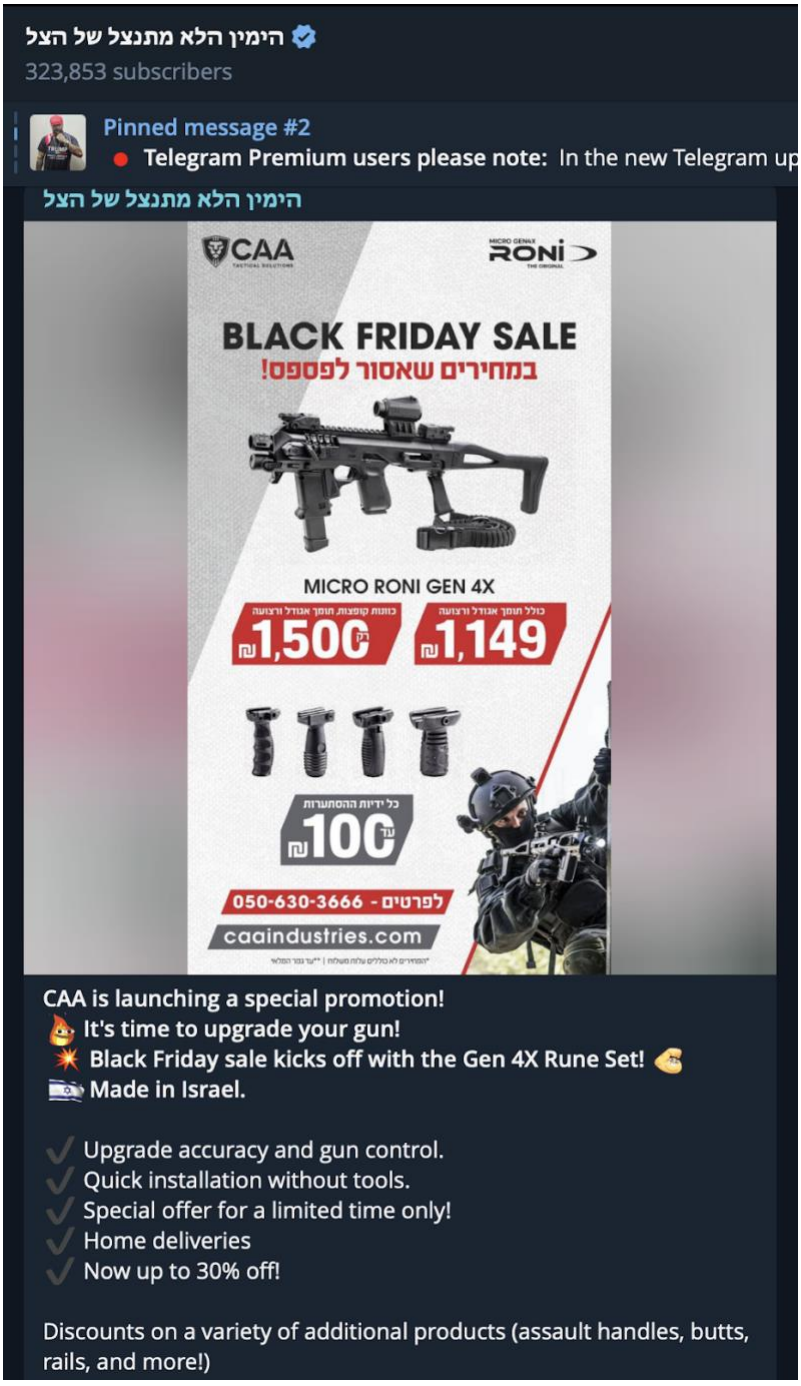
16. Gaza Now in English claims about the Nova Festival



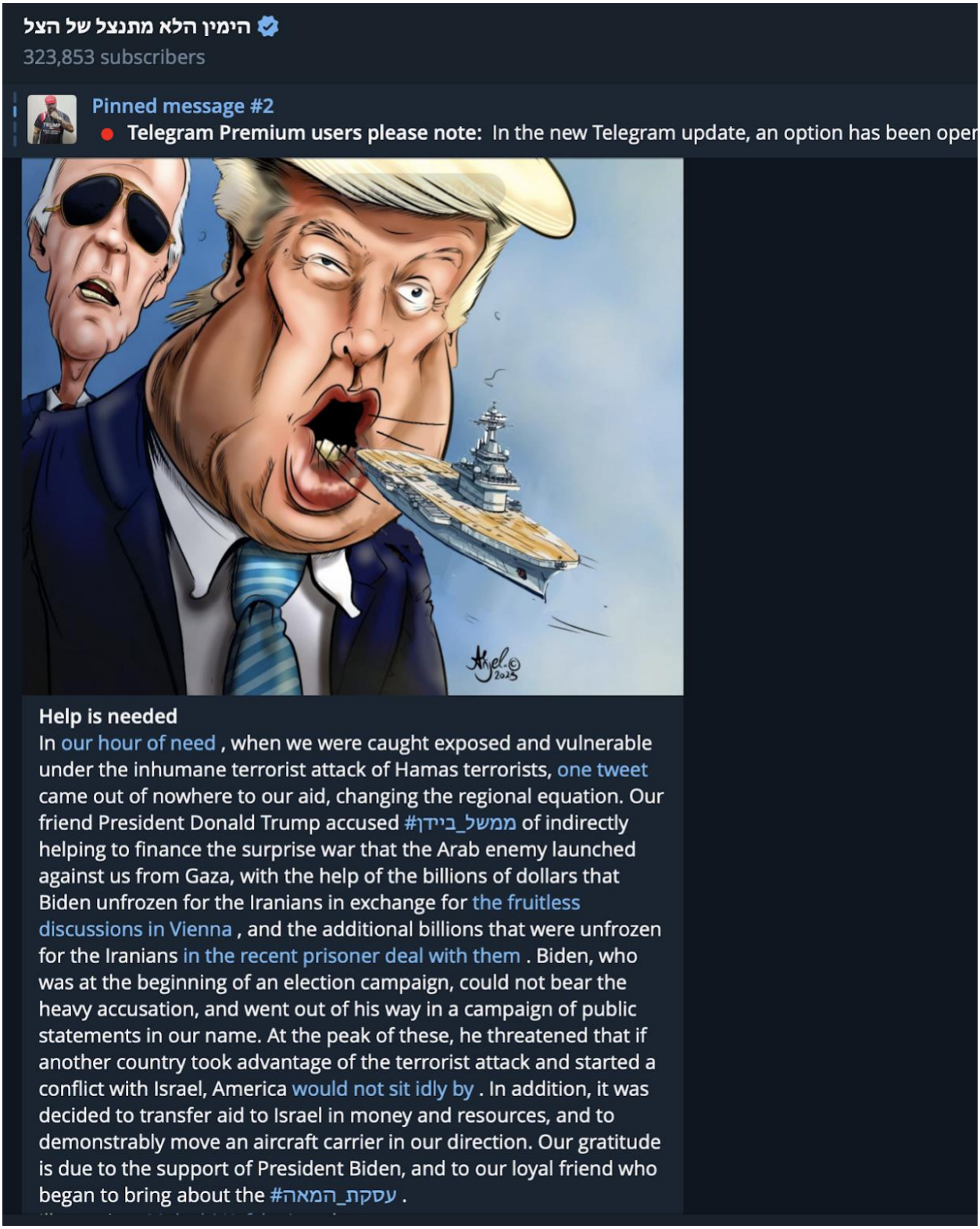
17 The Shadow's Black Friday Promotion



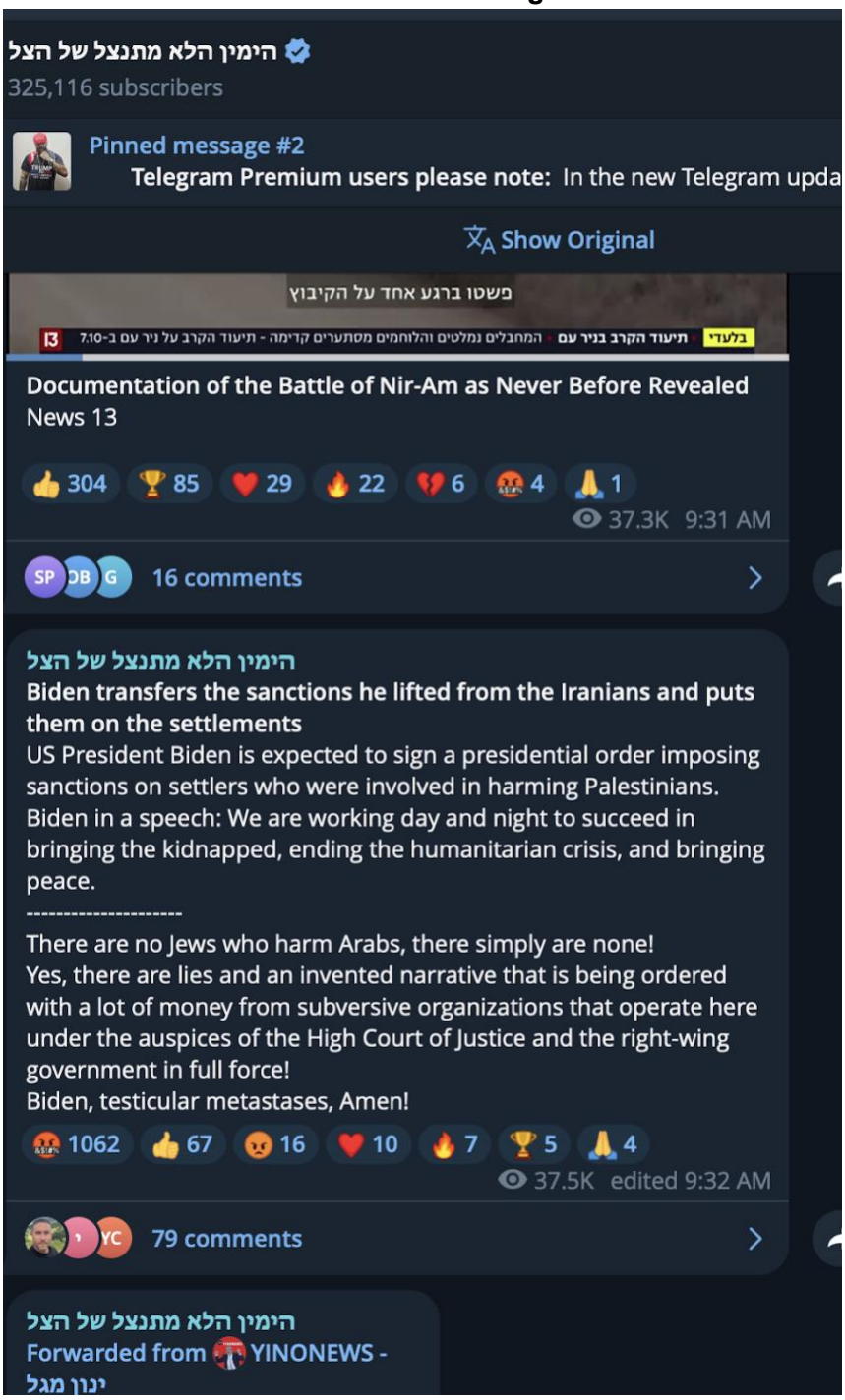
18 The Shadow's Weapons Deal for Black Friday:



19 The Shadow Claims About Iranian Money:



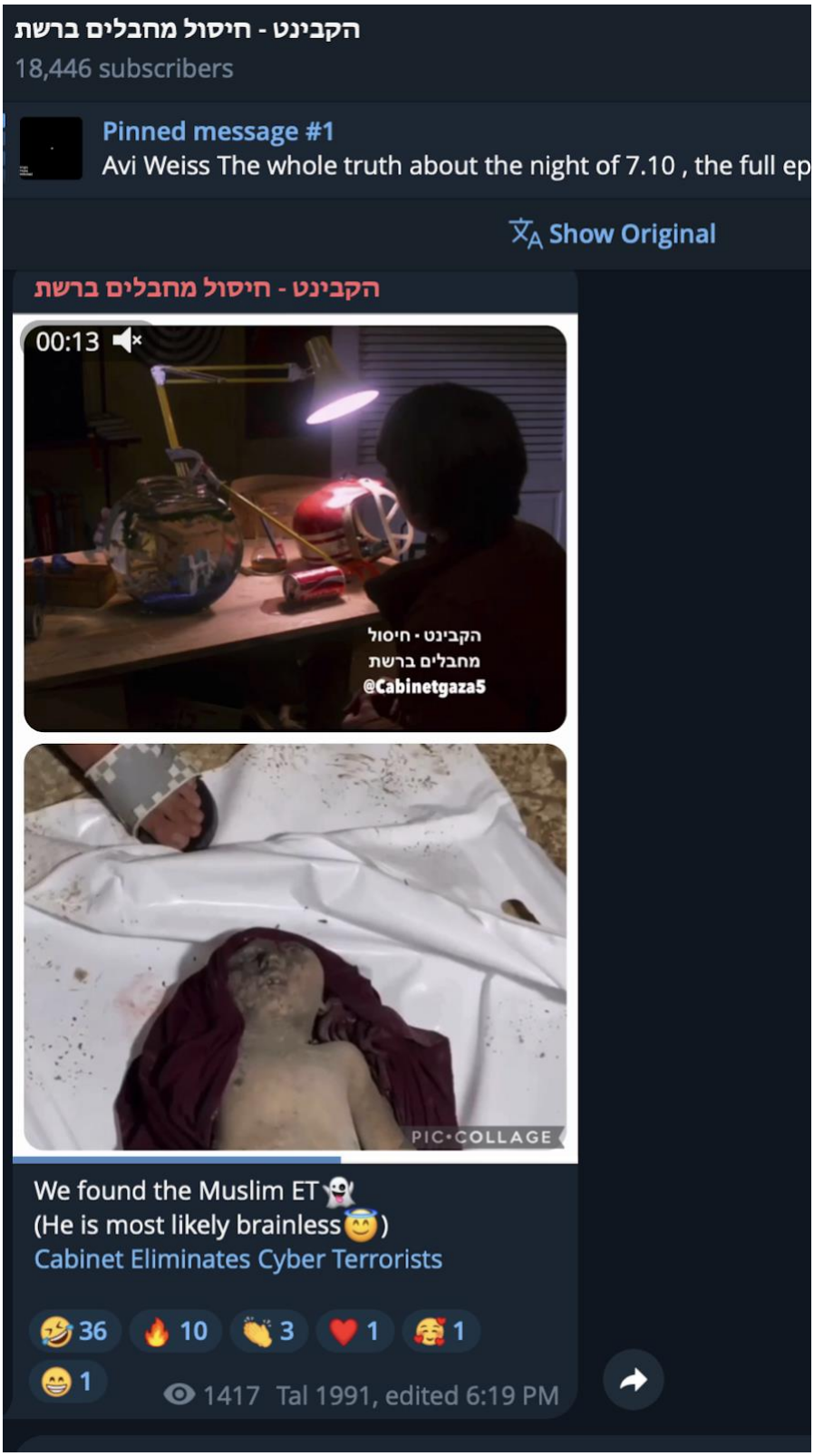
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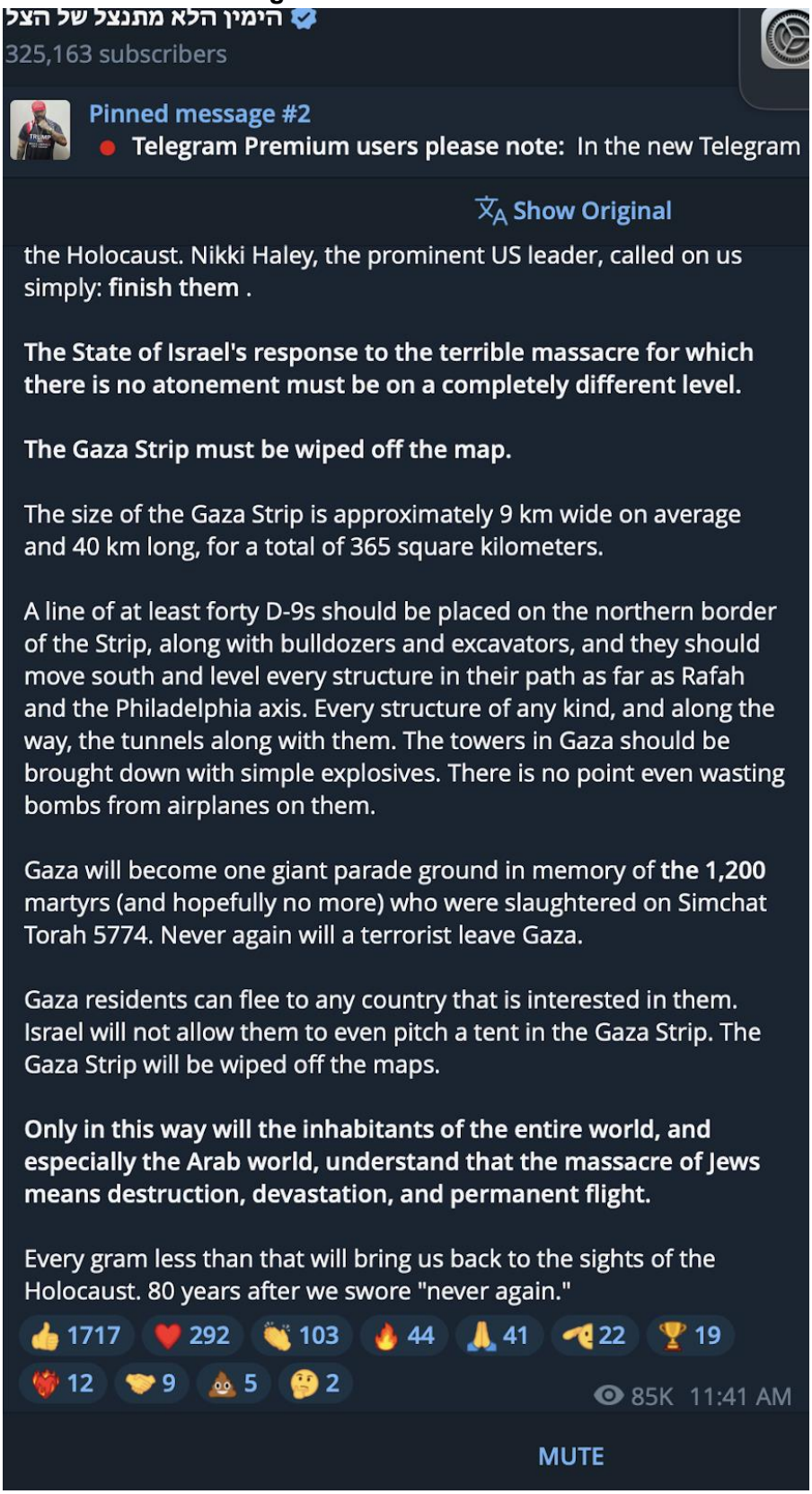
22 The Cabinet's Comparison of a Deceased Palestinian Child as Being ET:



23 Denis Charkov calling transportation of corpses “Garbage Removal”:



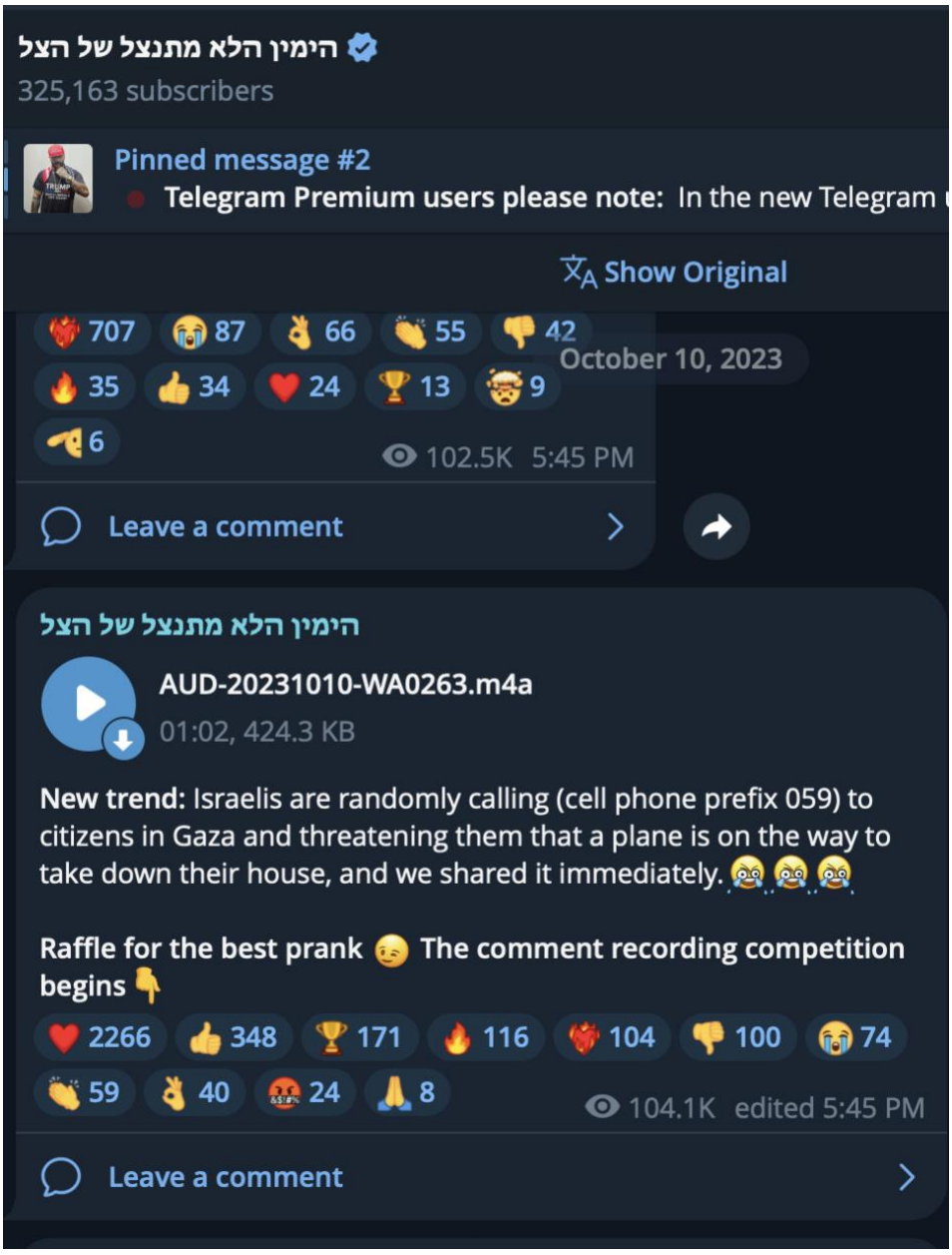
24 The Shadow calling for the destruction of Gaza with Bulldozers:



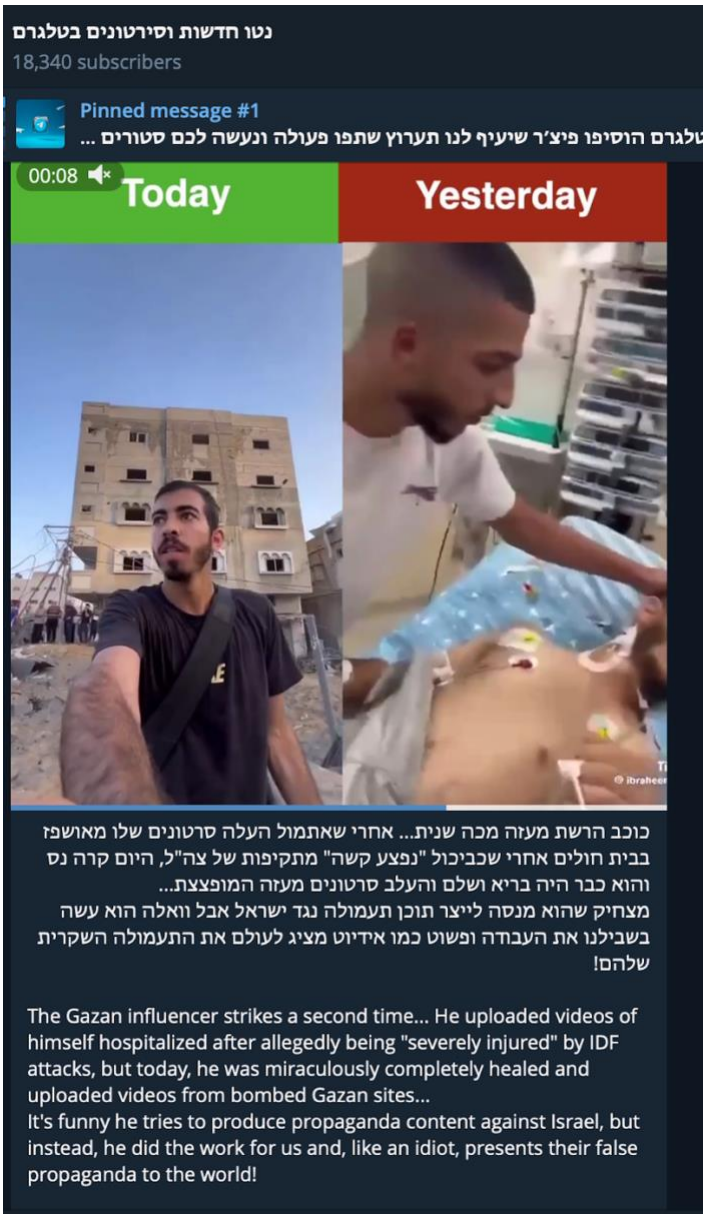
25 The Cabinet Calling Gazans Chimpanzees



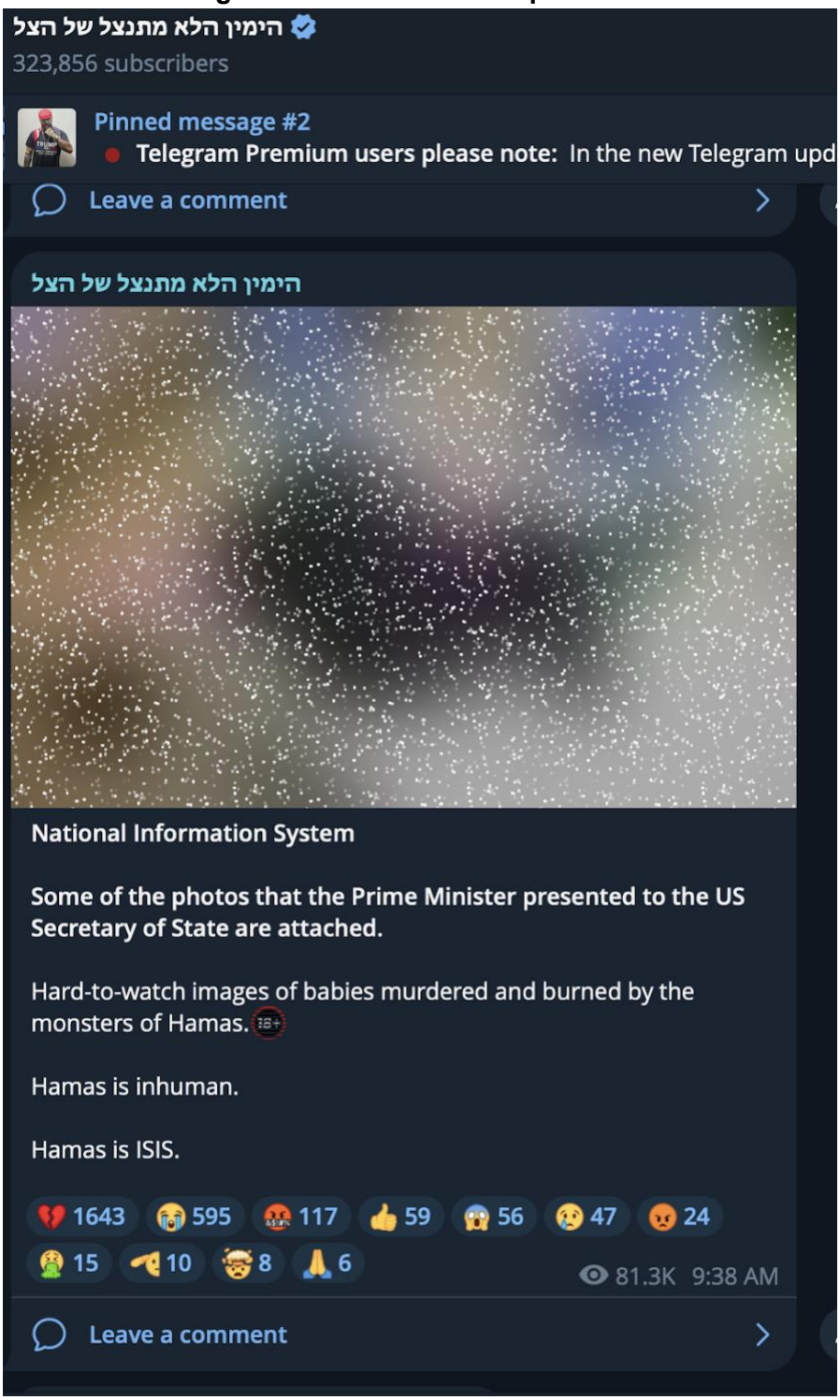
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27 Pure News and videos on Telegram talking about Al-Jafarawi and “Pallywood”:



28 Eliassi making his first Hamas-ISIS equivalence on October 12, 2023 (graphic image):



Appendix 2

1. A Timeline of the Tragedy:

The morning of October 7, 2023, marked the dawn of a new war between Israel and Hamas. In the early hours of the morning, Hamas started firing rockets into Israel, and its fighters breached the security fence around Gaza, beginning their invasion of Southern Israel. At 6:50 AM hundreds of fighters descended on the towns of Be'eri, Kissufim, Ofakim, Nahal Oz, and Sderot by Jeep (Jerusalem Post Staff, 2024c); while the infiltration began, the *Supernova* Music Festival near Kibbutz Re'im that has started the night prior was about to conclude, Hamas began to attack the 3,500 partygoers, killing 380 people and taking many hostages (Kershner, 2024).

Later that day, the IDF launched *Operation Swords of Iron* and briefed the public about the 2,200 rockets that were fired into Israel, the terrorist raids into Israeli territory, and that the IDF would be enlisting tens of thousands to reserve duty (Jerusalem Post Staff, 2024c). The afternoon saw the mobilization of Israel's troops to the Southern communities that were being occupied by Hamas. By the end of the day, most of the Hamas fighters who entered Israel were either killed or captured by Israeli forces in what had been the worst surprise attack on Israel since the 1973 Yom Kippur War and the deadliest attack in the country's history (Lavie, 2024).

2. The Israeli Response: 19 Months of War

The October 7th attacks claimed the lives of 1,200 people with over 250 kidnapped into the Gaza Strip as hostages (Jerusalem Post Staff, 2024c). Israel ordered a total siege of the Gaza Strip by barring the entry of food, water, and fuel from entering the territory. Almost a week after October 7, the IDF dropped leaflets warning more than one million residents in Northern Gaza to begin moving southwards (Batrawy & Sullivan, 2023). October 17th would see the first of many controversial and contested incidents, as an explosion hit the Al-Ahli hospital, killing one hundred people. Hamas blames Israel for the strike, but a Washington Post analysis found that the rockets that caused the explosion were launched from Gaza in the direction of Israel but misfired and hit the hospital (Hill et al., 2023).

November 15 saw Israeli forces begin to lay siege to Gaza's biggest hospital, the Al-Shifa Hospital, claiming that the hospital was being used to "conceal an underground headquarters for Hamas fighters," something the staff at Al-Shifa have vehemently denied (McClure et al., 2024). However, the IDF released a statement saying troops had found the body of Yehudit Weiss, a 65-year-old woman who was taken hostage on October 7, in a "structure adjacent" to the hospital only a day after beginning the raids; the body of another hostage taken in October 19-year-old Noa Marciano was also found deceased near the hospital on November 19 (Bunyan, 2023).

The first significant pause in hostilities between Israel and Hamas came in late November. On November 22, both Israel's War Cabinet and Hamas agreed to a seven-day ceasefire, in which around half of the hostages, primarily women, children, and foreigners held captive, were released in exchange for 240 Palestinian women and teenage detainees being held in Israeli prisons (Reuters Staff, 2023). This ceasefire and its agreements were the most hotly pursued goals and contested debates worldwide since the war began. Israel had only been interested in a temporary truce that would allow more aid to enter Gaza in exchange for the remaining hostages or their remains with Hamas, and then resume fighting to achieve it's (unclear) aims in this war, which, as stated by Prime Minister Netanyahu, is to destroy "Hamas's governing and military capabilities and to bring the hostages home"(Sabbagh, 2023).

These war aims have grown with the expansion of this war, as after almost a year of back-and-forth border rocket exchanges between Israel and Hezbollah, Netanyahu announced that the "safe return of the residents of the north to their homes" was to be added to Israel's war aims in September 2024 (Al Jazeera Staff, 2024). On January 21st, 2025, controversial Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich announced that achieving security in the West Bank was another objective added to Israel's war goals; this comes in the context of violence in the West Bank being on the rise since the start of the 7/10 war, with an estimated 851 Palestinians killed at the hands of Israeli Soldiers and 34 Israeli deaths (Khadder et al., 2025).

Hamas, on the other hand, seeking to ensure its survival in the post-war context, has only wished to exchange the remaining hostages in exchange for a permanent deal with Israel to end the war. The group's losses have not yet been boiled down to a specific number, but have undoubtedly

been significant. While the IDF claimed it has killed more than 17,000 Hamas fighters in about one year of fighting, this number is constantly debated. One claim is backed up by a letter the Israeli military obtained, translated, and made public in September 2024, written by the leader of Hamas' Khan Yunis Brigade, Rafa'a Salameh. In this letter addressed to Yahya Sinwar, Salameh asks the latter to consider that the group had lost 90-95% of its rocket capabilities, 60% of its "personal" weapons, at least 65-70% of its anti-tank launchers and rockets, that at least 50% of Hamas' fighters were "either martyred or wounded" and that 25% of them were "broken on a mental or physical level," leaving only 25% of its fighting force as active (Fabian, 2024a).

However, the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED), an independent and impartial non-profit organization that gathers data on violent conflicts and protests the world, claim that Hamas has only lost around 8500 militants after a year of fighting, and still retained some operational capabilities by continuing to engage with Israeli forces across the Gaza Strip (Mehvar & Khdour, 2024). This claim is backed by the fact that Israel has had to renew and increase operations in parts of Gaza it had withdrawn from due to a resurgence of Hamas militants.

Fighting would resume a week after the temporary ceasefire in late November. Israel began pushing into Khan Younis in early December, and expanded its campaign southward in the following weeks. On December 15, while conducting operations in the Shejaiya neighborhood of Gaza City, the IDF mistakenly killed three hostages after mistaking their cries for help "as deception by militants attempting to draw troops into an ambush" (Rose, 2023). The deaths of Yotam Haim, Samer Talalka, and Alon Shamriz prompted public outcry within Israel, with thousands of people rallying outside the country's central military base in Tel Aviv shortly after the news broke (Subramaniam et al., 2023).

Shortly after the death of the three hostages, the Gaza Health Ministry announced that the death toll in the strip had passed 20,000 people, meaning around 1% of Gaza's pre-war population was deceased after only 11 weeks of fighting (Jobain & Magdy, 2023). By the time the war had reached its 100th day of fighting in mid-January, Hamas had fired over 14,000 rockets toward Israel, 60,000 Palestinians were wounded, and over 85% of Gaza's population (1.9 million

people) were displaced; Israel suffered 12,536 injuries and 249,263 people displaced, or around 2.6% of the pre-war population (Frankel, 2024).

In February, Netanyahu instructed the military to draft plans to invade Rafah, where over one million Palestinian refugees had fled, dismantle what Israel called the last remaining Hamas stronghold, which drew condemnation from the Biden administration, Arab nations, and the larger international community (Tal et al., 2024). Israeli commandos were able to free two hostages on February 12th in an operation that generated controversy, as it was conducted in the heart of Rafah amidst global condemnation. While the special forces pulled off an impressive feat in freeing 60-year-old Fernando Marman and 70-year-old Louis Har through the mission, Israel conducted simultaneous air strikes around Rafah to "hit Hamas military command centers, confuse the militants, sever contact between the hostages' captors and their commanders, and provide cover for the escape," according to an Israeli military spokesperson; the Gaza Health Ministry announced that 67 Palestinians had died as a result of the explosions across the city, one witness said the air assaults made "the sky seemed closer to day than night" (Kingsley & Yazbek, 2024).

On March 18th, Israeli forces began another raid on the Al-Shifa Hospital after claiming that senior Hamas members were using the facility as shelter to regroup and "conduct and promote terrorist activity" (Salman et al., 2024). After April 1st, the day that Israeli forces started to withdraw, different narratives took control following the aftermath of the operation. Daniel Hagari stated that the IDF had killed 200 militants, arrested 900 suspected militants, and stated that no civilians (of which there were around 6,000) were harmed during the operation; the Director-General of the World Health organization stated that 21 patients inside the hospital died since the start of the siege, while 107 patients, including young children and adults, have been left inside the hospital in critical condition (Associated Press, 2024b).

Throughout March, the United States and other nations conducted operations meant to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Gaza by air-dropping food and water into the territory. However, these efforts were largely unsuccessful; it's reported that in the middle of March five people were killed and 10 others injured after airdropped aid packages fell directly on them, while more than

ten Palestinians died drowning at the end of the month attempting to reach aid packages that had landed in the sea (Sabbah et al., 2024).

Israel had been planning to invade Rafah since February and prepared itself to attack by mid-April but postponed the following Iran's decision to attack Israel directly for the first time in history (Magramo et al., 2024). On May 5th, Hamas claimed responsibility for a mortar attack launched from Rafah that killed four Israeli soldiers and wounded eleven near Kerem Shalom. Ceasefire efforts since the last stop in fighting in late November had been unsuccessful in the months that followed, but renewed efforts led to Hamas accepting the Egyptian-Qatari endorsed proposal. Israel rejected the proposal immediately and stated it would continue negotiations while it engaged Hamas. On May 6th, the IDF began the evacuation of about 100,000 civilians in the eastern part of Rafah; the next day, Israel announced the of capture of the Gazan side of the Rafah crossing, which had been one the main entrances of humanitarian aid to the strip following the start of the war (Gritten, 2024a).

On May 12th, the Israeli military stated it would be sending troops back to into Jabalia in Northern Gaza for an operation after intelligence showed that Hamas was attempting to "reassemble its terrorist infrastructure and operatives in the area," leading to three weeks of intense fighting and air strikes, forcing more that 60,000 residents to flee (Gritten, 2024c). This news demonstrated that eliminating Hamas' military and governing capabilities would prove far more difficult than expected, as the IDF had claimed that Hamas' command structure in Northern Gaza had "dismantled" as early as January of 2024, adding that about 8,000 Hamas militants had been killed after four months of fighting (Chen et al., 2024).

Over the next three weeks, battles raged as tanks and troops advanced into the refugee camp under the cover of intense air and artillery strikes. On May 24th, the International Court of Justice issued a ruling that Israel was required to stop its offensive in Rafah. However, Israeli strikes that landed 200 meters away from the United Nations' biggest warehouse in Gaza killed at least 45 Palestinians just two days after the ruling, drawing fierce international condemnation and prompting Prime Minister Netanyahu to call it a "tragic mishap" during a speech to the Knesset (CBS News, 2024).

On June 6th, Israel struck an UNRWA sponsored school in Central Gaza called the Al-Sardi school, where many had been seeking refuge, claiming the facility was being used as a base of operations by Hamas militants; it is reported that 33 people, including 12 women and children, were slain in the strike (Shurafa & Magdy, 2024). On June 8th, Israeli forces successfully located and rescued Noa Argamani, Almog Meir, Andrey Kozlov, and Shlomi Ziv after an extensive raid in the same neighborhood they had struck two days prior. The operation that released these four hostages abducted from the Nova festival was a costly feat due to the fact they were being held in the heart of the populated Nuseirat neighborhood; Israeli forces faced heavy resistance, which prompted heavy fire from air support, leading to the deaths of more than 200 people according to Palestinian sources (Lubell & Al-Mughrabi, 2024). The very next day, a member of Israel's war cabinet, Benny Gantz, stepped down from his position and criticized Netanyahu's management of the war and calling on him to set an agreed election date in his resignation announcement (Ebrahim, 2024).

The month of July would witness the assassination of critical Hamas leaders both in and outside of Gaza. It began with a series of bombings targeting Mohammed Deif, the head of the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, and Rafa Salama, head of the Khan Younis branch of the al-Qassam Brigades, in the Masawi neighborhood near Khan Younis. These initial strikes did kill both leaders, although Deif's death would be confirmed later on in August, but also resulted in the deaths of 90 people and injured hundreds of others (Clayton, 2024). Another important figurehead who was killed was the Chair of Hamas' Political wing, Ismail Haniyeh, who was assassinated on July 31 following an explosion in Tehran, which Israel denied participation in for months until Israel's Defense Minister admitted it in December (Fabian, 2024d). Additionally, on July 18th, the bodies of Tomer Ahimas, Ravid Katz, Oren Goldin, Maya Goren, and Kiril Brodski were recovered from Khan Yunis after Israeli forces discovered them in a Hamas tunnel underneath an area designated as a humanitarian zone (Gritten, 2024).

Briefly turning away from the battlefield, August 5th saw the United Nations investigate and terminate the contracts of nine staff members it found were linked to the October 7th attacks following Israeli claims that UNRWA staff had been participants in the massacre. However, the UN denied other Israeli claims that more than 450 UNRWA staff were members of terrorist

groups after a report released in April found Israel had not provided evidence to back its claims (Chatterjee, 2024). August saw the death toll in Gaza rise to 40,000 casualties; it was in this month that both the Qassam brigades announced that they would return to suicide bombings against Israeli targets "to the forefront" of its strategy against Israel (Forey, 2024).

This statement was echoed by the former leader of Hamas' political bureau, Khaled Mashaal, who also openly endorsed the renewal of such attacks against Israelis (Jerusalem Post Staff, 2024). On August 27th, the IDF announced that it had successfully rescued an Israeli-Arab hostage named Kaid Farhan Elkadi, who became the eighth hostage rescued by Israeli forces since the start of the war in Gaza. A few days later on the 29th of August, Israel agreed to pause fighting in the month of September in Gaza to allow for a Polio vaccine campaign with the aim of vaccinating over 600,000 children across Gaza after traces of the virus was found in sewage samples in the Strip in prior months and reports showing that vaccination among children had dropped to below 90% at the start of 2024 (John et al., 2024).

On September 1st, the IDF announced that it had recovered the bodies of six hostages: Carmel Gat, Eden Yerushalmi, Hersh Goldberg-Polin, Alexander Lobanov, Almog Sarusi and Ori Danino. They stated the hostages were shot by Palestinian militants around the time of the strike, and that it would have never been carried out had they known the hostages were in the vicinity (Reuters Staff, 2024a). On September 9, Israel struck the Masawi neighborhood of Khan Younis after designating it a "safe zone" in an overnight strike killing nineteen people and wounding more than sixty in the area; Israel stated it was targeting senior Hamas members involved in planning the October 7th attacks including the head of Hamas' aerial unit in Gaza, Samer Ismail Khadr Abu Daqqa.

On September 12th, Brigadier General Itzik Cohen announced that all four of Hamas' Rafah brigades had been defeated, that the IDF had "completed operational control over the entire urban area" of the city. Cohen also confirmed that the IDF had located 203 separate, but interconnected tunnels in the Philadelphi Corridor, of which nine had crossed into Egypt (Fabian, 2024b). On September 20th, the IAF launched a series of air-strikes in Central and Southern Gaza hitting a total of 20 targets targeting Hamas "military cells and terrorist infrastructure,"

which ended up killing Muhammad Mansour, a key figure in Hamas's intelligence system, and other Hamas militants (Jerusalem Post Staff, 2024b).

On October 5, Israel began its third operation and siege in Northern Gaza since the start of the war, indicating that intelligence reports showed that Hamas was once again trying to "rebuild its operational capabilities" (Gritten, 2024b). The following day, the IDF had encircled Jabaliya and ordered 300,000 Palestinians in Northern Gaza to evacuate southwards (Keller-Lynn, 2024). On October 7th, 2024, both sides commemorated the anniversary of the terrorist attacks that took place in 2023 that catalyzed the current war with even more violence. Hamas and the PIJ fired a volley of missiles directed towards Tel-Aviv and communities in Southern Israel near the Gaza border. Israel responded by intensifying its operations in Jabaliya, as well as striking a compound of the Al-Aqsa hospital in Deir al Balah to target a Hamas command center within the hospital, wounding 11 Palestinians (Al-Mughrabi & Al-Masri, 2024).

Perhaps the most significant event that occurred in October was the death of Yahya Sinwar on the 17th. Sinwar was found completely by chance in the neighborhood of Nur al-Sultan in Southern Gaza during a routine patrol, and was killed after a unit of trainee soldiers engaged Palestinian fighters; finding him there was a surprise, as Israeli intelligence had stated that Sinwar was likely hiding in tunnels and surrounding himself with hostages to avoid being assassinated (Boxerman, Bergman, Abdulrahim, et al., 2024). It was not only Hamas that celebrated his death as a "martyr" who died fighting the enemy, but thousands of social media users as well; it's reported that by October 18, the day after his death was announced, the hashtag #Sinwar garnered over two million shares on X (Middle East Eye Staff, 2024).

On November 1st, Israel launched a series of airstrikes across the Gaza Strip that killed a total of 68 Palestinians; one of these airstrikes aimed at Khan Younis resulted in the death of a senior Hamas member named Izz al-Din Kassab, who was described as being of senior-ranking and had been a key player in organizing Hamas forces in the area (Al-Mughrabi et al., 2024). Turning to a significant rupture in the Israeli domestic scene, Prime Minister Netanyahu decided to fire the Minister of Defense, Yoav Gallant, on November 5th. Gallant's demission sparked protest throughout Israel; as the hostilities between Israel and Hamas progressed, he was consistently

one of the harshest critics of the way Netanyahu was approaching the war, believing that the release of hostages should be prioritized over a 'total victory' against Hamas, which he saw as a difficult and unsustainable outcome to the war.

November 9th marked the 400th day of fighting, and also happened to be the day that Qatar, the nation that had assumed the role as one of the mediators between Israel and Hamas throughout the war, announced that it was going to stop leading these efforts due to both parties refusing to approach these negotiations seriously (Le Monde & Agence France-Presse, 2024). On November 20, Israel conducted a wave of airstrikes aimed at different buildings in Northern Gaza and the Kamal Adwan Hospital in Beit Lahiya, which claimed the lives of 48 Palestinians (Al-Mughrabi, 2024). A few days later on November 22, the IDF announced that an airstrike in Beit Lahiya had killed five Hamas militants; two of these militants killed were company commanders of elite units that had been directly involved in the October 7th attacks and led forces that murdered and kidnapped Israeli civilians around the Mefalsim Kibbutz (Fabian, 2024c).

The death of Omer Neutra, an Israeli-American hostage who had been previously thought to have been taken captive into Gaza, was found to have been killed the day of the October 7th Attacks on December 2nd, becoming the fourth American citizen to have died as a result of the October 7th attack (Kottasová & Karni, 2024). Two Israeli strikes killed fifteen Palestinians near an aid convoy truck on December 12th.

There are completely different narratives surrounding this incident. The IDF claimed that Hamas members aimed to hijack the aid convoy, while Palestinian sources reported that the people killed in the air strikes were guarding the aid trucks (Al Jazeera, 2024). On December 15th, a series of Israeli strikes and ground maneuvers killed more than 50 Palestinians. Around eleven were killed in airstrikes on Gaza City houses, nine in the towns of Beit Lahiya, Beit Hanoun, and Jabalia, and two were killed in Rafah, and twenty people, including women and children, were killed in Khan Younis; an Israeli airstrike on Nuseirat in Central Gaza targeting Hamas and PIJ members operating in the area killed a journalist working for Al Jazeera named Ahmed Al-Louh, who Israel has claimed was a member of the PIJ (Al-Mughrabi, 2024b).

As the year ended, the New York Times released a bombshell report surrounding Israel's engagement with targets in Gaza in the first phases of the war. The Times investigation found that on the seventh of October, Israel's military leadership believed that the country was facing an existential threat, leading to changes in the army's rules of engagement. Israel was able to fire 30,000 munitions in the first seven weeks, which were more munitions used than the following eight months the war combined because the upper-echelons had lifted restrictions on its military targets and increased the number of civilians that could be endangered in airstrikes, allowing for strikes on Hamas leaders even if it endangered over 100 civilians (Kingsley et al., 2024). While these rules changed in November following international outcry, the Times states that the IDF's protocols are still less restrictive than they were before October 7th, as mid-ranking officers are still able to sign off on most strikes that endanger 10 civilians or fewer, a higher limit than before the 7/10 war.

On January 16th, Prime Minister Netanyahu announced that a deal to return hostages captured on October 7th had finally been reached; the Israeli cabinet later approved the deal that paused the now 15-month war with Hamas for only the second time in six weeks. The "formula" for the ceasefire follows the model laid out by President Joe Biden months ago in May 2024 and follows three different stages. The first stage is set to last 42 days in which there would be a complete ceasefire, Hamas will release 33 hostages (women, children, older men, and the sick) at regular intervals while Israel releases 1,900 Palestinian prisoners (except ones directly involved in the 7/10 attacks), Israeli forces will leave populated areas as displaced Palestinians will return to their homes.

The second stage began sixteen days following the start of stage one, in which a permanent ceasefire will be established, any remaining living hostages will be swapped for more Palestinian prisoners, and Israeli forces will fully withdraw from Gaza; the final part of the agreement was supposed to see the return of the bodies of killed hostages and the beginning of the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip (Huggard & Sachs, 2025). The ceasefire collapsed on March 18th, so it remains to be seen if both parties will return to the negotiating table or if the region will have to brace itself for a continuation of fighting, death, and destruction.

3. The International Element

3a. The Axis of Resistance:

The global and regional actors involved in this war using hard power are Iran and its many armed regional proxies, including Hamas and other Palestinian Islamists in Gaza and the West Bank, Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, Shia militias, and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) operations in Iraq and Syria. All of these proxies are critical pieces of Qassem Soleimani's strategy to build a "ring of fire" around Israel (Mansharof et al., 2024).

Hezbollah was the first such actor to engage Israel and did so amid the chaos of October 7th, as the group renewed its attacks on the Lebanese-Israeli border and rocket attacks into Northern Israel from its bases in Lebanon "in solidarity" with Hamas, since October 8, 2023, which displaced tens of thousands of Israelis from their homes in Northern Israel (Reuters Staff, 2023a). Both sides would launch tit for tat airstrikes up until July 2024, when a rocket fired from Lebanon hit a Druze village in the Golan Heights under Israeli control that killed twelve children. This prompted outrage in Israel, and the IDF began increasing the intensity of its strikes against Hezbollah.

The two most significant moments of this conflict between the two sides came before Israel's ground invasion on September 30th and happened over a few weeks in mid-September. The first was Israel's pager attack, one of the most extraordinary espionage operations of the 21st century, in which Israel was able to remotely detonate thousands of pagers and walkie-talkies used by Hezbollah operatives throughout Lebanon on September 17th and 18th. These remote attacks killed 39 people, wounded more than 3,400, and was made possible by a year-spanning operation in which Israeli agents were able to build pagers containing a battery that concealed a small but powerful plastic explosive and detonator that was invisible to X-ray, as well as creating fake online stores, pages and posts that spoke about these products to fool Hezbollah into buying them (Gebeily et al., 2024).

By September 25, 2024, five days before Israel would launch its ground campaign in Southern Lebanon, it's reported that Hezbollah has fired some 9,000 rockets and drones since October 7th, 2023 (Sewell & Melzer, 2024). The second significant event was Israel's assassination of Hassan Nasrallah on September 27, 2024, the leader of the Lebanese military organization for decades; his death followed a series of strikes that had eliminated half of Hezbollah's leadership council and decimated its top military command at the time of his death (Nakhoul et al., 2024).

With the help of American and French mediation, Israel and Hezbollah announced they had reached a ceasefire after thirteen months of fighting on November 27. Both agreed to a sixty day pause in fighting and to withdraw from Southern Lebanon and allow the Lebanese army to enter the area; Hezbollah's militants were required stay clear of any territory within forty kilometers of the Israeli border, while Israel had to withdraw behind the "Blue line" established by the UN in 2000 (Picheta et al., 2024).

As of today, the ceasefire has not been fully implemented, but on January 27th, 2025, both Israel and Lebanon agreed to extend the ceasefire through February 17th because both the Israeli and Lebanese armies are at a standstill. The IDF has stated that it needs to remain in Lebanon longer because the Lebanese army has not fully deployed the necessary troops in Southern Lebanon to prevent Hezbollah from reestablishing a presence, as originally agreed to in the November ceasefire, but the Lebanese army insists it cannot deploy until Israeli forces fully withdraw (Magid & TOI Staff, 2025).

Another important part of Iran's alliance is the Houthis, a Zaidi Shia militia in Yemen that has controlled much of the country since 2016. The Houthis began launching missiles and drones toward Israel as October 16, 2023, but these were intercepted by the USS Carney before coming close to the country's airspace (Copp & Baldor, 2023). The first nine months of war that followed October 7 saw the Houthis successfully fire more than 200 cruise missiles, ballistic missiles, and drones at Israel (Wilson Center Staff, 2024). Many of the Houthis' strikes have been intercepted either by Israel or its allies, and the ones that have landed caused limited damage, but the fact remains that the Houthis posed a persistent aerial threat to many Israelis. On July 19th, a Houthi drone managed to pass into Israel undetected and hit a residential building in

the heart of Tel Aviv, killing one person and injuring four; Houthis officials like Yahya Saree praised the attack as a big operational success and declared that Tel Aviv a primary target "within the range" of the Houthis weapons (Amichay, 2024).

Israel responded to this unprecedented attack by striking Yemen directly for the first time. On July 20th Israel conducted one of the farthest missions ever conducted by the IAF by targeting the port areas of Hodeida, a coastal city in Northern Yemen. The IDF stated that the city was targeted due to it being an important entry of Iranian made weapons and munitions into the country, and the strikes injured at least 80 Yemenis (Boxerman et al., 2024). The Israeli Air Force would target Hodeida a second time on September 20th, after the Houthis launched two hypersonic missiles on different occasions, bypassing Israel's air defense system twice; these strikes targeted seaports and power plants in the area that the IDF stated " are used to import oil for military use by the Houthi terrorist regime"(Motamedi, 2024).

A third round of confrontation between Israel and the Houthis took place in December 2024, after a Houthi projectile that was partially intercepted outside Israeli airspace, but its warhead crashed into an empty school in Ramat Gan, causing no injuries. Israel retaliated on December 26th by hitting the Houthis' infrastructure at sites like Sana'a airport, the ports of Hodeida, Salif, and Ras Kanatib, targeting different power plants, injuring forty people and killing six (Reuters Staff, 2024).

The Houthis have taken advantage of Yemen's strategic position on the Bab al-Mandab strait that connects the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean to their advantage in taking a stance on the Israel-Hamas war, as the group has launched attacks on commercial vessels passing the Red Sea. This forced many companies to pay more for shipping as ships were now forced to take an expensive detour around the Cape of Good Hope in Southern Africa. According to Freightos, a digital marketplace for shipping, the cost of shipping a container from Asia to Northern Europe increased by 270 percent in the 12 months since the Houthis began their attacks (Naar et al., 2024). With the announcement of the Israeli-Hamas ceasefire in January 2025, the Houthis announced that they would limit their attacks on international cargo ships and would stop targeting Israeli ships upon the completion of the third phase of the ceasefire.

The final component of Iran's ring of fire is the Islamic Resistance in Iraq (IRI). The IRI consists of different Iraqi militias consisting of groups like *Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba* and *Kataib Hezbollah*. By June 2024, the IRI had successfully launched over 180 attacks on U.S. forces in Iraq and Syria and over 115 claimed attacks on Israel (Malik & Knights, 2024).

As the leading financial and military backer of the groups mentioned above, and the most prominent threat to Israel, the Islamic Republic of Iran's role in this round of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict cannot be understated. Hamas has been receiving funding from Iran as early as 1994, proven by a statement made by Palestinian politician Ziad Abu-Amr, who estimated Iran's financial aid to Hamas to be around the tens of millions of dollars while also providing "logistical support to Hamas and military training to its members" (Levitt, 2023). While the full extent of Iran's involvement in the October 7 Attacks remains a mystery to this day, it is evident through Bergman et al.'s (2024) New York Times article that indicated that Iran had (at the very least) a concept of what Hamas' "big project" would entail.

This war saw Iran directly engage Israel in combat for the first time in history on two separate occasions. The first series of strikes began on April 13th, 2024, when the IRGC fired over 300 drones, cruise missiles, and ballistic missiles towards Israel; however, 99% of projectiles fired were intercepted either outside Israeli airspace with the help of the US, UK, and Jordanian air forces or over the country itself (Spender, 2024). The second Iranian attack came months later on October 1st and consisted almost entirely of ballistic missiles, which only took twelve minutes to reach Israel, instead of a combination slower projectiles as they had in the months prior; Israel was able to intercept approximately 80% of the missiles fired, but three different targets were hit within Israel, including the Nevatim Airbase, which the IDF stressed remained fully functional claiming no fighter jets had been damaged, and a school in Gedera (Schneider, 2024).

3b. The International Community:

Many nations released statements either supporting or condemning both sides for the event that had unfolded on October 7th. As the Gaza War has raged on for over a year, so has a "War of

Narratives" been launched from Cyberspace, Newsrooms, NGOs, Governments, and Non-State Actors worldwide.

By October 11, 2023, some forty-plus nations condemned Hamas' attacks and labeled the group's operations four days prior as terrorism. On October 9, the United States, France, Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom released a joint statement in which all five governments and their respective leaders stated their support for Israel. The 5 Western nations announced that they support Israel "in its efforts to defend itself and its people against such atrocities" while recognizing the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people stating, adding that Hamas "offers nothing for the Palestinian people other than more terror and bloodshed" (US Embassy in Israel, 2023). Other nations throughout the Western World, Latin America, and Oceania released similar statements explicitly condemning Hamas, with even some of the signatories of the 2020 Abraham Accords, such as the UAE and Bahrain, both revising their original statements to condemn both Hamas and the organizations killing and kidnapping of Israeli civilians (Waldo et al., 2023)

In stark contrast to the UAE and Bahrain, some countries throughout the Middle East and North Africa, like Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, and Qatar, took a different approach in addressing the events that had shaken the region. These countries condemned the Zionist Occupation/Entity (Israel's) military response immediately following the 7/10 attacks and held Israel accountable for the violence that occurred that day due to its oppression of the Palestinian people. Iran and Syria even went as far as to praise Hamas for the attacks.

The Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates posted a message on Facebook in which the country "raises its head high in honor of the martyrs" of the Palestinians who planned and conducted the Al-Aqsa Flood operation (7/10 attacks) and that Hamas' "achievement" that day showed the world that "the only way to achieve the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people is resistance in all its forms and to challenge the arrogant Zionist occupation authorities" (Waldo et al., 2023). A Spokesperson in Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nasser Kanaani, called the 7/10 attacks a spontaneous move, saying the operation was a "natural reaction to the war-mongering, provocative and incendiary policies of the Zionists"; Kanaani also called out the international

community and the fake human rights defenders' hypocrisy and inaction regarding the Palestinian cause, leaving "the Palestinian nation and resistance no way but to resist and rely on their inherent strength in the face of the Zionists" (IRIMFA, 2023).

Other regional leaders, like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Morocco, took a more balanced approach by reiterating their respective concerns over the escalation of violence in the region, condemning the civilian dimension of the conflict, or emphasizing the reactivation of a credible peace process or past initiatives meant to solve the conflict in the two-state-solution framework once and for all.

In the 33rd annual Arab League Summit, hosted by the Bahraini King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa in Manama, and attended by the most influential leaders in the Arab world, the summit concluded with both the adoption of the "Bahrain Declaration," calling for a UN-backed international peace conference addressing the Israeli Palestinian issue to be held in Bahrain's capital, and discussing the reactivation of the Arab Peace Initiative (API) put forward by Saudi Arabia and adopted by the Arab League's members in the 2002 league summit (Farhat, 2024). The API proposal is one of the most important initiatives in the entire history of the Arab/ Palestinian and Israeli Conflict, as it offers total Arab normalization with Israel in exchange for the latter withdrawing from the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967, as well as Israel agreeing to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital (Said Aly et al, 2021, p.372).

Other countries, regional blocs, and international bodies have also chosen to weigh into the newest evolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The BRICS countries, in a similar fashion to the Arab League, showed an incredibly diverse set of reactions to both the 7/10 attacks and Israel's subsequent response.

Russia's position throughout the conflict, given the country's standing in the global order and unique relationship with Israel and the region, historically and geopolitically, is an essential factor to consider. Following the fall of the Soviet Union in the early, about one million Jews from throughout the USSR immigrated to Israel. Vladimir Putin recognized an opportunity to forge strong ties with this new Russian-speaking demographic in Israel when he came to power

in 2000, seeing them as a potential source of future economic investment (Hill & Huggard, 2024).

In the pre-7/10 context, Russia conducted a successful balancing act throughout the Middle East. Under Putin's leadership, the country has strengthened its relationship with Iran since the start of the "special military operation" in Ukraine. The country also maintained a tacit understanding with Israel, in which the latter would communicate its operations against Iran and Hezbollah in Syria with Russia (Vorobyov, 2024).

Since 7/10, Putin has blamed the West for failing to implement a peace process between the Israelis and Palestinians, while also choosing to frame this conflict as a part of the battle between the West and the Russian-led resistance camp. Following this point of view places, the responsibility of the current war is placed on the United States for monopolizing the mediation of the peace process and accused the US of fanning the flames of war intentionally, using the chaos of war to both prevent the rise of a multipolar world order and ensure the survival of its dominance in the international order.

Russia has been taking on an increasingly "pro-Hamas" stance in the years leading up to the October 7th Attacks, which is quite ironic when considering the country's decision as part of the Quartet to initially boycott Hamas in the mid-2000s. Around three weeks after the 7/10 attacks, Russia hosted a high-level Hamas delegation in Moscow, a move that enraged the Israeli government, which reacted by criticizing Russia's decision to host Hamas as supporting terrorism and giving "legitimacy to the horrific acts of Hamas terrorists" (Nechepurenko, 2023).

Similarly to Russia, China has been engaged in a balancing act of its own in the Middle East while also seeking to expand its role as a diplomatic mediator in the region. In 2022, China became Israel's second-largest trading partner behind the US due to a boom in Israeli imports from the country, reaching 17.62 billion dollars; Chinese foreign direct investment in Israeli hi-tech, life sciences, software, and information technology companies also grew in the past decade (Wong, 2023).

On the one hand, China has maintained its economic ties with Israel open while also serving as a spokesperson for the Palestinians in International forums, attempting to present itself as a mediator of conflict in the region. On the other hand, China has its ambitions in the Middle East, and since October 7th, it has recognized an opportunity to challenge the United States' influence in the region. This materialized in July of 2024, when China announced that Fatah, Hamas, and twelve other Palestinian groups had flown to China and signed the Beijing declaration, in which committed all of these factions pledged to restore Palestinian national unity by including all of these faction in under the PLO framework and to the creation of an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital (Urhová, 2024).

Turning now to the remaining founders of BRICS, Brazil's President Lula da Silva, while decrying the 7/10 attacks as an act of terrorism, has called Israel's response in Gaza as being just as grave. Lula stated that Israel was committing genocide in the Gaza Strip. Lula went as far as to compare Israel's conduct vis-à-vis the Palestinians as that the Jews underwent at the hands of the Nazis in World War II, which that catalyzed a flurry of misinformation and disinformation throughout social media platforms that claimed the two countries had completely severed diplomatic ties with one another (Wade & AFP USA, 2024).

South Africa also condemned the October 7th attacks but has since taken the most active stance of any BRICS country against Israel during the war. South Africa was the first country to file a case against Israel at the International Court of Justice on December 29, 2023, claiming that the IDF's inability to protect the civilian population of Gaza were genocidal. South African prosecutors cited comments made by Prime Minister Netanyahu and members of Israel's governing coalition as proof of Israel's "genocidal intent" (Berg, 2024). This case will remain in the hands of the court for years before a decision will be made.

India has taken a completely different approach from its other BRICS colleagues by being a supporter of Israel throughout the war, even supplying the latter with weapons it has used in the Gaza War (Nazir, 2024). While India has reiterated its commitment to the two-state solution as the way to end the conflict, India's diplomatic decision has also reflected its growing pro-Israel position. The country decided to not to vote on a U.N. resolution that aimed to investigate Israeli

actions for human rights violations in the Palestinian territories on November 13th; it took a similar stance in April 2024, by abstaining from a U.N. Human Rights Council resolution that urged Israel to cease fire immediately in Gaza, called for an arms embargo on Israel, and sought to hold Israel accountable for potential war crimes in Gaza (Nazir, 2024).

The global community, international bodies, and organizations have also played a significant role in the war. As of November 2024, the United Nations Security Council has drafted fourteen resolutions concerning the Israel-Hamas war since October 7th (Al Jazeera Staff, 2024). Only four have successfully passed due to the United States exerting its veto power as a P5 member of the UN Security Council. The International Criminal Court, a treaty-based international criminal court that investigates and prosecutes crimes against humanity, war crimes, and genocide, released arrest warrants for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant. A warrant was also put out for Mohammed Deif, the Hamas commander who Israel is said to have killed in July 2024, since Hamas has never confirmed his death.

Since the ICC has no police force or army to enforce these arrests, it cannot bring these leaders to the Hague itself. The court relies on its 124 member states to implement these orders, arrest these individuals if they visit any of the 124 countries, and later send them to the Netherlands (UN News, 2024). As mentioned in the previous section, the ICJ (not to be confused with the ICC) has been investigating the claims put forward by South Africa that Israel is committing a genocide on the Palestinian people through its war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip, but any decision the court makes could take years to materialize.

3c. The role of NGOs:

NGO's (Non-Governmental Organizations) have also been following or have been on the ground in Gaza throughout this war. Amnesty International, an NGO that promotes human rights throughout more than 150 countries around the globe, concluded its investigation in December 2024 and claimed that Israel is committing genocide in the Gaza Strip. Amnesty looked at the IDF's conduct throughout the war and reviewed its claims that it lawfully targeted Hamas and other armed groups, and that the destruction and denial of aid were due to unlawful actions by

these groups (like diverting aid) “unconvincing”; it added that presence of militants in populated areas did not exempt Israel from its duty to minimize civilian harm, and found that the IDF had committed multiple international law violations (Amnesty International, 2024).

Human Rights Watch reached a similar conclusion to Amnesty International but highlighted the claim that Israel has deliberately created conditions in Gaza to destroy part of the population by depriving Palestinians of adequate access to water. HRW said that this policy likely caused thousands of deaths and constitutes a crime against humanity of extermination and acts of genocide (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

Reporters Without Borders, an NGO with consultative status with the United Nations that defends the rights of freedom of the press and free speech by supporting journalists at risk, released a yearly report in December that talked extensively about the war’s impact on journalists. According to RWB, Gaza was the most dangerous place to be a journalist in the entire world, as over 145 journalist had been killed, 35 of which were linked to the reporters journalism work, by the IDF since October 7th; they also added that since the war began Israel has imprisoned more journalists than any other country, making it the world's third-largest jailer of journalists (Reporters Sans Frontières, 2024).

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