

DON'T BE A

Copagandist!

ISRAELI MILITARISM EDITION

**A resource for media on covering Palestine
and Israel by Interrupting Criminalization**

*Co-sponsored by Adalah Justice Project, Migrant Roots Media,
Press On, Critical Resistance.*

CONTEXT

The Israeli Defense Forces, or IDF (also known as the Israeli Occupation Force or IOF), is the national military of the state of Israel. It was established in May 1948, the beginning of what Palestinians call the [Nakba or “catastrophe”](#) — the mass displacement, dispossession, and murder of Indigenous Palestinians that is inextricably linked to the creation of the Israeli state. Propaganda is written into the IDF’s name, misrepresenting the Israeli military as a “defensive” body even though it is and has always been the military arm of an occupying force. The IDF deeply shapes the militarized culture and politics of Israel in part because all Israelis over 18 are required to serve in the military — Israel is a nation of trained combatants. [Conscientious objectors are criminalized.](#)

The ongoing campaign to promote the interests of the Israeli government and military through propaganda has been thorough and global, and has received the support of the governments of the U.S., U.K., Australia, and Germany, among others. This particular and deadly brand of copaganda by Israel and its supporters works to sanitize Israel’s image and justify Israel’s actions and to justify military, police, and political violence by occupying Israeli forces, no matter how discriminatory, anti-democratic, cruel, or downright genocidal.

Israeli copaganda is uniquely global and thorough, and this global campaign has its own Hebrew name, [Hasbara](#). According to this explainer in [+972](#) “Israeli advocacy is probably the most widespread and ambitious state-run propaganda effort in the world today.” We see many of the results of Hasbara in our day-to-day conversations,



news reports, and debates, in which the state of Israel’s violence is consistently normalized and presumed to be justified while Palestinian existence is framed as a threat justifying the most brutal forms of repression, torture, incarceration, and death. It is fueled through sponsored tours for celebrities, politicians, and faith leaders, as well as “birthright” trips for young American Jews that hide the effects of the occupation, and through collaborations with police and militaries in other countries. It is also supported by powerful Zionist organizations who claim to speak for all Jewish people, and through directly silencing and repressing Palestinian voices in the occupied territories as well as Jewish voices of dissent. The IDF has also [escalated direct and deadly attacks on journalists](#) since October 7 in an effort to suppress truthful reporting of the brutal and deadly impacts of a relentless bombing campaign and denial of food, water, electricity, and [health care facilities](#). Inside Israel, the government has [escalated its crackdown on free speech and expression, arresting people for nothing more than social media posts expressing sympathy for the resultant humanitarian crisis in Gaza](#).

This guide attempts to unpack a few key places where IDF propaganda shows up in news reporting. Please note that this is not a primer on covering Palestine — we link to some recommended resources as well as other guides for journalists below, and would like to note particularly the call from Palestinian and Arab journalists around the world for all journalists to “[value and humanize Palestinian lives equally to Israeli lives](#).” That should be the baseline of any news coverage.



1

Don't act as a stenographer for the Israeli government

Do not repeat Israeli military or governmental statements unchecked. We know from decades of experience that the IDF (and occupying forces in general) do not tell the truth, particularly when they are in the process of committing atrocities. During the 2023 siege in Gaza, the IDF has lied repeatedly about everything from its [attacks on ambulances](#), health care facilities, and [hospitals](#) to its [deliberate targeting of journalists](#). The IDF has also [lied about targeting journalists such as Shireen Abu Akleh](#), whom they shot and killed in May 2022. The IDF has recently collaborated with U.S. President Joe Biden to [cast doubt on the numbers of dead and injured reported by the Palestinian Health Ministry](#) (without providing any evidence to counter the numbers), thus forcing Palestinians in Gaza into the grotesque position of having to provide pictures of the dead and lists of names of people murdered by Israeli forces. There have been dozens of false stories and disinformation going around to justify the genocide against Palestinians, along with journalistic efforts to debunk that disinformation, such as this article from The Wire, "[Fact Check: Unedited Footage Debunks Israeli Propaganda on Shrouded Corpse.](#)"

Journalists are increasingly questioning Israeli state spokespeople's claims - that babies and children are legitimate targets, that the United Nations is colluding with Hamas, that targeting civilians is justified - and highlighting the genocidal nature of statements and actions reflecting Israel's intent to maximize suffering and erase Palestinian life from Gaza.



2 ***Assume that the IDF and their supporters are putting out disinformation***

By now, all reporters should know to question official releases from repressive governments and attempt independent verification before repeating, especially if the official releases are justifying state violence. The international news media acted egregiously when outlets repeatedly echoed the unfounded rumor that Hamas had “beheaded dozens of babies” during the October 7 attacks. In a blatant attempt to stoke anger and justify escalated violence, this rumor was repeated by Netanyahu and Biden, but [later walked back](#) when it emerged that there was no evidence that anything of the sort actually happened. This is just one example of an Israeli-U.S. disinformation campaign that media outlets have enabled.

3 ***Apartheid and occupation are violence***

Many news reports discuss the 2023 siege of Gaza, and previous Israeli bombing campaigns in Gaza, as outbursts of “self-defense” on the part of Israel. And yet, these campaigns of brutal violence take place against a backdrop of ongoing military occupation in Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem, as well as apartheid conditions for Palestinians living across the territories. [As Mariame Kaba and Kelly Hayes wrote for Truthout, “what preceded the killings in Israel and Gaza was not ‘peace’ — it was apartheid.”](#) The occupying forces (the Israeli government and the IDF) with full financial and military backing from the U.S., enact daily violence including mass arrests and political imprisonments, near-constant use of tear gas against protesters, and IDF soldiers harassing, kidnapping, humiliating, torturing, and murdering Palestinians, including children. Prior to October 7, 2023 was already the [deadliest year on record](#) for children in the West Bank, with more than one Palestinian child being killed by the IDF each week. Since then, a Palestinian child has been [killed by the IDF every 10 minutes](#) on average.



4

Don't conflate opposition to Israel's actions, anti-Zionism and antisemitism

Zionism is defined by [Jewish Voice for Peace](#) as a political ideology which resulted in the expulsion of 750,000 Indigenous Palestinians from their land and homes to create a nation-state with exclusive rights for Jews above others on the land. Zionism asserts that Jews require a supremacist nation state in order to be safe. A key tactic of Israeli government propaganda has been to equate anti-Zionism with antisemitism around the globe — this is part of the state of Israel's recruiting tactics to bring more Jewish people to the territory, and it is also part of how Israel defends itself from any criticism.

Organizations like the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) in the U.S. spread alarm about antisemitism in cases where there is no evidence of any anti-Jewish sentiment, because it defines all opposition to the Israeli occupation of Palestine as antisemitic — even when it comes from Jewish people. These propaganda tactics also cynically conflate support for a ceasefire or Palestinian self-determination with anti-Jewishness, accuse supporters of Palestine of Holocaust denialism, and stoke fears that any criticism of Israel globally will inevitably lead to anti-Jewish violence. Many people and organizations have [spoken out against the ADL](#) and the [IHRA's definitions of antisemitism](#).

Antisemitism is real, and it is dangerous. But IDF propaganda confuses, rather than helps, the fight against antisemitism globally. Many Jewish people are anti-Zionist, and it can be antisemitic to associate Israel and Zionism with Jewish people, who are diasporic and diverse and who should not be held collectively accountable for Israeli state violence. Do not allow this false interpretation of antisemitism to drive what you choose to cover, and do not platform those who misuse the concept of antisemitism to justify violence and silencing against Palestinians.

For more on this, [see this guide to antisemitism by Jews for Racial and Economic Justice](#) and [this article by Jewish Voice for Peace](#).



5 *It's not a conflict or a clash*

The term “conflict” is encouraged by the IDF to make it seem as though their acts of violence occur on an equal playing field. Use “occupation” in describing Israeli presence in the West Bank and Gaza, “siege” in describing the actions in Gaza since October 7, and “ethnic cleansing” or “genocide” in describing the escalating campaign to ethnically cleanse the region of Palestinians. The use of the term genocide is not hyperbolic — over [800 scholars who study genocide](#) have signed on to a letter explaining why what is happening is in fact a genocide, and a United Nations [expert](#) has similarly named the ongoing violence as genocidal, while others have [warned of mass ethnic cleansing](#). Israeli officials have [confirmed their genocidal intent with a number of statements since these letters were written](#). Avoid the use of passive terms like “clash” or “skirmish” when describing Israeli military actions, which are nearly always cases of one of the best-funded militaries in the world carrying out violence against occupied peoples. (For more guidance on language, [see this guide from the IMEU](#)).



6

Situate the Israeli military and police in the context of global militarism, policing, and racism

Recognizing and pushing back against this form of copaganda requires reporting on the root causes and interests served by militarism and policing around the world. The IDF does not exist for Jewish “self-defense” any more than cops exist to keep people safe. Both are about racial and social control, and their shared motives may be seen in their frequent collaborations with one another.

Racist policing and militarism go hand in hand, in some cases literally: for example, the IDF has [partnered with police forces in Atlanta](#), receiving training in “community policing” from Georgia officers. An IDF installation called [“Little Gaza,” where its soldiers practice ground combat in simulated Gazan streets](#), is an inspiration for the proposed Cop City installation in the Weelaunee Forest in Atlanta. Much like the U.S. military has trained repressive governments in Latin America in how to suppress their own populations, the IDF [has trained police forces in the U.S. in tactics for repressing protest](#), including the use of tear gas, advanced surveillance technologies, infiltrating movement spaces, and coordinating and controlling media coverage. In one example of a successful local abolitionist campaign, a coalition called [Demilitarize Durham2Palestine](#) won a resolution in Durham, North Carolina that police will not partner with the IDF.



7 *Be careful with adjectives*

This is an area where propaganda and bias can slip in unnoticed. Words like “brutal,” “barbaric,” and “savage” have a long racist history of being used to describe the actions of Black and Brown people, particularly colonized people. We see many articles and posts that describe Hamas’ October 7 attack as “barbaric” while describing Israel’s retaliation as “targeted,” “self-defense,” or simply without the use of inflammatory adjectives. The underlying message is that Palestinian life is more disposable than the lives of Israelis — that killing Palestinians is, in fact, not brutal but inevitable. An easy solution to this is to show, don’t tell — describe what you know happened, rather than characterizing how bad you think it is.

8 *Governments are not people; Israel is not a democracy*

Be wary of the propagandist tendency to claim to speak for a large group of people: allowing the IDF to claim to speak and act for all Jews risks stoking global antisemitism, and it invisibilizes the many acts of resistance from Israelis who oppose militarism and Zionism (these acts of resistance that are criminalized and punished in Israel).

The IDF claims to protect the safety of Jews everywhere. However, not all Israelis are Jews — many are Muslim and Christian Palestinians living under apartheid laws in Israel where they do not have full voting rights. There are also African, Palestinian and other Arab and racialized Jews living in what is currently called Israel who experience structural racism and displacement, as well as Arab Palestinians who do have full voting rights and citizenship but are otherwise marginalized. This system of racialized caste and class is part of an apartheid strategy to divide and conquer. And, not all Israelis, Jewish or otherwise, support the IDF or their government.

The state of Israel is not a democracy: it is an apartheid state without voting rights or free speech for all, and should not be taken to represent all Israelis, all Israeli Jews, let alone Jewish people in general. Instead, coverage should uplift the voices of dissent around the globe, highlight [Israel’s attacks on free speech and expression](#), and hold this powerful government to account for its treatment of Palestinians, its open ethno-nationalism, and its tactics of crushing dissent.



How can media push back against IDF copaganda?

What does effective coverage look like?

Cover the daily violence of occupation, including criminalization

Al Jazeera has [compiled data](#) and consistently told stories about life under Israeli occupation, illegal settlements, and the unequal power dynamics that are a constant in the occupied territories. [One leading Palestinian reporter who did this](#), Shireen Abu Akleh, was shot and killed by IDF soldiers in 2022. [Israeli forces attacked her funeral](#) outside of an East Jerusalem hospital.

Mondoweiss has for many years covered the criminalization of Palestinians and their supporters — see for example [this article about the criminalization of the terms intifada, qawem, and shaheed](#).

Jewish Currents has an ongoing [“Dispatches from the West Bank”](#) series with “as-told-to” reporting about the deteriorating conditions since the beginning of the 2023 siege on Gaza. A [similar series provides on-the-ground reports from Gaza](#).



How can media push back against IDF copaganda?

What does effective coverage look like?

Connect the dots between Zionism and other Right Wing ethnonationalism

For example, [this coverage by MSNBC discusses the motives of Christian Zionists in supporting Israeli atrocities](#), noting that “What happens to the Jews and Palestinians is, to put it very mildly, collateral damage.” An article in [The Nation connects the dots between Hindu nationalism in India and Israeli occupation policies](#), as does [another in Jacobin](#). The Jewish magazine Forward looks at [why Netanyahu and Trump both “cozy up to antisemites.”](#) The reporting on Christian Zionism and Christian nationalism in particular is sorely lacking and there are many avenues of ideological, political, and financial connection that could still be explored.

Use Palestinian (indigenous) place names and terms

It is very rare that news organizations use the indigenous Palestinian names for places if the Israelis have already given those places another name. [In this article, the occupied city of Al Khalil, known in Hebrew as Hebron, is described by its original name and settler violence is described in detail](#) (content warning for photos of injured children).



How can media push back against IDF copaganda?

What does effective coverage look like?

Hold politicians and corporations accountable

Many politicians in the U.S. [receive campaign support from Israeli lobbyists through AIPAC](#) (American Israel Public Affairs Committee). Good reporting on U.S. politics will follow the money, as [this article from the American Prospect](#) and [The Intercept](#) does. Similarly, many multinational corporations benefit directly from the Israeli occupation. [As this piece from Vox explains, the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions \(BDS\) movement](#) is a key part of the global nonviolent solidarity movement for Palestinian self-determination.

Look at who benefits from war and occupation

Military contractors, weapons manufacturers, and tear gas producers should all be held accountable for the violence of militarism, as they are the global beneficiaries. This article in Environmental Health News looks at the [use of tear gas in the West Bank](#) that is manufactured in Pennsylvania.

As People's World reported, in late October 2023, U.S. weapons manufacturers projected big profits from the brutal siege on Gaza.

And even before 2023, it was no secret that Israeli weapons companies were using Gaza as a testing ground for new technology to later be exported around the world, as [+972 reported](#). The benefits reaped by global capital at the expense of trauma and suffering in Palestine should be a huge, ongoing story.



How can media push back against IDF copaganda?

What does effective coverage look like?

<p>Debunk IDF copaganda and Hasbara directly</p>	<p>Throughout the 2023 siege of Gaza, there have been dozens of false stories and disinformation going around to justify the genocide against Palestinians, and many journalistic efforts to debunk that disinformation. See for example this article from The Wire, “Fact Check: Unedited Footage Debunks Israeli Propaganda on Shrouded Corpse,” and this excellent piece in +972 explaining the dynamics of Hasbara, which says, “Israeli advocacy is probably the most widespread and ambitious state-run propaganda effort in the world today.”</p>
<p>Cover dissent among Israelis</p>	<p>The IDF is not above using the stories of victims to promote its propaganda, for example, claiming that the families of hostages taken on October 7 all desire a full-throttle siege in Gaza and do not accept a prisoner swap proposed by Hamas. As Democracy Now reported, in late October, families of hostages plead with Netanyahu to protect hostages and called for a prisoner swap.</p>



How can media push back against IDF copaganda?

What does effective coverage look like?

Cover dissent by Palestinians

Many Palestinian and Arab news sites do this; more English-language news sites should. See, for example, this [Mondoweiss podcast](#) and the longstanding coverage of [Electronic Intifada](#).

There is also a long, underreported tradition of nonviolent resistance by Palestinians that has been met with violence, including the two-year-long [Great March of Return in Gaza, documented here by The Palestine Chronicle](#).

The Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement has also been poorly reported in English-language press. [Omar Barghouti, one of the founders of BDS, explains the current significance of the movement for The Guardian](#).

Connect Palestine to global anti-colonial struggle and Indigenous movements

As the [NDN Collective explains here](#), global indigenous movements have long stood in solidarity with Palestinians. Here, [Underscore News covers how indigenous activists in Coast Salish territory \(Tacoma, WA\) helped block a ship carrying weaponry for Israel from leaving port](#). [This column in The New Arab explains the 75th anniversary of the Nakba in the context of 531 years of settler colonial occupation in the U.S.](#) [Counterfire Magazine breaks down the meaning of settler colonialism in the context of Israel](#).

More news articles should explain the context of settler colonialism, including Israel's use of the U.S. model for [displacement and elimination](#) of indigenous populations.



How can media push back against IDF copaganda?

What does effective coverage look like?

Look beneath accusations of antisemitism and analyze whether they are actually Israeli propaganda

One IDF copaganda tactic is the deliberate reinterpretation of the Palestinian liberation refrain “from the river to the sea” as a genocidal anti-Jewish call to eliminate Jewish people from the lands between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean (the region known before 1948 as Palestine). [As Maha Nassar writes for Forward](#), “after 1948, Palestinians were not able to live with full freedom and dignity anywhere in their homeland. That’s how the call for a free Palestine ‘from the river to the sea’ gained traction in the 1960s. It was part of a larger call to see a secular democratic state established in all of historic Palestine. Palestinians hoped their state would be free from oppression of all sorts, from Israeli as well as from Arab regimes.”

Jewish Currents has done some great coverage that pushes back on the narrative that anti-Zionism is antisemitic. For example, [this article looks at the campus backlash against pro-Palestine speech](#).

Cover forced displacement and refugees

Millions of Palestinians have already been displaced from their homes by the ongoing Nakba, living most or all of their lives as permanent refugees. [Reuters did a story providing this context](#) as many elderly Palestinians in Gaza are displaced a second time and almost everyone in Gaza is a registered refugee.

There are also 7 million Palestinians living in the diaspora across the world. Cover the organizing, resistance, and culture of diasporic Palestinians, like this article in [The New Arab](#).



[Adalah Database of Discriminatory Israeli Laws](#)

[Arab and Middle Eastern Journalists Association \(AMEJA\) Media Resource Guide for Covering Palestine](#)

[Deadly Exchange: Ending US-Israel Police Partnerships, Reclaiming Safety](#)

[Decolonize Palestine Myths and Realities](#)

[Demands for media workers in this moment](#) by Palestinian Youth Movement for Mondoweiss, 8 November, 2023

[Guidance for reporting on Israel/Palestine](#) by the Institute for Middle East Understanding

[How media outlets and politicians amplified uncorroborated reports of beheaded babies in Israel](#), by Sara Swann for Poynter, 23 October, 2023

[How the US and Israel exchange tactics in violence and control](#), by Mersiha Gadzo for Al Jazeera, 12 June 2020

[Hundreds of Journalists Sign Letter Protesting Coverage of Israel](#), by Laura Wagner and Will Sommer for The Washington Post, 9 November 2023

[Palestinian Feminist Collective: All Out for Palestine Toolkit](#)

[Understanding Antisemitism: An Offering to Our Movement](#), by Jews for Racial and Economic Justice



www.InterruptingCriminalization.com