

The Eighth Front: Media and Information Warfare in the Hamas-Israel War

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Executive Summary

- Media constitute a battlespace (“eighth front”) in the Hamas–Israel war, with real-time livestreaming, emotionalised content, and unfiltered violence fundamentally reshaping public perceptions, trauma exposure, and the strategic use of information by a terrorist organisation.
- The digital information ecosystem has expanded the number of actors and weakened professional standards, enabling misinformation to spread rapidly while eroding public trust in journalism and democratic institutions.
- Regulatory efforts such as the EU’s Digital Services Act mark important progress, but remain insufficient without transparent algorithms and stronger platform accountability, as well as targeted digital literacy initiatives that address the differing needs of all age groups.
- Asymmetric information warfare: coordinated media strategies by non-state actors like Hamas outpace fragmented state responses, while digitally amplified antisemitism increasingly spills into real-world violence, highlighting the need for strengthened prevention and societal resilience.

The Weaponization of Media on October 7

The changed presence of media has profoundly influenced our perception of politics and information flows. Looking back 80 years, the disability of former U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt was largely concealed throughout his career owing to arrangements with the media and the support of the Secret Service – almost all published images depict him seated or positioned behind a desk.¹ A 21st-century Franklin Roosevelt would hardly have been able to maintain such secrecy for 12 years – such information would likely be amplified across various media channels and used strategically within competing narratives.

Today, the presence and consumption of media are fundamentally different. The attacks of October 7 starkly illustrated this reality: Everyone could watch the atrocities committed by Hamas via Live-Stream.

The fate of the late German-Israeli hostage Tamir Nimrodi is an example of how cynically Hamas incorporated the power of media into its warfare. The brutal abduction of Tamir as he was attacked and dragged from his bed by Hamas terrorists was streamed live on Instagram.² On October 7th, Tamir’s little sister came across the video on Instagram by chance. For two years, it remained the last sign of life his family had received from him until his body was returned as part of the ceasefire in October 2025. This example illustrates how media coverage has changed the nature of warfare: Barbaric scenes are disseminated globally without filters or safeguards, accessible to anyone. They humiliate and traumatize victims, relatives, and unsuspecting viewers, while serving, in this case, as a deliberate „display of power“ by a terrorist organization undermining the norms and ethical standards of the analogue era.

Twenty-First Century Challenges: Social Media Influence and the Erosion of Trust

The main actors in modern warfare are a mix of state and non-state entities, including regular armed forces, private security contractors, mercenaries, jihadist groups, warlords, and paramilitary units. In contrast, traditional wars were primarily fought between the regular armed forces of states.³ War correspondents operated from within military units or conflict zones, depending on print and broadcast outlets to convey information that underwent thorough editorial oversight and curation before reaching the public.⁴

The rise of social media has drastically transformed war reporting moving from an era in which selected war experts and correspondents were permitted to enter conflict zones to report to a time in which social media enables anyone to document what they witness first-hand. This results not only in a drastic increase in the number of actors involved but also brings the challenge of “non-experts” covering wars who lack the knowledge, professionalism, and emotional distance required to contextualize events. Basic journalistic standards such as fact-checking, impartiality, and proper provision of context risk being undermined.

This lack in professionalism results in a crisis of information governance with significant effects on journalism and the whole news sector as these developments push the professional news industry even further to release information in real time as events unfold. Immediacy therefore often takes precedence over accuracy.⁵ This dynamic became particularly evident in October 2023, when international media outlets initially reported large-scale casualties following what was described as an Israeli airstrike on the Al-Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza. By the time the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) presented evidence indicating that the explosion had in fact been caused by a misfired rocket launched by Islamic Jihad, several major global news organizations had already reproduced unverified claims originating from Hamas and publicly attributed responsibility to Israel.⁶⁷

The incident illustrates how misinformation can function as a political weapon, shaping public perception long before factual clarifications emerge. Its impact was substantial: the narrative triggered violent protests across numerous countries and contributed to the cancellation

of a planned summit between the President of the United States, Jordanian leadership, and the Palestinian Authority.⁸



Source: Berte Citak (via Unsplash)

This case may help explain why a survey commissioned by the German media magazine ZAPP and conducted by Infratest Dimap found that 48 percent of respondents expressed little to no confidence in German media coverage of the Hamas–Israel war.⁹ It is accompanied by a broader erosion of trust in public institutions and persistently low levels of media literacy which in turn provides fertile ground for the influence of social media platforms – according to the Reuters Institute, approximately one fifth of 18- to 24-year-olds rely primary on TikTok for news consumption.¹⁰¹¹¹² A study by the Stiftung Neue Verantwortung found that younger people in Germany often feel overwhelmed by the volume of information in the media, while at the same time demonstrating slightly higher levels of media literacy than older age groups.¹³

Media – both social platforms and traditional outlets – are significantly involved in the so-called “battle of narratives” in which actors strive to win over the “hearts and

minds” of their audience. The growing number of actors, all competing for control over the prevailing narrative, has intensified information warfare compared to phases in which traditional media were the primary sources of information. The media has become a constitutive element of war itself, rather than merely an observer and reporting instrument.¹⁴

The aftermath of October 7 has demonstrated that the information battlefield is just as significant as conventional battlefields. The framing of a conflict through language, imagery, and narrative emphasis is essential, as war reporting plays a pivotal role in shaping both public perception and policy responses. Especially a clear and responsible use of language is crucial in this context: The public service broadcaster of the United Kingdom BBC, for instance, has followed the editorial policy of not referring to Hamas as “terrorists,” arguing that doing so would compromise its commitment to neutrality and risk being perceived as taking sides.¹⁵ A questionable policy when taking into account that the UK and the EU among multiple others designate Hamas as a terrorist organization. In November 2025, the BBC’s Director General and the Head of News resigned following extensive public accusations, including allegations of insufficient neutrality in their coverage of the Hamas–Israel war.¹⁶

A particularly visible manifestation of extreme rhetoric on social media has been the proliferation of hashtags carrying violent and hateful messages. According to the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD), the number of antisemitic comments increased more than fiftyfold in the aftermath of the Hamas attacks.¹⁷

Analysis of Instagram activity shows an imbalance in the visibility of narratives. The hashtag #FreePalestine has accumulated around 5.6 million posts, while #IsraelUnderAttack totals 132,000 posts and #Freelsrael just 22,300 posts.¹⁸ This asymmetry in volume is reinforced by platform dynamics: higher posting frequency and stronger interaction rates drive algorithms to amplify pro-Palestinian content more prominently.

According to data from social-media intelligence firm Cyabra, approximately 40,000 fake accounts across Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and X disseminated hundreds of pro-Hamas posts per day in the immediate aftermath of October 7.¹⁹ These coordinated activities contributed to a rapid, large-scale spread of narratives aligned

with the interests of these actors, further distorting the information ecosystem. The combination of an increasing volume of misinformation and unprofessional news content circulating widely on social media platforms, alongside the uncertainty and limited competencies of consumers, contributes to declining trust in the media, reduced confidence in democratic institutions, and a broader societal polarization.

The Responsibility of Digital Platforms - The Digital Services Act as a Turning Point for Effective Content Moderation?

The role of social media also raises a central question: What responsibilities do platforms bear? And are tools like content moderation useful to combat hatred and disinformation? The current system, marked by a division of labor between automated tools and human moderators, faces persistent structural constraints. Platforms increasingly outsource moderation to low-wage countries such as the Philippines or Kenya, where people are working under precarious conditions confronted with content which they are often unable to adequately contextualize because they lack the necessary background knowledge, such as political-historical knowledge and cultural codes.²⁰

The Digital Services Act (DSA), an international legal framework in force across the EU since February 2024, establishes a unified regulatory framework designed to create a safer digital environment and safeguard the fundamental rights of all users in the EU. Platforms are required to remove illegal content and take proactive measures to minimize the risk of such content appearing, reflecting the principle that illegal offline content is equally illegal online. The DSA provides a comprehensive EU-wide framework for the detection, flagging and removal of illegal content, alongside stringent risk-assessment and mitigation obligations for platforms.²¹

Proceedings are currently underway against Meta in which the European Commission’s preliminary findings indicate that both TikTok and Meta have failed to meet key obligations under the DSA.²² If the Commission’s preliminary findings are upheld, both could face substantial financial penalties under the enforcement provisions of the Digital Services Act (DSA). These provisional findings underscore persistent gaps in compliance among major platforms and signal the potential for substantial regu-

latory action under the DSA's enforcement framework. But it will likely not be sufficient to regulate social media platforms alone, as consumers are driven by a general sense of being overwhelmed by the volume of information across multiple channels and by persistently low levels of media literacy. Effective governance, transparent algorithms and targeted digital literacy initiatives that address the differing needs of all age groups will be essential to ensuring that social media evolves not only as a vector of risk, but as a platform that reinforces democratic resilience and informed public discourse.

Strategic Communication in Times of War

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) are renowned for their military capabilities, particularly in air defense and cyberspace, making them one of the most efficient and technologically advanced armed forces in the world. Nevertheless, the IDF show weaknesses on the information battlefield due to institutional fragmentation and unclear lines of responsibility leading to a tendency to react too slowly.²³ However, there appears to be an awareness of this challenge. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, for instance, stated Israel was not only fighting Iran, Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, and groups in the West Bank, Syria, and Iraq, but also at an eighth front: the battle for truth.²⁴ Nevertheless this "eighth front" does not currently seem to be a core component of Israel's national security doctrine.

Unlike Israel, Hamas has invested heavily in the "battle for truth" recognizing the need to compensate for its other limitations. There are around 1,500 media operatives – twice the manpower of the IDF media division and an additional 1,000 "combat cameramen" embedded with fighters, equipped with GoPros and streaming equipment. This reflects an understanding that one cannot win the physical war while losing the information war.²⁵

In contrast, Israel's information and communication structures often operate in a fragmented manner. Both the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as the Israel Police, and elite security units such as the Yamam elite counterterrorism unit function at a bureaucratic pace rather than the speed required by social media dynamics. Moreover, without a central coordination hub, the efforts remain reactive and disjointed allowing Hamas's centralized propaganda apparatus to dominate the nar-

rative.²⁶ These different approaches underscore a core structural challenge in contemporary conflicts: whereas democratic states operate under binding legal, ethical and institutional constraints, non-state actors and authoritarian regimes are not bound to equivalent obligations. This asymmetry significantly shapes both the dynamics and outcomes of modern warfare.

Nevertheless, the Israeli government has begun implementing new strategic approaches. A central component of this effort is the "media war room" at the Foreign Ministry, a monitoring system launched in March 2025 to track real-time coverage and sentiment across global and social media platforms. The system operates on two levels: at the micro level, it identifies content containing major factual inaccuracies or lacking an Israeli perspective; at the macro level, it monitors broader narratives, how topics are framed and how much global attention they receive. This way, Israel's messaging strategy can be adopted accordingly.²⁷

Israel's communication response has been comparatively slow, largely due to the fragmented structure of the institutions involved and the inherent asymmetries of the conflict. According to Israeli officials, around 90% of the Israeli messaging continued to focus on domestic audiences and supporters²⁸, leaving broader international audiences both under-addressed and seemingly not targeted as a strategic priority. This is also reflected in the style of communications.

All these examples show that communication warfare has been professionalized in a way with which state actors can hardly compete. The pace and quality standards of governments cannot match the unconventional method of warfare a terrorist organization applies.

Al Jazeera and Information Control in the Hamas-Israel War

Over the past two years, one media actor has drawn particular attention for its coverage of the Hamas-Israel war and wider regional developments: Al Jazeera. The outlet exemplifies a seemingly trustworthy medium that, upon closer examination, raises significant questions about its credibility and underlying agenda.

Al Jazeera is Qatar's international news network, operating a global system of television stations and digital plat-

forms that produce news and commentary across multiple media channels. With approximately 70 offices worldwide, the network broadcasts to around 150 countries and claims an audience of about 430 million viewers.²⁹ The absence of impartial reporting consistent with professional journalistic standards becomes evident in Al Jazeera's choice of language. Hamas led attacks are being referred to as „resistance operations“ whereas Western „mainstream media“ is being accused of supporting expansionism and portraying a one-sided picture of events.³⁰

Leaked documents suggest that Hamas sought to establish a secure communication channel with Al Jazeera, enabling direct coordination between its offices in Doha and the group's leadership in Gaza. The alleged purpose was to facilitate tailored media coverage during emergencies and allow Hamas's military wing to issue real-time broadcasting instructions, including directives on what to air or suppress.³¹ Reports further indicate that Al Jazeera journalists were granted rare access to Hamas's underground tunnel network, while some correspondents affiliated with the outlet in Gaza were reportedly also serving as operatives within Hamas's military wing with a few allegedly participating in the October 7 attacks.³²

While Europe remained largely passive to this emerging news actor, both Israel and the Palestinian Authority took action. In May 2024, the Israeli cabinet unanimously decided to terminate Al Jazeera's operations in the country, citing national security concerns. This resulted in the immediate closure of the network's offices and the suspension of its broadcasts nationwide. In December 2024, the Palestinian Authority (PA) formally accused Al Jazeera of disseminating misleading reports and exacerbating internal divisions, prompting a ban on the network's operations in the West Bank. In January 2025, the PA imposed a temporary suspension of Al Jazeera's broadcasts across the territory, citing concerns over allegedly „inciting material.“³³ In May, the PA reversed the decision without providing specific reasons.³⁴

Al Jazeera exemplifies how highly emotionalised,

wide-reaching content can be disseminated simultaneously across a wide range of outlets worldwide and amplified through both traditional print media and social media channels.

The Avalanche of Antisemitism: The Spillover of Digital Hate

The growing prevalence of (Israel-related) antisemitism within the broader discourse surrounding the conflict spreads rapidly through the internet, social media and artificial intelligence (AI), transcending national and international boundaries.

This has tangible security implications. During the Hamas-Israel war, rising antisemitism worldwide has coincided with an increase in physical attacks on Jewish individuals, symbols and property.³⁵ In Germany alone, 2024, a total of 6,236 antisemitic offences were recorded, representing an increase of 136 percent compared to 2022 (2,641 offences), before the attack of Hamas on Israel.³⁶ This sharp rise underscores the escalating threat environment for Jewish people and the urgent need for stronger prevention, monitoring and response mechanisms across society.

The Jewish community is facing a historic challenge that remains deeply intertwined with the enduring question of the Jewish state's existence.³⁷ Antisemitism is continually repackaged and adapted to appeal to new generations and emerging socio-political contexts.

Today's era is marked by profound socio-political and economic instability, uncertainty, and recurring crises that have significantly undermined democratic systems and public trust in governance and political institutions. Historically, such systemic disruptions have fueled broad trends of autocratization, international conflict, and asymmetric warfare while simultaneously providing fertile grounds for the renewed social and political mobilization of antisemitic worldviews that seek to interpret these developments through conspiratorial lenses.³⁸

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