# War in Israel: Fighting Back Online

## A how-to document on fighting disinformation.

*A note of concern before reading the rest of this document: while it is important to never look away from the horrors being committed against Israel, it is critical to remember that social media is intentionally graphic and incendiary. Do not consume yourself with social media; remember to take breaks and also be sure to connect with people you care about offline.*

The amount of information against Israel can feel overwhelming. However, it has been proven that much of the most inflammatory content on the Internet is not human-generated and does not necessarily represent public opinion. Right now, disinformation about Israel and Hamas is spreading on social media. These are tactics of the war against Israel's legitimacy, are methods of dehumanizing the Jewish people, and are part of broader efforts to sow divisions in our society.

As the situation progresses and our emotions run high, it can be tempting to immediately comment on and/or share what we see online. But now, more than ever, it's important for us to take the time to carefully assess what we're reading and respond thoughtfully. With that in mind, here are some guidelines:

### Here are some messaging strategies to combat disinformation

#### Stick with the Facts

You're going to hear the same narratives you've heard for years. While we as professionals may know how to counter, our audiences most likely do not. And remember that this is an unprecedented situation. We should never feed into propaganda and we must use our online presence to educate and engage. **Make sure to only share verified content; if you're not sure, don't share it**. Please note that "verified" on Twitter/X no longer guarantees an account is an official source, or that the content of the tweet has been confirmed as true.

#### Avoid debunking one-for-one.

Resist the urge to immediately debunk or interact with disinformation. It is often the case that the people who share these falsehoods about the war want you to interact and try to correct their false information. But remember: Engaging with their content, even if it is to debunk or correct it,

lifts up the content in algorithms and inadvertently contributes to its spread. If you must post a rebuttal, it's better to share a screenshot of the offending content than to reshare it.

### Balancing Messaging

This is a technique that introduces skepticism around incorrect information. We recommend that you use this strategy sparingly, because engaging with harmful content will amplify it and make it more visible to our audiences. If you do use this strategy, your response should provide facts in a non-confrontational way. These kinds of messages should feel neutral; the goal of balancing messaging is to stop the fire, not fuel it.

### Inoculation Messaging

These are messages that help your social media audiences recognize disinformation before they encounter it, while providing them with factual information and counter arguments to use when they are confronted with disinformation.

### Debunking Messaging

Debunking messaging uses a "truth sandwich" strategy: State the fact clearly, warn your audience about the myth, discredit the disinformation, and reiterate the truth. This works because audiences tend to remember the first and last things they read or hear in a message.

### Make it Personal

Most often, those who are posting disinformation are not your target audience and you will not change the opinion of strangers. However, if your relatives, friends, or neighbors are posting inaccurate information you have an opportunity to engage on a personal level. Sharing your individual experience and the human impact is a powerful tool. A tactic of disinformation is to have just enough truth to make it difficult to refute. Countering false information with personal anecdotes can help.

## Common, inaccurate narratives - and how to respond

#### *"These are freedom fighters."*

- No, this is Hamas. Hamas is an Iran-backed terrorist organization designated as such by the United States and the European Union. Founded in 1987, Hamas's charter calls for the destruction of Israel.

- While some reports have speculated that Iran was involved in the planning and implementation of the attack, neither the Israeli nor U.S. governments have confirmed Iran's role at this time. In a tweet sharing a video of Israelis running for their lives, Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei called for "the Zionist regime" to be "eradicated."

### *"Hamas is just trying to help its people."*

- No. Hamas is a genocidal, radical, Islamic terrorist organization that is committed to the annihilation of the state of Israel and the Jewish people.
- They use their people as human shields - and their people are the ones who thus suffer the most. Since Hamas took control of Gaza in 2007 rather than use the hundreds of millions of dollars of aid given to build a vibrant Palestinian community, Hamas has used the money to build terror tunnels, to stockpile illegal munitions, and to provoke the Israeli army.
- Hamas has been proven to store weapons in mosques, hospitals, schools, and UN facilities. The organization has deliberately impeded progress towards establishing a two-state solution.
- Massacres and hostage-taking aren't humanitarian acts of service. They are war crimes.
- As President Joe Biden said: "Hamas does not stand for the Palestinian's people's right to dignity and self-determination. Its stated purpose is the annihilation of the State of Israel and the Jewish people."

### *"Israel deserves this after everything they've done to the Palestinians."*

- Victim-blaming is never justified. Hamas explicitly targets innocent civilians and is proud of its brutality - the rape, murder, and kidnapping of women, children and the elderly - and brazenly puts these images on social media to create fear.
- Hamas intentionally targeted civilians. In one case, a Hamas terrorist live-streamed the murder of a grandmother and posted it on her Facebook account.
- These actions are illegal under every international law of war.
- Israel has made numerous attempts to peacefully end the conflict over many decades and Palestinian leadership has continued to rebuke such offers, instead opting for an escalation of hostility towards Israel and Israelis.
- Hamas has worked to derail peace efforts through terrorism by opposing any steps that would allow Israel to exist in any form.
- Israel has historically and regularly supplied Gaza with food, water, and electricity. In 2021, Israel sent approximately 104,000 truckloads of supplies–goods, food, and medical

equipment–through the Kerem Shalom border crossing in Gaza, which was destroyed during the attack.
- About 20% of Israel's population identify as Arab or Palestinian Israelis. They are entitled to the same rights to security and protection from terror as Jewish citizens of Israel.

***"This is the same thing Israel has done to the Palestinians for 75 years"***

- False moral equivalency between Hamas terrorists and the Israeli Defense Forces is dangerous and disempowers the Jewish state from protecting its citizens, who are both Jewish and non-Jewish. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which predates the 1948 War of Independence, is a dispute that is about narrative as much as it is about the territory itself.
- Since the creation of the State of Israel, Israel has faced non-stop existential threats from surrounding countries and therefore has created the defense and deterrence capabilities necessary to defend her citizens. It has also proven, in the cases of Egypt and Jordan, that it is willing and able to create a peaceful resolution - including giving up land - in exchange for the end of hostilities.
- There has never been a moment of peace with Hamas. Furthermore, there are established systems and processes to resolve political and territorial disputes, which are not unique to Israel and the Palestinian territories.

***"Gaza is an open-air prison and it's Israel's fault because of the occupation/blockade."***

- Hamas has been in control of Gaza since Israel withdrew all civilian and military presence from Gaza in 2005 in the hopes of establishing peace with a Palestinian controlled territory. In exchange for disengaging from Gaza, militant factions, many of which are funded as Iran's terror proxies with the sole mission to destroy Israel, have continually terrorized Israeli communities.
- Hamas is responsible for the lack of investment in civilian infrastructure and has failed to build a better life for their people.
- Israel has established the necessary security infrastructure to prevent the illegal smuggling of weapons into and out of Gaza. Despite its best efforts, however, terrorists continue to hide weapons in humanitarian aid packages and to use building materials intended for hospitals and schools to build miles of subterranean terror tunnels into Israeli neighborhoods.

***"Palestinians have had way more people die - what happened in Israel is nothing in comparison."***

- Hamas and other terrorist leadership in Gaza cynically uses their own populations as human shields. The loss of every innocent life is tragic. The biggest impact of the ongoing conflict is the general Palestinian population living under the authoritarian rule of Hamas.
- Israel has taken great lengths to prevent innocent casualties, including canceling critical missions to prevent terror attacks, if there is intelligence that innocent people are in harm's way.
- Hamas and other terror groups store their weapons and command centers in Mosques, schools, hospitals, and UN buildings using their own civilians as human shields.

***"Israel should practice restraint"***

- In the days and weeks following the horrendous massacre committed on October 7, 2023, there will be much analysis to understand how such atrocities took place. In the meantime, Israel and the Israeli Defense Forces must do what is necessary to protect Israeli citizens and secure the Israeli borders.
- Until now, the strategy of deterrence rested on the assumption that Hamas was not interested in a full scale war, nor was it capable of it. Last weekend's events show that Hamas and its determination to humiliate, dehumanize, and destroy Israel requires the fullest response possible.

***"Palestinians have tried the non-violent path before and this is a natural reaction to the occupation."***

- Since 2005 *alone* more than 20,000 rockets have been fired into Israel. It has taken soldiers and civilians hostage, perpetrated violence across the border, and illegally smuggled weapons in and out of Gaza. Hamas has continually said that it has no interest in a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

***"Israel doesn't want peace - and they're committing genocide"***

- Israel has demonstrated through peace agreements, disengagement, shared security infrastructure (e.g. helping Egypt rid the Sinai of ISIS) and other agreements (e.g. water and electricity agreements with Jordan) that they will work with anyone in the region who will work with them.

***"Israel's response must be proportionate."***

- "Proportionality" is a term of legal significance. **It does not mean that each side must suffer the same number of casualties, or use the same tactics.**

- Under international law, it is illegal to intentionally target civilians with military force. However, international law recognizes that military actions directed against legitimate targets of strategic value sometimes result in civilian casualties. The doctrine of proportionality outlines the standard armed forces must consider when weighing military action.
- The doctrine of proportionality dictates that military action cannot be "excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated." Stated simply, this means that the balancing test to determine whether military action is "proportionate" is done in relation **to the threat being faced**. In this situation, it means **Israel must respond to the threat of Hamas' continued rule in Gaza**, which is an existential one for the safety and security of its civilians, Jewish and Arab alike.