

# Israel boosts funding to propagandize Americans


 By Harrison Berger  
 Journalist

**O P I N I O N**

Israel's cabinet last month approved and sent to the Knesset a 2026 state budget that sharply increases both military spending and financing for propaganda operations abroad. According to reporting by the Jerusalem Post, the latter funding will be directed toward a variety of projects including foreign media campaigns, digital messaging operations, and efforts to counter and censor criticism of Israel's US-backed genocide in Gaza. The proposed budget, quadruple last year's allocation, also encourages coordination between government ministries and outside contractors, or "civil society organizations," to disseminate Israeli propaganda abroad. It comes as Israel reportedly moves to renew and expand its memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the United States, extending it for up to 20 years rather than the traditional ten and likely securing at least \$4 billion annually from US taxpayers. Even as Israel's assault on Gaza slows in pace, its government continues to require uninterrupted US financing, weapons transfers, and diplomatic cover to sustain its occupation, prop up its US-taxpayer-dependent domestic defense industry, and prepare for future regional conflicts, including an openly telegraphed war with Iran.

Israel has hemorrhaged US public support after months of live-streamed mass killing in Gaza and growing international exposure of Israel's treatment of Christians and Muslims in its occupied territories. Yet because Israel remains structurally dependent on US political backing and taxpayer funds for its survival, the collapse of American public support represents an existential problem, one that Israeli leaders

hope to solve through a boosted propaganda budget.

"What we have to do," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told a group of US-based social media influencers-for-hire just six weeks before new MOU discussions were revealed, "is secure that part of the base of our support in the United States," which he said "is being challenged systematically." To "fight back," Netanyahu argued, Israel must win the information war on TikTok and Elon Musk-owned X. He praised TikTok's acquisition by pro-Israel billionaire Larry Ellison as "the most important purchase that is going on," one he said he "hope[s] will go through because it can be consequential." "We have to talk to Elon... he's a friend."

The expanded funding would further formalize an Israeli propaganda and censorship apparatus that already operates inside the United States and continues to expand through private contracts with foreign agents even as Israel's budget is pending final approval by the Knesset. Recent Foreign Agents Registration Act filings first reported by Nick Cleveland-Stout of the Quincy Institute and journalist Jack Poulson show that Clock Tower X LLC, a digital media firm run by former Trump campaign manager Brad Parscale, increased its contracts with the Israeli government from roughly \$6 million to \$9 million. A filing dated December 26, 2025, lists Israel's Foreign Ministry as the client, with the contract intermediated by the German branch of HAVAS Media. Those filings describe efforts to influence Americans across digital platforms, including attempts to shape outputs from artificial intelligence like ChatGPT by seeding it with content designed to produce pro-Israel responses, including about Gaza.

Ongoing initiatives also include Israeli government-sponsored trips for propaganda training, part of what Israeli officials describe as "public diplomacy efforts." These programs recruit American thought leaders from the US constituencies most important for Israel's long-term survival as a state: Christian Zionists, whose ideology is increasingly viewed as illegitimate and politically bankrupt by Christians around the world, and American college students, whose growing identification with Palestinians living under Israeli occupation has long been considered to be an "existential threat" by Israeli policymakers.

Last month, Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs brought to Jerusalem "over 1,000 pastors" for coordinated hasbara training, an influence operation convention promoted by prominent American Zionist evangelists such as US Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee and Rev. Johnnie Moore, who headed the so-called "Gaza Humanitarian Foundation." Speaking to the attendees,



President Donald Trump (back-3rd L) hosts a bilateral dinner for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, July 7, 2025, in the Blue Room.

● DANIEL TOROK/WHITE HOUSE

training, according to Israeli media, with i24NEWS describing the delegation as visiting "not just to tour but to prepare for the fight back at home." In an interview with Israeli television, Elijah Wiesel, the grandson of famed Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel—warned of rising campus opposition to Israel, labeling those free speech activities "antisemitism," while citing being called a "Judeo-Nazi" by another Jewish student at Yale. "My worst experiences with antisemitism have been from other Jews," Wiesel said, acknowledging that many of the campus protesters punished and censored by universities for so-called "antisemitism" are actually just Jews who do not have loyalty or affection for a foreign government.

The Israeli government and its lobby in the United States have made clear that their latest propaganda efforts are oriented toward manipulating long-term perception of Israeli behavior. In an appearance at the MirYam Institute's Israel Security Briefing, former CIA director Mike Pompeo was applauded for arguing that "we need to make sure" history books "don't write about the victims of Gaza."

It is unclear at the moment which exact programs the proposed hasbara budget seeks to finance in 2026. In previous years, "public diplomacy" funds have been used to finance NGOs like ISGAP and CyberWell which work to censor Americans on social media and lobby to discipline college campuses on behalf of Israel. Readers can safely assume we will see more of both.

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Israel's 2026 budget sharply increases funding for military spending and propaganda operations abroad. The government plans to expand media campaigns, digital messaging, and influence programs targeting US audiences, including social media and AI platforms.

Huckabee urged pastors to "go to their pulpits" and "push back" against what he described as a dangerous trend within evangelicism of questioning the state of Israel's role in Christian theology. Friends of Zion founder Mike Evans, a partner in the program, celebrated the historic nature of the initiative and outlined a goal to reach one million pastors and "100 million people worldwide." As CBN reported: This gathering is a prelude to a massive campaign planned for next year. Evans said, "We're launching in 2026 a global program to reach one million pastors and one million churches globally, to teach them a biblical worldview so they'll realize God's not canceling any promises to the Jewish people. And He's not canceling for the Christians, either."

A few weeks later, more than 80 "student leaders" from North America, part of the Israeli government funded "Hasbara Fellowship" program, traveled to Israel for coordinated propaganda

## Israel set to sell defense company stakes to offset war costs



A rocket is launched near residential buildings in an urban area in Israel, in this undated photograph. The projectile leaves a trail of smoke as it rises into the sky above the city skyline.

● AP

**A N A L Y S I S**

Israel plans to sell stakes in some of its largest weapons manufacturers as it seeks to raise revenue to offset a surge in defense spending from the past two years of conflict, senior government officials said.

Yali Rothenberg, the finance ministry's accountant general, told the FT that work had already begun on the privatization of Israel Aerospace Industries, whose products include the Arrow air defense system, missiles and drones.

It is also examining the possibility of privatizing Rafael Advanced Defense Systems, which manufactures Israel's Iron Dome and David's Sling air defense systems. Rothenberg said that in light

of "the additional resources required for defense", the government was considering "the partial privatization of certain defense-related assets".

However, Rothenberg and Gil Pinchas, who spoke to the FT shortly before he stepped down as chief financial adviser to the Israeli military and defense ministry this month, cautioned that privatizing Rafael would be more complicated.

The finance ministry estimates the direct security cost of the two years of conflict triggered by Hamas's attack on October 7, 2023, to be \$62 billion, a figure that excludes the impact on the economy.

Israel's defense budget soared to 8.3% of GDP in 2024, double the figure from two years earlier, as the country fought conflicts

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Israel plans to sell stakes in major defense companies, including Israel Aerospace Industries, to raise funds and offset soaring costs from two years of conflict. The defense budget jumped to 8.3% of GDP in 2024, while exports and profits for these firms also hit record levels.