

Israel Student Union Set Up “War Room” to Sell Gaza Massacre on Facebook

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This article was published on July 14, 2014. The death toll in Gaza as of today, July 23, 2014, reaches 678 according to [Al-Akhbar](#).

Students at the IDC Herzliya “war room,” seen here in a screenshot, focus on posting propaganda justifying Israel’s attack on Gaza on Facebook.

As the death toll from Israel’s savage bombardment of Gaza continues to climb, Israel has once again turned to students to sell the slaughter online.

“Although they haven’t been called up to the army yet, they’ve decided to enlist in a civilian mission that is no less important – Israeli propaganda [hasbara],” [Ynet’s Hebrew edition reported](#) about a massive initiative organized by the Israeli student union branch at the [Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya](#) (IDC Herzliya), a prestigious private university.

Hasbara war room

“[Hasbara](#),” literally “explaining,” is the term used in Israel for government propaganda aimed at overseas audiences.

“The goal is to deliver a very clear message to people abroad – Israel has the right to defend itself,” Lidor Bar David told [Ynet](#).

Bar David, a student, and one of the organizers of the “war room,” adds, “We want people abroad who don’t know our reality to understand exactly what is going on here.”

(Update: In a [15 July report](#), which also links to this post, *The New York Times* notes that previously “Bar David was a captain in the Israel Defense Forces, serving in the office of the military spokesman’s unit.”)

At least 168 Palestinians have been killed since Israel massively escalated its attack on Gaza on 7 July (as of July 23, the death toll reaches 678, GR Editor). Eighty percent of the fatalities are civilians, [according to the United Nations](#).

Thirty-six Palestinian children have been killed and more than 1,200 people have been injured. Thousands are fleeing homes fearing escalating Israeli attacks which have so far destroyed or severely damaged 940 homes, as well as numerous mosques, schools, businesses and charities.

A video accompanying the *Ynet* report shows rows of students beavering away at computers in a hall with a sign on its door saying “Advocacy Room” in English. In Hebrew, it says “Hasbara war room.”

While *Ynet* does not reveal specific government ties to this initiative, the [National Union of Israeli Students](#), of which the IDC Herzliya student union is an [affiliate](#), has a history of working on government-funded propaganda schemes, where students are recruited as the country’s “[pretty face](#).”

“Organized lying”

Last year a “covert” Israeli government initiative [came to light](#) which planned to pay students for spreading propaganda online.

“The whole point of such efforts is to look like they are unofficial, just every day people chatting online,” Israel expert Dena Shunra told *The Electronic Intifada*.

“But in fact, these are campaigns of organized lying, orchestrated with government-approved talking points and crowdsourced volunteers and stipend recipients,” Shunra added.

According to *Ynet*, “The war room was opened in the afternoon of the first day of Operation Protective Edge,” one week ago, by the IDC Herzliya student union, and currently has more than 400 volunteers active in it, all students at the institution.



The IDC Herzliya “war room,” seen in a screenshot from *Ynet* video, is a continuation of earlier propaganda efforts.

Working in 30 languages, the students working this comment far target online forums including so called “anti-Israel” pages on Facebook and comments sections of online media.

Tomer Amsalem, a second-year year psychology student, acts as one of the war room’s graphic designers.

“In one of our graphics we show the treatment that members of [Hamas leader] Ismail Haniyeh’s and Abu Mazen’s [Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas] families received in Israel, to show we’re even humanitarian to the families of the Palestinian leaders,” he told *Ynet*.

“In another graphic we show the trauma of the children living around Gaza, which is expressed in drawings of Qassams [rockets]. Another example is a series of cities around the world, being attacked. For example, Berlin – we wrote in German ‘What would you do?’ with a background of Berlin being attacked,” Amsalem added.

Amsalem is quoted as saying that he sees his work in the “war room” as a civilian equivalent to being called up for military reserves.

Inbal Deutsch, another psychology student who moved to Israel four years ago, responds to comments. She focuses on misattributed photos – photos occasionally circulated online that

show scenes that are either not current or not from Gaza. Israel propagandists likely hope that by debunking such pictures they can sow doubt about all too common real pictures of atrocities currently being committed in Gaza.

Focus on Facebook



Students working the “Hasbara war room” at IDC Herzliya, seen in a screenshot from a Ynet video, see their role as a civilian equivalent of military service.

Yarden Ben Yosef, chair of the IDC student union, is described as the person who initiated the war room.

“Yesterday we managed to pull down a whole Facebook page that incited against Israel and called for the killing of Jews,” Ben Yosef claimed.

“It had 120,000 followers and Facebook took it down after a lot of activity on our part,” Ben Yosef said.

If true, that is in marked contrast to Facebook’s total inaction, despite complaints, to control the pervasive, raging incitement to racism and violence by [Israelis on Facebook](#) who support the slaughter of Palestinians.

Student role in government propaganda

Bar David is quoted as saying that “the war room was founded as a continuation from Operation Pillar of Cloud,” Israel’s November 2012 assault on Gaza that killed more than 170 people, again overwhelmingly civilians.

Indeed, the effort to [recruit students into government propaganda](#) has a well-documented history, as The Electronic Intifada has reported:

- [Head of Israel’s “covert” social media program suspended over anti-Japanese Facebook posts](#) (15 August 2013)
- [“Hasbara” courses at Israeli universities exposed in new report](#) (15 July 2013)
- [Israel’s “pretty face”: How National Union of Israeli Students does government’s propaganda dirty work](#) (5 January 2012)
- [Israeli students to get \\$2,000 to spread state propaganda on Facebook](#) (4 January 2012)

With thanks to Dena Shunra for research and translation.

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