# Microsoft engineer’s Gaza protest exposes rising tech worker activism over military ties



At the Microsoft Build 2025 conference, a significant disruption highlighted deepening tensions within the tech industry regarding ethical practices and corporate responsibility. During a keynote speech by CEO Satya Nadella, Joe Lopez, an engineer from Microsoft’s cloud hardware team, interrupted the proceedings with a fervent call for justice—"Free Palestine." This moment crystallised grievances over the company's alleged role in facilitating military actions in Gaza, igniting conversations about the responsibilities of tech corporations in global conflicts.

Lopez's protest is emblematic of a growing movement among tech workers who are increasingly vocal about their employers' business practices, particularly when they intersect with ethical concerns. The campaign ‘No Azure for Apartheid,’ which advocates for heightened transparency and accountability regarding technology's role in military operations, underscores a shift in employee activism within major firms. This is not an isolated incident; it follows a series of protests demanding that tech giants acknowledge their potentially harmful impacts on human rights.

Microsoft maintains that there is no evidence directly linking its Azure services to civilian casualties in Gaza. The company claims that thorough internal reviews have found no connection between its cloud technology and harm inflicted on non-combatants. Yet, the internal assessments have faced scrutiny, with critics arguing that they may lack sufficient transparency and meaningful engagement with the allegations made by protestors.

The incident highlights broader concerns within the tech industry about its entanglement with military contracts. Microsoft's Azure Government Cloud, for instance, has engaged in extensive contracts with defence and intelligence agencies, including the U.S. Department of Defense. These relationships complicate Microsoft’s narrative as a neutral service provider, especially as its services support critical infrastructures across various nations, including regions currently embroiled in conflict.

Moreover, following an Associated Press investigation, Microsoft confirmed that it provided the Israeli military with advanced AI and cloud services during the Gaza conflict, purportedly to assist in operations like locating hostages. While the company asserts adherence to an AI Code of Conduct designed to prevent unlawful harm, critics have pointed out the inherent risks and ethical dilemmas posed by such collaborations. Notably, the identities of those conducting these internal reviews remain undisclosed, raising questions about the adequacy of oversight in such contexts.

The protests at Microsoft resonate with ongoing activism within the tech sector, as employees increasingly push back against policies that they perceive as aligned with unethical practices. For instance, recent demonstrations at Microsoft and other giants like Google and Amazon have highlighted the discomfort among workers regarding their companies' roles in international conflicts, particularly in relation to military contracts.

Amidst these pressures, Microsoft’s leadership has largely refrained from engaging in public disputes with protestors. Instead, they continue to champion their vision of innovation and digital collaboration, as exemplified by their focus on generative AI. However, the recent upheaval suggests that the discourse surrounding corporate accountability and ethical technology deployment will not be easily dismissed.

The global tech landscape is facing crucial questions about oversight and moral custodianship. The interactions between technology firms and military entities challenge the assumption that technology can remain apolitical. As the dialogue evolves, it becomes increasingly clear that the consequences of corporate decisions extend far beyond the balance sheets, influencing societal structures and human rights globally.

The unfolding situation poses critical implications not only for Microsoft but for the tech industry as a whole. There is a burgeoning trend of activism among tech workers that may lead to significant changes in how tech firms approach their relationships with governments and military organisations. The dialogue surrounding these issues won’t just shape the reputation of companies like Microsoft, but it will fundamentally alter how technology is positioned in the realm of global ethics and governance.

With calls for transparency and ethical oversight growing louder, it is apparent that the future of technology will be shaped not only by advancements in code and capability but also by the courage of those within the industry to challenge uncomfortable truths and demand accountability from leadership.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1: [[1]](https://www.coletivometranca.com.br/en/news_en/unseen-tensions-erupt-on-techs-biggest-stage-what-drove-a-microsoft-engineer-to-challenge-satya-nadella/65190/)
2. Paragraph 2: [[1]](https://www.coletivometranca.com.br/en/news_en/unseen-tensions-erupt-on-techs-biggest-stage-what-drove-a-microsoft-engineer-to-challenge-satya-nadella/65190/)
3. Paragraph 3: [[1]](https://www.coletivometranca.com.br/en/news_en/unseen-tensions-erupt-on-techs-biggest-stage-what-drove-a-microsoft-engineer-to-challenge-satya-nadella/65190/)
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5. Paragraph 5: [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/20b2adb438b39ee9cb6eb2f52c1ae44a), [[3]](https://apnews.com/article/90541d4130d4900c719d34ebcd67179d)
6. Paragraph 6: [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/20b2adb438b39ee9cb6eb2f52c1ae44a), [[4]](https://www.windowscentral.com/microsoft/microsoft-50th-anniversary-copilot-event-interrupted-by-protester)
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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.coletivometranca.com.br/en/news_en/unseen-tensions-erupt-on-techs-biggest-stage-what-drove-a-microsoft-engineer-to-challenge-satya-nadella/65190/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://apnews.com/article/20b2adb438b39ee9cb6eb2f52c1ae44a> - Microsoft has confirmed providing advanced AI and cloud services, including its Azure platform, to the Israeli military during the Gaza conflict, primarily to support efforts such as locating hostages. The company, however, asserted that there is no evidence its technologies were used to harm civilians in Gaza. This admission follows an AP investigation that revealed a sharp increase in military use of commercial AI tools post-Hamas' October 2023 attack. Microsoft's internal review, triggered by employee and media concerns, remains undisclosed, including the identity of the external firm involved. The company emphasized that the Israeli military is subject to its AI Code of Conduct and Acceptable Use Policy, which forbid unlawful harm. Critics, including rights organizations and Microsoft employees, questioned the transparency and ethical implications of such collaborations, pointing out the deadly consequences of Israeli operations, some of which resulted in significant Palestinian civilian casualties. Despite outlining some principles and oversight, Microsoft admitted limited visibility into the actual use of its products. This situation exemplifies the complexities of commercial tech use in modern warfare and the responsibilities of private companies in global conflicts.
3. <https://apnews.com/article/90541d4130d4900c719d34ebcd67179d> - Cinco empleados de Microsoft fueron expulsados de una reunión con el CEO de la empresa, Satya Nadella, por protestar contra los contratos que proporcionan servicios de inteligencia artificial y computación en la nube al ejército israelí. La protesta sigue a una investigación que reveló el uso de modelos de IA de Microsoft y OpenAI como parte de un programa militar israelí para seleccionar objetivos de bombardeos, incluido un ataque aéreo erróneo en 2023 que mató a tres niñas y su abuela. Los empleados mostraron camisetas con el mensaje "¿Nuestro código mata niños, Satya?" Nadella no reconoció a los manifestantes y continuó con su presentación. Microsoft aseguró que proporciona vías para que todas las voces sean escuchadas sin causar interrupciones comerciales. La compañía no respondió si los empleados enfrentarían acciones disciplinarias y previamente despidió a dos trabajadores por organizar una vigilia no autorizada para refugiados palestinos. Los empleados han expresado preocupaciones sobre los servicios prestados al ejército israelí y cuestionan la coherencia con los principios de derechos humanos declarados por Microsoft.
4. <https://www.windowscentral.com/microsoft/microsoft-50th-anniversary-copilot-event-interrupted-by-protester> - During Microsoft's 50th Anniversary Copilot Event, an employee, Ibtihal Aboussad, disrupted the live stream to protest the company's alleged involvement in the Israeli military's operations in Palestine. Aboussad, a software engineer with Microsoft’s AI Platform, accused Microsoft of complicity in what she described as the genocide of Palestinians, citing the use of Microsoft AI and cloud services by the Israeli military for surveillance and targeted attacks. Her statements referenced data from reports and leaked documents indicating a $133 million Microsoft contract with Israel’s Ministry of Defense and the use of Microsoft Azure in supporting Israeli intelligence and targeting systems. Aboussad detailed experiences of suppression and retaliation faced by Arab, Palestinian, and Muslim employees at Microsoft who raised similar concerns. She sent a staff-wide email explaining her protest and urging colleagues to take action by signing petitions and pressuring leadership to end these contracts. Microsoft AI CEO Mustafa Suleyman acknowledged the protest but did not address the claims directly. The protest gained traction online, resulting in the event’s live stream being made private and wider media coverage highlighting ongoing concerns over the ethical implications of Microsoft's AI partnerships. This remains a developing story pending Microsoft's official response.
5. <https://apnews.com/article/c5b3715fa1800450b8d0f639b492495e> - Two Microsoft employees, Ibtihal Aboussad and Vaniya Agrawal, were fired following a protest during the company's 50th anniversary event, criticizing Microsoft's AI technology support to the Israeli military. The protest disrupted a live-streamed presentation by Microsoft AI CEO Mustafa Suleyman at the Redmond, Washington campus. Aboussad confronted Suleyman on stage, accusing Microsoft of enabling violence in the Middle East and threw a keffiyeh scarf, a Palestinian solidarity symbol, before being escorted out. Agrawal disrupted another part of the event and had her resignation, originally effective five days later, expedited. Microsoft cited Aboussad for misconduct aimed at causing disruption and insisted that employees have internal channels to express concerns respectfully. The protest was backed by the activist group No Azure for Apartheid. Earlier in 2025, the Associated Press reported that Microsoft's AI, used by Israel, may have contributed to controversial military actions, including civilian casualties. This incident reflects growing employee resistance in tech companies—similar to previous protests at Google—over contracts with the Israeli government.
6. <https://www.wsls.com/business/2025/04/07/microsoft-workers-say-theyve-been-fired-after-50th-anniversary-protest-over-israel-contract/> - “You claim that you care about using AI for good but Microsoft sells AI weapons to the Israeli military," Aboussad shouted at Microsoft AI CEO Mustafa Suleyman. "Fifty-thousand people have died and Microsoft powers this genocide in our region.” The protest forced Suleyman to pause his talk while it was being livestreamed from Microsoft's campus in Redmond, Washington. Among the participants at the 50th anniversary of Microsoft's founding were co-founder Bill Gates and former CEO Steve Ballmer. Microsoft said Suleyman calmly tried to de-escalate the situation. “Thank you for your protest, I hear you,” he said. Aboussad continued, shouting that Suleyman and “all of Microsoft” had blood on their hands. She also threw onto the stage a keffiyeh scarf, which has become a symbol of support for Palestinian people, before being escorted out of the event. A second protester, Microsoft employee Vaniya Agrawal, interrupted another part of the event. Aboussad, based at Microsoft's Canadian headquarters in Toronto, was invited on Monday to a call with a human resources representative at which she was told she was being fired immediately, according to the advocacy group No Azure for Apartheid, which has protested the sale of Microsoft’s Azure cloud computing platform to Israel.
7. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/relationships/work/pro-palestinian-protest-why-bill-gates-satya-nadella-bosses-were-criticised-at-microsofts-50th-anniversary-event/articleshow/120006246.cms> - The protest started during Suleyman’s presentation about product updates and Microsoft’s long-term vision for its AI assistant, Copilot. Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates, former CEO Steve Ballmer, and current CEO Satya Nadella were seated in the audience when the protest happened. A Microsoft employee, Ibtihal Aboussad, interrupted the speech by shouting, “Mustafa, shame on you,” before walking toward the stage. Suleyman briefly paused as she continued: “You claim to care about using AI for good, but Microsoft sells AI weapons to the Israeli military. Fifty thousand people have died, and Microsoft powers this genocide in our region.”