# Microsoft employees protest AI’s role in Israeli military amid Gaza conflict



At the recent Microsoft Build developer conference in Seattle, a significant disruption occurred as software engineer Joe Lopez voiced his opposition to the company's involvement with Israeli military operations during the ongoing Gaza conflict. His protest, which took place during CEO Satya Nadella’s keynote speech, marked not only an individual act of dissent but also highlighted a growing wave of internal unrest among Microsoft employees regarding ethical concerns over the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in warfare.

Lopez's actions were part of a broader movement among Microsoft staff. He subsequently sent a company-wide email questioning the accuracy of Microsoft's statements about its Azure cloud platform, which the company has acknowledged supports the Israeli military. Microsoft claims that while it provides AI services to Israel, there is no evidence to suggest these technologies were used to harm individuals in Gaza. However, this assertion has been met with scepticism, particularly from the advocacy group No Azure for Apartheid, which includes both current and former employees. They reported that Lopez received a termination notice under dubious circumstances, claiming Microsoft blocked internal communications that included terms like 'Palestine' and 'Gaza.'

The implications of Microsoft's technology in military contexts have been scrutinised intensively. An investigation revealed a sharp increase in the use of AI tools by Israeli forces, particularly following the Hamas attacks in October 2023. According to Microsoft, its Azure platform has been employed to enhance military operations, primarily to assist in locating hostages. Critics have pointed out that despite Microsoft’s adherence to its own AI Code of Conduct—which ostensibly prohibits unlawful harm—there remain significant ethical concerns regarding the real-world application and accountability of these technologies.

During this period of unrest, another employee, Ibtihal Aboussad, also staged a protest at a separate Microsoft event, accusing the company of complicity in human rights abuses. Her opposition underscored the contention that Microsoft’s AI tools facilitate military actions that could lead to civilian casualties. She referenced Microsoft's multi-million dollar contracts with Israeli military agencies and implored her colleagues to advocate for the cessation of such ties. Aboussad’s actions gained traction online, as protests continued to disrupt Microsoft events, illustrating a hunger for accountability and ethical standards within the tech giant.

While Microsoft stated its commitment to allowing employee voices to be heard, the repercussions of dissent within its ranks remain unclear. The incidents involving Lopez and Aboussad reflect not only individual acts of courage but also a collective distress regarding the company’s business practices amid global conflicts. The protests herald a growing movement within tech companies to scrutinise how their innovations are used in warfare, particularly in light of escalating civilian casualties in Gaza, where reports suggest over 50,000 Palestinians have died since the conflict reignited.

As the situation evolves, Microsoft faces mounting pressure to transparently address these ethical dilemmas and clarify the extent of its military collaborations. The ongoing dialogues within and outside the company reveal deeper questions about the responsibilities of technology firms in ensuring their products are not complicit in human rights violations. With a global spotlight on the ramifications of AI use in warfare, the actions of employees like Lopez and Aboussad may be the catalyst needed for change within not just Microsoft but the tech industry at large.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1: [[1]](https://www.ocregister.com/2025/05/22/microsoft-build-protest/), [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/a395ac137b74002886b2ad727b5ae5c2)
2. Paragraph 2: [[3]](https://apnews.com/article/20b2adb438b39ee9cb6eb2f52c1ae44a), [[4]](https://apnews.com/article/430f6f15aab420806163558732726ad9)
3. Paragraph 3: [[5]](https://www.windowscentral.com/microsoft/microsoft-50th-anniversary-copilot-event-interrupted-by-protester), [[6]](https://www.pcgamer.com/software/ai/microsoft-employee-escorted-out-of-50th-anniversary-event-after-protesting-sales-to-israel-you-have-blood-on-your-hands-all-of-microsoft-has-blood-on-its-hands/)
4. Paragraph 4: [[7]](https://apnews.com/article/737bc17af7b03e98c29cec4e15d0f108)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.ocregister.com/2025/05/22/microsoft-build-protest/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://apnews.com/article/a395ac137b74002886b2ad727b5ae5c2> - At the Microsoft Build developer conference in Seattle, software engineer Joe Lopez was fired after publicly protesting the company's involvement in supplying AI technology to the Israeli military during the ongoing Gaza conflict. Lopez interrupted CEO Satya Nadella's opening speech and later sent a companywide email challenging Microsoft's statements about its Azure cloud platform's use in Gaza. His protest was the first of multiple pro-Palestinian disruptions during the four-day event, which included interruptions of other executive talks and demonstrations outside the venue. Microsoft acknowledged providing AI services to the Israeli military but denied that its technology was used to harm individuals in Gaza. The advocacy group No Azure for Apartheid, comprised of current and former employees, reported that Lopez received a termination notice he could not access and claimed Microsoft blocked internal communication using words like 'Palestine' and 'Gaza.' Microsoft has not responded to media inquiries regarding its handling of the protests.
3. <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.
4. <https://apnews.com/article/430f6f15aab420806163558732726ad9> - U.S. tech giants, such as Microsoft and OpenAI, have provided Israel with advanced AI and cloud computing services, significantly enhancing its military operations in Gaza and Lebanon. This has led to faster tracking and targeting of alleged militants, but also a high number of civilian casualties. An Associated Press investigation highlighted the extensive use of AI in processing intelligence and surveillance data to pinpoint targets. The reliance on U.S. tech services like Microsoft Azure spiked after a Hamas attack in 2023, prompting ethical concerns about the use of commercial AI in warfare. Additionally, companies like Google, Amazon, and Palantir have contributed to military initiatives, raising questions about the role of technology in warfare and its potential misuse. Although aimed at increasing accuracy, AI systems pose risks due to possible errors in data and translations.
5. <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.
6. <https://www.pcgamer.com/software/ai/microsoft-employee-escorted-out-of-50th-anniversary-event-after-protesting-sales-to-israel-you-have-blood-on-your-hands-all-of-microsoft-has-blood-on-its-hands/> - At Microsoft's 50th anniversary event, employee Ibtihal Aboussad disrupted a speech by AI CEO Mustafa Suleyman, protesting Microsoft's sales of AI technology to the Israeli military. Amid allegations that Microsoft's tools are being used in the Gaza conflict, Aboussad accused the company of aiding genocide and being complicit in human rights abuses. She stated her moral obligation to speak out after learning about the use of Microsoft’s AI for military purposes, particularly by Israel’s Ministry of Defense, the company's second-largest military client. Aboussad, a software engineer at Microsoft’s AI division, criticized the company for silencing dissent and mentioned the firing of two employees for holding a vigil. She urged colleagues to support the No Azure for Apartheid petition and end the Israeli military contracts. A second protest followed from another employee, Vaniya Agrawal, during an event with Microsoft leaders Satya Nadella, Steve Ballmer, and Bill Gates. Microsoft emphasized its commitment to allowing voices to be heard without disrupting business. However, based on past firings, Aboussad and Agrawal may face repercussions. The incident reflects growing internal dissent at Microsoft over its involvement in global military conflicts, especially in Gaza, where over 50,000 Palestinians are estimated to have died since October 2023.
7. <https://apnews.com/article/737bc17af7b03e98c29cec4e15d0f108> - Israel's military has been leveraging AI technology from US companies such as Microsoft and OpenAI to increase efficiency in identifying and striking targets in Gaza and Lebanon. This rapid advancement has significantly enhanced Israel’s ability to act swiftly against alleged militants. However, the use of commercial AI models in war, originally developed for non-military purposes, raises serious concerns about the ethical implications and the increase in civilian casualties. An AP investigation revealed how Israel’s dependence on AI systems, particularly for sorting through surveillance and communication data, surged following a Hamas attack in 2023. Despite AI's potential to improve target accuracy, errors stemming from incorrect data and flawed algorithms have led to wrongful deaths, such as the tragic misidentification incident that killed three young girls in Lebanon. As US tech firms, including Google and Amazon, continue to support these military operations, some employees have protested, raising ethical concerns about the role of AI in warfare and its potential misuse.