# Microsoft engineer’s Gaza protest exposes rising ethical tensions at Build 2025



The recent Microsoft Build 2025 conference in Seattle became more than just a platform for innovation when a protest erupted, throwing the spotlight on the ethical dilemmas facing the tech giant. As CEO Satya Nadella demonstrated the latest advancements, the voice of Joe Lopez, a Microsoft engineer, pierced the air with a powerful, urgent call for justice: “Free Palestine.” This unexpected disruption highlighted rising tensions within the company regarding its involvement in military operations, particularly in Gaza.

Lopez’s protest is emblematic of a broader trend of tech worker activism, which has gained momentum in recent months. Among the major movements is ‘No Azure for Apartheid,’ a campaign that demands transparency and ethical accountability from companies like Microsoft regarding their cloud services. Activists argue that such technologies, particularly through Azure, serve as “digital infrastructure for destruction,” enabling military actions that threaten civilian lives. Microsoft has faced escalating scrutiny in light of allegations that its AI and cloud services have been utilised by the Israeli military amid ongoing conflicts.

Despite these allegations, Microsoft has consistently denied any direct link between its services and civilian harm. The company asserts that its internal reviews found no evidence of its technologies being employed to result in civilian casualties. However, critics remain sceptical, arguing that these internal assessments lack transparency and are insufficiently rigorous. A report from the Associated Press reveals that Microsoft has confirmed providing advanced AI and cloud services to the Israeli military, though it insists these services support operational efforts unrelated to civilian targeting.

The ethical implications of cloud computing and AI partnerships have sparked debates within the industry, raising questions about the responsibilities tech companies bear in global conflicts. This incident at Build 2025 is not an isolated occurrence; it follows a series of protests that have included prominent figures within the company, reflecting a growing discontent with the perceived complicity of major tech firms in military operations. For instance, other Microsoft employees have staged protests, donning shirts emblazoned with the question, “Does our code kill children?” echoing a sentiment of moral obligation.

Furthermore, the financial dimension of Microsoft’s dealings cannot be overlooked. The Azure Government Cloud supports several significant military contracts, including those with U.S. defence and intelligence agencies. These arrangements complicate Microsoft’s narrative as a neutral service provider and demonstrate how intertwined corporate interests can be with military actions. The company’s partnership with global governments raises questions about the ethical ramifications of such collaborations—particularly when military and civilian needs collide.

In the wake of this protest, the incident has catalysed further discussions among employees about their roles in shaping company ethics. Over 1,000 Microsoft employees previously petitioned leadership, demanding a review of the potential ethical impacts of government and military contracts. The challenges posed by such activism are not unique to Microsoft; similar movements have orchestrated protests and walkouts at companies like Google and Amazon, indicating an industry-wide reckoning with the ethical implications of tech’s involvement in warfare.

As the tech landscape evolves, the protests at Microsoft are a clear signal that technology’s role in society is an urgent discussion, one that cannot be reduced to mere contracts or codes. Employees are increasingly vocalising their concerns, driving home the message that technology is never neutral and highlighting the imperative for ethics in tech applications. The future of Microsoft—and indeed other tech giants—lies not only in advancing capabilities but in recognising the societal impacts of their innovations and responding to the calls for accountability that resonate within their workforce.

Given this heightened awareness, the implications of these protests extend well beyond the conference stage. They beckon a new era of corporate responsibility, where tech workers and consumers alike demand greater transparency regarding how technology is wielded in contexts that can have devastating consequences. In this complicated interplay of innovation, ethics, and social responsibility, the stakes have never been higher—for companies, employees, and the global community they serve.

**Reference Map**

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

## Bibliography

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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://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.
6. <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.
7. <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/microsoft-ai-ceos-remarks-interrupted-by-pro-palestinian-protester-2025-04-05/> - During Microsoft's 50th anniversary celebration in Redmond, Washington, the company's AI CEO Mustafa Suleyman was interrupted by employee Ibtihal Aboussad, who protested Microsoft's alleged role in supporting Israeli military actions through its AI technology. Aboussad accused the company of profiting from war and using AI in acts of genocide. Suleyman acknowledged the protest before the employee was escorted out. The incident relates to an earlier Associated Press investigation revealing that AI tools developed by Microsoft and OpenAI were used by the Israeli military to select bombing targets during conflicts in Gaza and Lebanon. As violence escalated following Hamas’ October 2023 attack on Israel, which resulted in 1,200 Israeli deaths and 250 hostages taken, Israel launched a counteroffensive in Gaza that has since caused over 50,000 Palestinian deaths, massive displacement, and a humanitarian crisis, according to Gazan officials. Accusations of genocide and war crimes have followed, which Israel denies. Microsoft stated it supports free expression through proper channels and confirmed that Aboussad and another protester lost access to their work accounts after the incident.