# Microsoft employees protest company’s AI support for Israeli military amid Gaza conflict



Microsoft has found itself at the centre of controversy following the firing of employee Joe Lopez, who disrupted CEO Satya Nadella's keynote speech during the recent Microsoft Build developer conference in Seattle. Lopez's protest centred on the company's engagement with the Israeli military, particularly regarding the use of AI and cloud technologies amid the ongoing conflict in Gaza. His actions elicited widespread attention, marking a significant moment of internal dissent within one of the world's largest technology firms.

According to reports, Lopez challenged Microsoft's assertions about its Azure platform, which the company acknowledged has been utilised by the Israeli military amidst the ongoing conflict. While Microsoft claimed that it had not found any evidence implicating its technology in harming civilians, critics argue that the mere provision of such technologies raises profound ethical concerns. In the wake of these revelations, the advocacy group No Azure for Apartheid, composed of current and former Microsoft employees, highlighted ongoing efforts to address what they describe as the moral implications of the company’s partnerships.

The backdrop of this protest is crucial. Since the attack by Hamas in October 2023, there has been a notable increase in the military use of commercial AI tools, including those provided by Microsoft. An investigation by the Associated Press revealed that U.S. technology firms have substantially bolstered Israel's military operations, leading to both enhanced targeting capabilities and increasing civilian casualties in Gaza. Despite Microsoft's public statements emphasising ethical guidelines, the lack of transparency about how its products are used in real-world scenarios has drawn scepticism from rights groups and the public alike.

The situation escalated during the four-day event, which saw not only Lopez but other Microsoft employees voicing similar protests. Notably, Ibtihal Aboussad, another employee, interrupted a speech by AI CEO Mustafa Suleyman during the company’s 50th anniversary event, accusing Microsoft of complicity in violence and human rights abuses. These incidents indicate a rising tide of internal opposition, with employees feeling compelled to speak out against what they perceive as unethical practices.

Critics have pointed out that Microsoft's claims of maintaining strict ethical norms through its AI Code of Conduct and Acceptable Use Policy ring hollow in light of the growing body count in Gaza. Rights organisations have urged tech companies to acknowledge their role in facilitating violence through technology. As the number of civilian deaths in Gaza surpasses 50,000 since the conflict escalated, the ethical ramifications of using AI in warfare become increasingly urgent.

Moreover, Microsoft's recent partnerships, such as the one with Elon Musk's AI startup xAI, further complicate its public relations in this context. Musk, who spoke at the conference via pre-recorded message, did not address the surrounding controversies. Instead, he announced that his company’s Grok chatbot would be hosted on Microsoft’s Azure platform, which has already faced scrutiny for its role in military operations.

This ongoing saga raises essential questions about the accountability of tech companies in military contexts and the ethical responsibilities inherent in developing technologies with potential warfare applications. The internal protests at Microsoft not only signal a growing awareness and unease among its workforce regarding the implications of their work but also highlight a broader critique of the technology sector’s complicity in global conflicts.

With significant employees now speaking out publicly and advocating for change, it remains to be seen how Microsoft will navigate the backlash and whether it will reconsider its partnerships or policies in light of these emerging ethical dilemmas.

**Reference Map:**

1. Paragraph 1 - Sources 1, 2
2. Paragraph 2 - Sources 3, 7
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5. Paragraph 5 - Sources 3, 6
6. Paragraph 6 - Sources 4, 5
7. Paragraph 7 - Sources 5, 6

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/c448a837e05437425bf37545961c75e8> - During Microsoft’s Build conference in Seattle, Elon Musk appeared via pre-recorded video to announce a partnership between his AI company xAI and Microsoft. Despite Musk’s ongoing lawsuit against Microsoft and OpenAI over his foundational role in OpenAI, xAI’s Grok chatbot will now be hosted on Microsoft’s Azure cloud platform. This collaboration places Grok alongside AI models from OpenAI, Meta, and others. Musk did not address recent controversy surrounding Grok’s content but emphasized the importance of honesty in AI safety. The conference was briefly disrupted by a protestor condemning Microsoft’s collaboration with the Israeli government, highlighting concerns that Azure-powered AI services may support the war in Gaza. Microsoft acknowledged providing services to Israel's military but denied any role in targeting civilians. Separately, Microsoft introduced a new AI coding agent, an evolution of GitHub's Copilot, designed to autonomously handle routine programming tasks. This launch followed recent layoffs affecting about 6,000 Microsoft employees globally, including many software engineers in Washington.
5. <https://www.tomsguide.com/tech-events/microsofts-50th-anniversary-copilot-event-interrupted-by-protestor> - During Microsoft's 50th anniversary Copilot event on April 4, 2025, an employee, Ibtihal Aboussad, publicly protested the company's role in supplying AI tools to Israel, accusing Microsoft of facilitating violence and profiting from war. While CEO Mustafa Suleyman presented new features of the Copilot AI assistant, Aboussad accused Microsoft of having 'blood on your hands,' referencing a reported rise in civilian deaths linked to the Israeli military's increased use of AI technologies developed by Microsoft and OpenAI following the Hamas attack in October 2023. Reports by the Associated Press earlier this year confirmed that Israeli forces have been employing Microsoft’s AI systems and Azure servers in military operations. AI ethics expert Heidy Khlaaf emphasized the serious ethical implications of commercial AI use in warfare. Despite the protest’s intensity, Suleyman responded calmly and allowed Aboussad to speak before venue staff escorted her out. Additional protestors demonstrated outside the venue, and another disruption occurred during a post-event panel with Microsoft executives. These incidents highlight growing internal dissent and public scrutiny over Microsoft’s ethical responsibilities in geopolitical conflicts involving its technology.
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/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.