

Billions of dollars raised for pro-Israel, anti-Palestinian media drive



New York, November 13 (RHC)-- A billionaire real estate tycoon in the United States is rallying support for a high-dollar media crusade to boost Israel's image and demonise the Hamas armed group amid global pro-Palestinian solidarity protests.

The media campaign — called "Facts for Peace" — is seeking million-dollar donations from dozens of the world's biggest names in media, finance and technology, according to an email seen by news website Semafor.

More than 50 individuals are being courted, including former Google CEO Eric Schmidt, Dell CEO Michael Dell and financier Michael Milken. They have a combined net worth of around \$500 billion, Semafor said.

Some of the individuals, such as investor Bill Ackman, have publicly threatened to blacklist pro-Palestine students who are critical of Israel. On October 10, Ackman wrote on X, formerly Twitter, that he and other business executives wanted Ivy League universities to disclose the names of students who are part of organizations that signed open letters criticising Israeli policies in Gaza.

U.S. billionaire Barry Sternlicht, who started the project, said the campaign would help Israel "get ahead of the narrative" as the world has reacted to the intensive Israeli attacks in the Gaza Strip.

"Public opinion will surely shift as scenes, real or fabricated by Hamas, of civilian Palestinian suffering will surely erode [Israel's] current empathy in the world community", Sternlicht wrote in an email soliciting contributions from the wealthy figures shortly after Hamas's October 7 attacks on Israel, according to Semafor. "We must get ahead of the narrative."

Sternlicht's media drive aims to brand Hamas as a "terrorist organization" that is "not just the enemy of Israel, but of the United States," he wrote. The goal is to draw \$50 million in private donations, paired with a matching contribution from a Jewish charity. Hamas is already designated as a "terrorist" organization by the U.S. and the European Union for its armed resistance against Israeli occupation.

It is unclear which figures have donated, but the campaign has raised at least a few million dollars already, Semafor reported, citing "people familiar with the matter." It is being advised by Josh Vlasto, a communications strategist who previously worked for U.S. Senator Chuck Schumer and former Governor of New York Andrew Cuomo, Semafor reported.

The U.S. is Israel's strongest global ally, providing it with billions of dollars of aid annually and staunch diplomatic backing. Despite the mounting humanitarian crisis in Gaza, the U.S. government has continuously rebuffed global calls for a ceasefire and reiterated that Washington will not give Israel "red lines" in the war. On November 2, the U.S. Congress passed a \$14.3 billion emergency military aid package for Israel.

However, public support for Washington's position appears to be ebbing, with nearly half of U.S. Democrats disapproving of how Joe Biden has handled the conflict, according to a recent poll by the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Social media giants such as Instagram, X, YouTube and TikTok have been accused of censoring pro-Palestine voices by reducing their reach, a practice known as shadowbanning. Axios reported last month that pro-Palestine posts on TikTok were being viewed four times more than pro-Israel posts. This came as people around the world have reacted with horror to the mounting death toll in Gaza where most of the killed are civilians.

Facts For Peace, the media campaign launched by Sternlicht, aims to win back public favour for Israel, posting videos on its social media pages blaming Hamas for the plight of Palestinians and denying claims of Israeli rights violations.

The most recent video posted on its Facebook page argues that "Israel is not an apartheid state."

This contradicts findings from Palestinian, Israeli and international rights experts, including from the United Nations, that Israel is practising apartheid through its "deeply discriminatory dual legal and political

system” in the occupied territories.

Israel occupied West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza in the 1967 war and later annexed East Jerusalem. It withdrew its forces from Gaza in 2005 but continues to maintain a siege on the territory of 2.3 million people. Israel has continued to expand settlements in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem – a step considered illegal under international law.

Settlements pose the biggest hurdles in the realisation of an independent and sovereign Palestinian state living side-by-side with Israel, experts say. The U.S. has condemned the settlements’ expansions but done little to stop its closest ally.

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