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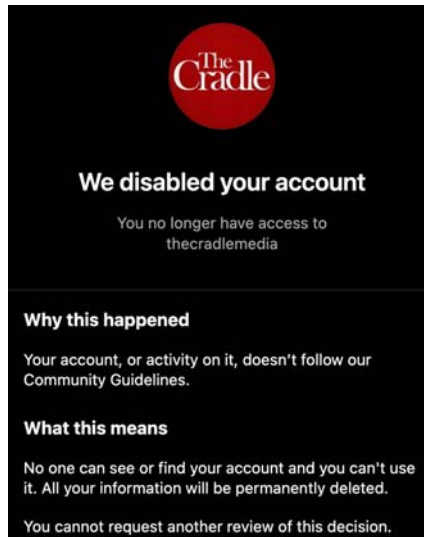
Meta permanently bans The Cradle in latest attack on free speech

The social media giant has singled out an independent West Asian media outlet, as it intensifies its crackdown on Palestinian and regional voices, both on its platforms and among its employees

On 16 August, Facebook and Instagram parent company Meta permanently banned *The Cradle* from its social media platforms for allegedly violating community guidelines by “praising terrorist organizations” and engaging in “incitement to violence.”

“No one can see or find your account, and you can't use it. All your information will be permanently deleted,” reads the message accompanying the ban on Instagram, where *The Cradle* had surpassed 107,000 followers and amassed millions of views.

“You cannot request another review of this decision,” the message ends, despite the fact the ban came with little warning or any chance for review.



The Cradle is an independent, journalist-owned news website that covers the geopolitics of West Asia from a West Asian perspective. Since 2021, the publication has made a name for itself by covering regional developments with the kind of breadth and depth – and nuance – that often go missing in mainstream corporate media.

Meta's accusations of “praising terrorist organizations” and engaging in “incitement to violence” largely stem from posts and videos that relay information or quotes from West Asian resistance movements like Hamas, Hezbollah, and Ansarallah – blacklisted by many western governments – *who are an essential part of the news stories unfolding in a region on the precipice of a major war.*

It is also essential to recognize that these are major West Asian political organizations that have deep institutional and civic roots within Lebanon, Palestine, and Yemen and are part of the very fabric of these societies. They are represented in governance, run schools, hospitals, and utilities, and disperse salaries to millions of civilian workers.

Ironically, many of *The Cradle's* Meta-flagged quotes on these organizations also come from Israeli and western officials:

“The intelligence information that Hezbollah has collected is accurate at the level of an advanced western intelligence organization, with observation capabilities, accurate intelligence gathering, and real-time documentation ... There is almost no target in the north that Hezbollah cannot hit with over 50 percent success.” – Meta claims this two-month old post violated its guidelines, despite the quotes coming from Israeli journalists and officials.

Other posts that Meta claimed violated its rules included a reel on protesters breaking into an Elbit factory in the UK, a news headline image that reads “[Israeli army approves plans for offensive on Lebanon](#),” and a quote by a Hamas official in Lebanon on how the “[Gaza] support fronts ... achieved their goal.”

Although *The Cradle* had occasionally run afoul of Meta's frustratingly unspecific community guidelines – which the publication always addressed immediately – matters appeared to come to a head following the 31 July assassination of Hamas Politburo Chief Ismail Haniyeh, when the company owned by US billionaire Mark Zuckerberg significantly [tightened](#) its grip on free speech.

In the days after Haniyeh's assassination, Meta took down 10 posts from *The Cradle's* Instagram account over 48 hours. These ranged from quotes by Hamas officials and Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah condemning massacres in Gaza and the

Israeli strikes in Tehran and Beirut, videos released by local resistance factions clashing with the Israeli army in Gaza, and even news headlines about Haniyeh.

One of the posts removed for violations was a headline that read, “ Hamas calls for ‘day of rage’ following assassination of Haniyeh.” Another was a carousel of image quotes by Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah, addressing the assassinations in Beirut and Tehran, and a likely response.



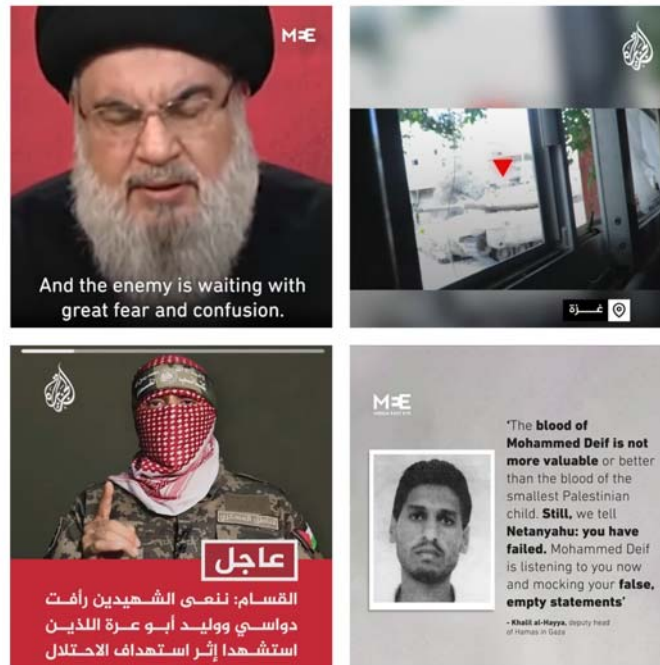
Hamas calls for ‘day of rage’ following assassination of Haniyeh. (Removed by Meta for violations.)

Meta informed *The Cradle* for the first time in early August, “You could lose our account in the future if you kept violating Meta’s community guidelines.”

Days later, Meta issued its permanent ban, targeting *The Cradle's* main Instagram account and a backup account that had not violated any of the company's guidelines. Hours later, the company disabled *The Cradle's* Facebook page, which was not directly linked to the Instagram account and was registered under a completely different email. Meta clarified in its message regarding permanently removing the backup account that it does not allow “creating another account after we've suspended yours.” The backup account was created *before* the suspension.

We believe that this serves as evidence that Meta was targeting *The Cradle* in its entirety. *The Cradle's* business account on Instagram was clearly identified from the onset as a ‘news website/media’ company.

Other news pages on Meta, such as *Middle East Eye* and *Al Jazeera*, post similar footage and content – videos released by Hamas and Hezbollah, for example – and appear free to do so without having their posts removed. *The Cradle's* description of these posts has been strictly neutral throughout.



Instagram posts by Middle East Eye and Al Jazeera include images, quotes, and videos of Hamas and Hezbollah officials, as well as Hamas's military operations against Israel in Gaza. The Cradle, in contrast, does not publish photos of Resistance Axis leaders on any Meta platforms, except for highly obscured visuals.

Since the events of 7 October 2023 and Israel's military assault on Gaza, independent news outlets such as *The Cradle* have seen a marked surge in audience as news consumers seek out representative coverage from the ground that counters misinformation.

This change in the global information status quo has triggered growing censorship by social media giants.

“Meta’s policies and practices have been silencing voices in support of Palestine and Palestinian human rights on Instagram and Facebook in a wave of heightened censorship of social media,” [Human Rights Watch](#) (HRW) detailed in a December 2023 report.

“Human Rights Watch found that the censorship of content related to Palestine on Instagram and Facebook is systemic and global. Meta’s inconsistent enforcement of its own policies led to the erroneous removal of content about Palestine ... Meta, the parent company of Facebook and Instagram, has a well-documented record of overbroad crackdowns on content related to Palestine,” the HRW report adds.

Digital civil rights organizations and human rights groups have urged Meta over recent months to [end](#) its systemic [censorship](#) of pro-Palestinian content and uphold its human rights commitments.

Meta’s devolving censorship policies may be attributable to its questionable senior hires. One example is Chief Information Security Officer since 2022, [Guy Rosen](#), a veteran of the Israeli army’s Unit 8200 – its clandestine Intelligence Corps Unit – and co-founder of Facebook-owned Israeli tech company [Onavo](#).

Meta continues to escalate its attack on speech, even considering censorship of the word “[Zionist](#),” as revealed by Intercept journalist Sam Biddle in February 2024.



Quotes by Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah following the assassinations of Ismail Haniyeh and Fuad Shukur in Beirut and Tehran. The finger of Nasrallah can be seen in this photo. (Removed by

Meta for violations.)

In 2022, Palestinian journalists in the Gaza Strip and occupied East Jerusalem accused Meta of “purging” their WhatsApp and Facebook accounts for reporting on Israeli war crimes.

At the time, Meta [accused](#) the journalists of “breaching their publishing standards [for posting pictures] detailing the civilians killed by Israeli forces in the Gaza Strip.”

The tech giant has also been accused of “[exorbitant internal censorship](#)” by its own staff.

In June, Meta’s diversity chief, Maxine Williams, effectively barred staff from discussing the war in Gaza, [informing](#) them that the company had “decided to limit discussions

around topics that have historically led to disruptions in the workplace, regardless of the importance of those topics – this includes content related to war and statehood.”

The same month, a Palestinian-American engineer, Ferras Hamad, sued the company for [discrimination](#) and wrongful termination, claiming Meta fired him for trying to help fix bugs causing the suppression of Palestinian Instagram posts.

Hamad also accused Meta of bias against Palestinians, saying the company deleted internal employee communications that mentioned the deaths of their relatives in Gaza and conducted investigations into their use of the Palestinian flag emoji.

On 15 August, one day before Meta permanently banned *The Cradle* from its platforms, [The Guardian](#) reported on the company's “internal struggles” moderating content related to the war in Gaza and its double standards when determining “the accuracy of moderation of Hebrew content and Arabic content.”

Whistleblowers also expressed fears of reprisal from the company, saying its priorities are “not about actually making sure content is safe for the community.”

“If I raised this directly, I feel my job would be on the line – it is very obvious where the company stands on this issue,” the unnamed Meta staffer said.

As journalistic freedoms rapidly decline in all spaces, we urge our readers and audiences to help counter those efforts by kindly supporting us with donations via [thecradle.co](#) and [Patreon](#). Make sure to [follow us on X](#), [Telegram](#), [TikTok](#), and *The Cradle*'s [RSS](#) feed for daily and hourly news updates, subscribe to our weekly newsletter, and join us on YouTube and Rumble for weekly podcasts that break down the news for you.

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