

Does the Boycott, Divestments, and Sanctions Movement Contribute to Peacebuilding

Within the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict?

The origins of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict began with the creation of the British Mandate of Palestine in 1918, which became the ruling authority over Palestinian Arabs and Palestinian Jews. The peak of the conflict came in 1948 with the establishment of the State of Israel under the United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine, when the Jewish Agency accepted the Plan for Palestine, but Arab leaders and governments rejected it. A civil war broke out between the Palestinian Jews on one side and the Palestinian Arabs, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen on the other side. After the war, Israel took over lands that were given to the Palestinians Arabs under the United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine. In 1967, another war broke between the sides – The Six Day War. Israel took over more Arab land, including the area of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip; those areas are what is now referred to as the occupied territories (“State of Israel Proclaimed”). Palestinians currently live under a military occupation, controlled by the State of Israel; they use armed and non-armed struggles to fight for their freedom and to confront the State of Israel. One of the most noticeable struggles is the Boycott, Divestments, and Sanctions Movement (BDS). The BDS movement is built from unions, academic associations, churches, and grassroots movements across the world. The

movement calls for the boycott of academic, cultural, and business cooperation with the State of Israel. In its official website, the BDS movement states, "We appeal to you to pressure your respective states to impose embargoes and sanctions against Israel. We also invite conscientious Israelis to support this Call, for the sake of justice and genuine peace." The website continues to outline the following objectives:

These non-violent punitive measures should be maintained until Israel meets its obligation to recognize the Palestinian people's inalienable right to self-determination and fully complies with the precepts of international law by:

1. Ending its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantling the Wall
2. Recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality; and
3. Respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in U.N. resolution 194. (Palestinian Civil Society Call for BDS.)

With a rise in support of the BDS movement worldwide, one must ask if and how the BDS movement contributes to peacebuilding in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

There are two fundamental approaches to ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Two-State Solution supporters believe that a final agreement between both sides will include two independent states – Palestine and Israel. On the contrary, One-State Solution supporters urge that a final agreement must include one state to contain both Palestinians and Israelis. One State

Solution diverts into two streams. One would create a single democratic country resulting in Arab Muslims outnumbering Jews, thus ending Israel as a Jewish state. The other version would involve Israel annexing Gaza and the West Bank, forcing out Palestinians. (Beauchamp), A joint poll conducted by the Israel Democracy Institute (IDI) in Jerusalem and the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR) in Ramallah, in partnership with and support from the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) and with funding from the European Union (E.U.), gives a piece of clear and unbiased information on the public opinion. The poll involves opinions from both sides of the conflict regarding the popularity of different peace approaches. According to the poll, the majority of both Israelis and Palestinians support the two-state solution (Palestinian-Israeli Pulse). Yet, in the words of Omar Barghouti, leader of the BDS movement, "Definitely, most definitely we oppose a Jewish state in any part of Palestine. No Palestinian, rational Palestinian, not a sellout Palestinian, will ever accept a Jewish state in Palestine" (qtd. in "Behind the Mask"). Such a claim goes hand in hand with the beliefs of One State supporters. The BDS movement claims to have 86% of Palestinians support on their official website. One can understand the contrast between the BDS movement's leadership approach, the poll results, and the true Palestinian support of BDS. This contrast raises questions regarding the BDS movement's goals and activities.

One of the first questions in history regarding the true motives of boycotting Israel arose long before the establishment of the state when the Mufti of Jerusalem formed ties with the Nazi Party. Boycotts of Jewish products began in 1922 when Arabs began boycotting Jewish interests in British Mandate Palestine (Thrall). The Arab High Command, as the group was known, was led by the Mufti, Haj Amin al-Husseini, and represented Arab interests in Palestine until 1948.

The Arab High Command began their protest by calling for a general strike of Arab workers and a boycott of Jewish products (“Pre-State Israel”). The archives of the National Library of Israel have revealed documents that attest to a connection between Nazi Germany and the Mufti. This quote is from a letter that was sent to the Mufti by the head of the SS, Heinrich Himmler "To the Grand Mufti Amin al-Husseini. The National-Socialist movement of greater Germany has made its fight against world Jewry a guiding principle since its very beginning. For that reason, it has been closely following the battle of freedom-seeking Arabs—and especially in Palestine—against the Jewish invaders." Himmler continued, saying, "The joint recognition of the enemy, and the joint battle against him are what creates the firm allegiance between Germany and freedom-seeking Muslims all over the world." According to a British archive revealed 50 years ago, the Mufti asked "to take the opportunity to thank the Fuehrer, who is popular with the entire Arab world, for the sympathy he has always shown to the Arab world, especially the Palestinians. The Arab states are convinced that Germany will win the war and that Arab interests will flourish. The Arabs are Germany's natural friends because they have the common enemies of Germany, especially the British, the Jews and the Communists, and for this reason they were willing to cooperate with Germany with all their heart" (qtd. In “Letter Written to Grand Mufti from Himmler Uncovered”). In 1945, the Arab League officially organized a boycott of the Yishuv, the Jewish community in pre-Israel British Mandate Palestine. The declaration, contained in Arab League Resolution 16, stated: "Products of Palestinian Jews are to be considered undesirable in Arab countries. They should be prohibited and refused as long as

their production in Palestine might lead to the realization of Zionist political aims" (qtd. In "Bigotry, Discrimination, Anti-Semitism").

In the mid-1970s, the U.S. Congress implemented anti-boycott laws. One of the regulations is the Export Administration Act, which forbids U.S. companies and their subsidiaries from complying with or supporting a foreign country's boycott of another country unless the U.S. also approves of the boycott (Bingham). Such policy combats the Arab League Boycott of Israel in the U.S. because it is running under foreign countries' governments. A year after the resolution, in 1978, the U.S. branch of the General Union of Palestine Students (GUPS) was formed, and Palestinian students across college campuses formed GUPS chapters (Shehadeh, 6). NGO organizations could exist under the claim of being led by the Palestinian

Himmler and the Mufti shaking hands



civil society and not by a foreign government. In 2001, the NGO forum took place during the U.N. World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance, in Durban, South

Africa. The forum published its declarations and calls for action. Calls for action number 423 and 424 are the basis for the establishment of the BDS movement:

423 - "Call for the launch of an international anti-Israeli Apartheid movement as implemented against South African Apartheid through a global solidarity

campaign network of international civil society, U.N. bodies and agencies, business communities and to end the conspiracy of silence among states, particularly the European Union and the United States."

424 - "Call upon the international community to impose a policy of complete and total isolation of Israel as an apartheid state as in the case of South Africa which means the imposition of mandatory and comprehensive sanctions and embargoes, the full cessation of all links (diplomatic, economic, social, aid, military cooperation and training) between all states and Israel. Call upon the Government of South Africa to take the lead in this policy of isolation, bearing in mind its own historical success in countering the undermining policy of "constructive engagement" with its own past Apartheid regime" (qtd. In "Palestinians and Palestine").

In general, BDS supporters believe that the movement is effective, sometimes singularly so, in promoting Palestinians' rights and even show support for the armed struggle. The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs published the article, "Who Represents Palestinian Refugees? Sidelineing of the Core of the Palestine Question" which claims that the BDS movement is the Palestinians' best hope. The author, Jinan Bastaki, believes that every other solution or organization does not help the Palestinians. The article was biased against Israel. Bastaki brings a quote from the Palestinian National Charter, saying, "Armed struggle is the only way to liberate Palestine... The Palestinian Arab people assert their absolute determination and firm resolution to continue their armed struggle and to work for an armed popular revolution for the liberation of their country and their return to it." The Palestine Liberation Organization's (PLO) words

regarding their ideology shows that the organization was established under the beliefs of armed struggle. Bastaki connects BDS activity with armed struggle in such a way that suggests that both are equally just. She also believes that boycotting academic dialogue with the State of Israel is a large success in promoting Palestinian rights. On the contrary to what supporters believe, this connection to violence with the BDS movement demonstrates actions that contrast with peacebuilding efforts and hurt Palestinians.

Not only does BDS not work towards true peace, but it also often engages in activities that hurt Palestinians. In the article, 'Is the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Movement Tainted by Anti-Semitism?' published by the American Geographical Society, the authors, Ira M. Sheskin and Ethan Felson, claim that the BDS movement is hostile to Judaism and that it does not promote the language of peace. The authors argue that the movement is not as its proponents assert: a focused campaign aimed to change Israeli policies. Instead, it is a movement that often lacks integrity and quite often traffics in anti-Semitism. The articles contain evidence for their claim in three different fields: BDS against academics, commercial companies, and cultural events. The authors give an example of an Israeli company called SodaStream. The company used to reside in the occupied territories and was eventually targeted by the BDS movement. This pressure forced the company to move its factory back to Israel proper, to a city in the Negev. Sheskin and Felson write that a consequence of BDS, namely the forced closing of this factory, was the loss of employment by around 950 West Bank Palestinians and 450 Arab Israelis who thrived working at the SodaStream plant. The SodaStream company was a peacebuilding model promoting work co-existence between Israelis and Palestinians. Boycotting such company is counterproductive – not only did the BDS movement hurt Palestinian workers,

but it also sought to stop a peacebuilding effort that was successful. Similarly, to the way BDS has hurt Palestinian economy, through the closure of the SodaStream plant, it also has hurt Palestinian academia. In 2005, the BDS movement claimed another success in the United Kingdom, when the Association of University Teachers (AUT) voted in its Council to boycott Haifa and Bar-Ilan Universities. After this statement from a non-Palestinian organization, presidents from both Israeli and Palestinian universities released a joint statement saying:

"Cognizant of the moral leadership universities should provide, especially in already turbulent political contexts, we, the President of Al-Quds University and the President of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, have agreed to insist on continuing to work together in the pursuit of knowledge, for the benefit of our peoples and the promotion of peace and justice in the Middle East.

Our position is based upon the belief that it is through cooperation based on mutual respect, rather than through boycotts or discrimination, that our common goals can be achieved. Bridging political gulfs – rather than widening them further apart – between nations and individuals thus becomes an educational duty as well as a functional necessity, requiring exchange and dialogue rather than confrontation and antagonism. Our disaffection with, and condemnation of acts of academic boycotts and discrimination against scholars and institutions, is predicated on the principles of academic freedom, human rights, and equality between nations and among individuals." (Cowell)

In this case, the BDS movement was acting in opposition to Palestinians' will, even while it claims to represent them. This statement shows that academic boycott, led by the BDS movement, has a countereffect over academic peacebuilding efforts. Through this incident, the BDS movement demonstrates actions that contrast with peacebuilding efforts.

Another inconsistency found between BDS and peacebuilding is the movement's undeniable connection to terrorism. BDS based organizations publicly show support for terror organizations, and some of them have been found guilty of financially supporting terror. According to the author of the article "Terrorists in Suits," in 2001, the U.S. Department of Treasury designated the Holy Land Foundation for supporting terrorism. In the period from 1995-2001, the Holy Land Foundation sent \$12.4 million from the United States to the designated terrorist group, Hamas. Today, some of the key members of the Holy Land Foundation are sitting on the board of the American Muslims for Palestine (AMP) – An NGO residing in the United States. The author describes a lawsuit against AMP alleging that the organization is the Islamic Association for Palestine, "simply repackaged under another name." (65) The article "SJP Unmasked," written by Dan Diker and Jamie Berk, examines terror links, violence, bigotry, and intimidation on U.S. Campuses perpetrated by Student Justice for Palestine (SJP). According to the authors, SJP founder Hatem Bazian also serves as chairman of American Muslims for Palestine. The authors also claim that SJP expressed support for terror



organizations such as Hamas, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), and the Islamic Jihad. They provide the following poster as an example of supporting Hamas. (24) Another example is Khader Adnan Mohammed Musa. Adnan is a spokesperson for Islamic Jihad, a US-designated terrorist organization, and has been a featured guest at SJP events. The

authors also mention that in 2013, SJP at American University in Washington DC organized a

Skype call with Adnan. The authors provide a post, published by SJP in University of California Santa Barbara, that demonstrate the support for armed struggle by PELP organization. The post shows Leila Khaled, a member of PELP, who took place in the TWA Flight 840 hijacking in 1969. (25) The BDS movement's origins and its public support of violent terror, turn the movement and organizations under its umbrella to be hostile to Judaism.



The BDS movement is anti-Semitic. One can find many anti-Semitic motifs from the holocaust in published caricatures. Moreover, the movement’s supporters tend to single out the State of Israel, the only Jewish State in the world. The article, “Behind the Mask - The Antisemitic Nature of BDS Exposed,” contains several pieces of evidence that BDS and anti-Semitism are interconnected. The article was published by the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs and claims that the BDS movement, led by the Ramallah-based BDS National Committee, is engaged in an ongoing campaign of delegitimization against Israel. That includes the use of antisemitic rhetoric and images. Because the Israeli government published this article, it is clear that it is biased for Israel. Nevertheless, it includes more than 80 pieces of compelling evidence that support its claims. The report follows the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism, which was adopted by the United Nations. The article starts by revealing clear anti-Semitic motifs laced within the language used by the BDS movement. One example shown in the article is a chain of caricatures with anti-Semitic motifs (20):

ANTISEMITIC MOTIF: JEWS AS OCTOPUSES



Der Stürmer, 1935- 1943, by Josef Plank



Al-Raya, 2017, by Umayya Juha



BDS activist Carlos Latuff 2010

ANTISEMITIC MOTIF: JEWS AS PIGS



Woodcut, “Die Judensau,” “The Jewish pig,” 15th century



Sandstone relief Stadtkirche Wittenberg, “Judensau,” ca. 1440



Al-Watan, Moving the American Embassy to Jerusalem,” 2018



BDS activist Roger Waters, The Wall Live Tour, 2013, pig balloon with the Star of David, Jerusalem Post

Another anti-Semitic activity, mentioned by Sheskin and Felson, is the boycott of a Jewish-American singer - Matthew Paul Miller. Before the Rototom Sunsplash festival in Spain in August 2015, the BDS movement demanded that the singer release a public statement stating that he endorses a Palestinian state. Miller was the only participant that was called to release such a statement. When he refused, the pressure to cancel his performance came from a pro-BDS group in Valencia, and the performance was initially canceled. Boycotting the only Jewish singer, in a festival that has no connection to Israel, is anti-Semitic.

The official website of the BDS movement explains the reason why single out Israel among other countries is not an anti-Semitic act. The website states, "BDS is a Palestinian-led movement. It is only logical that Palestinians and those who stand in solidarity with their struggle orient their struggle towards Israel, the party that denies Palestinians their freedom, and not towards North Korea, for example. The South African liberation movement also targeted the regime of oppression that they lived under, naturally, not the one in Cambodia or Honduras at the time."

This answers the question, 'why does the BDS movement single out Israel?' in an effective way. One can agree that Palestinians have the right to single out Israel. However, does a non-Palestinian organization have the right to do so? Organizations may add Israel to their "list" as one of the unjust countries they boycott, but if they have no such list, boycotting nothing but Israel is an anti-Semitic act. For example,



The American Studies Association (ASA) is an academic group focusing on the study of U.S. history and culture. ASA boycotts only Israel. (What Does the Boycott Mean?) Another example is the Feminist Student Union at The George Washington University, which supports the SJP group, which discriminates against Israel - the only country in the Middle East without a single law that distinguishes between women and men. This raises the question – Why does a non-Palestinian academic organization boycott the only Jewish state for its military occupation, while there are many other military occupations around the world?

Another counterargument against BDS being anti-Semitic is the existence of Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), a Jewish BDS support organization. How can Jews be anti-Semitic? JVP is an anti-Zionist movement with 15,300 participants, according to the website, “GuideStar.” That is 0.1% out of the total number of Jews, according to the Jewish Federation website. This percentage shows the drastic shift in Jews supporting the Zionist idea, from the time of the First Zionist Congress; at that time, the Zionist idea was debatable among Jews. A large difference between nowadays and the beginning of the Zionist idea is the effective use of social media by opponent Jews, which allows them to mislead people and fake their popularity. The false image that many Jews are against the state of Israel creates a dangerous psychological effect for supporting the BDS movement and can cause people to join it without having objective facts.

The BDS movement’s extremist origins, leaders, goals, and anti-Semitic actions are counter-effective for real peacebuilding efforts in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The BDS movement is another active arm in the armed and unpeaceful struggle of terror organizations. The movement is misleading groups and individuals and hurting real peacebuilding efforts in progress. The movement reaches non-related NGOs and groups, and not only also distracts those

activists' pursuits of their original goals but alienates pro-Israel people from being a part of a non-related group, such as GW's Feminist Student Union. Activists everywhere should further their studies before taking actions. Peace activists should promote companies like SodaStream that work in favor of peace and co-existence. Feminist activists should defend egalitarian and woman-empowering countries like Israel. An academic research association should not be biased and should try to understand the history of anti-Semitism. Universities should advocate for dialogues through academia, which promote mutual understandings. The BDS movement misleads people when it claims that Israel is perpetrating a genocide. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, the Palestinian population had a growth of 385% between 1970 and 2017. It is wrong to compare Israel to Nazi Germany and to the Apartheid in South Africa. It is, indeed, crucial to fight for Palestinians and promote the end of the conflict. However, supporting the BDS movement will bring the opposite results as it furthers a split between the two sides of the conflict.

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