

TRENDS IN THE MOVEMENT TO DELEGITIMIZE ISRAEL



ANTI-ZIONISM

The BDS movement, with its profound hostility to Jewish self-determination, has become more brazen in its antisemitism. In order to get people to hate Israel, it needs to make people comfortable hating Jews, Judaism, and Zionism. Supporters of BDS increasingly use anti-Jewish motifs about money, power, and influence. Together with white nationalists and neo-Nazis, who also draw on these tropes, these forces are causing an alarming resurgence of antisemitism from both the right and the left – with violent manifestations. Thus, the conflation of anti-Zionism and antisemitism has become a calling card of the BDS movement and has been normalized in public discourse. Complicating this is an effort by BDS activists and anti-Zionists to redefine antisemitism—attempting to distinguish their narrative from other forms of antisemitism.

MUNICIPAL BDS

The BDS movement is placing significant resources into advancing resolutions at the municipal level. These measures include boycott, divestment, and human rights related resolutions, as well as efforts to end partnerships with Israel. This includes popular programs in which Israelis help American law enforcement personnel learn techniques to prevent terror, save lives, and protect civil liberties. One insidious campaign, named “Deadly Exchange”, cynically capitalizes on tensions between police and communities of color. It blames these programs for all police violence against people of color – slandering Israel by stating it trains U.S. police in racial profiling techniques and the use of “repressive force”.

INTERSECTIONALITY

Intersectional theory asserts that the oppression of people of color, LGBTQ individuals, and women depend on an overlapping system of privilege and power. BDS groups and leaders have co-opted this theory with slogans such as “From Ferguson to Palestine.” These efforts seek to broaden the base of support for BDS among minorities by erroneously portraying Israel as a white, colonial power oppressing indigenous Palestinian people of color. This negates any Jewish right to self-determination, Israeli diversity, and the legitimate security concerns of Israeli men, women, and children. Some have asserted that Israeli or Jewish symbols, such as the Star of David, are “triggering” for other groups and should not be displayed. In some instances, progressive Jews are being asked to check their identities at the door if they want to participate in social justice advocacy.

ECONOMIC WARFARE

In today’s investment world, investors increasingly leverage their financial positions to pressure companies to change their policies and business practices. More than eight trillion dollars of actively managed funds in the U.S. are invested using some form of socially responsible investment mechanism. This includes screens that look at human rights, environmental, or governance policies. BDS groups are active in this space, distorting Israel’s human rights record and calling for investors to exclude Israeli companies or corporations with ties to Israel. The BDS movement seeks to undermine Israel’s economy through the use of shareholder resolutions and divestment policies by colleges and universities, churches, and others. Investment screens are drafted as neutral policies aimed at “conflict regions” in order to allow targeted anti-Israel activity that directors and trustees would not have otherwise supported.

“CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS” CAMPAIGNS

Many proponents of delegitimization are moving beyond traditional BDS operations (divestment resolutions, boycotts, anti-Israel statements, etc.) having confronted successful opposition. Their new campaigns focus on distorting the reality on the ground with regards to human rights for Palestinians and minority populations in Israel. Included in these campaigns are efforts to question the Jewish connection to the land of Israel. More recently, there have been efforts to use alleged human rights abuses to cut foreign aid to Israel. These issue-based campaigns are commonly implemented at the same time in a variety of places – social media, churches, campuses and more – making it vital to respond in a factual, comprehensive way.

POLITICAL PARTISANSHIP AND POLARIZATION

The deepening divide between the left and right over the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is a worldwide phenomenon. In the U.S., no matter what your views are regarding particular policies, President Trump’s alliance with Prime Minister Netanyahu has exacerbated this trend. And the BDS movement will continue to take advantage of this. Our efforts to keep strong bipartisan support for Israel is being undermined by all sides, as evidenced by the political grandstanding, name-calling, and the usage of Israel as a wedge issue. Real policy differences underlie this divide on how to resolve the conflict and provide a roadmap that fosters peace in the region. Polls indicate an alarming trend of softening support for Israel among progressives. The upcoming 2020 elections are a likely battleground—in party platforms, forums and debates, candidate campaigns across the board, as well as in emerging electoral coalitions.

COORDINATION AND CROSS-FERTILIZATION

The BDS movement has always operated across spheres, bringing similar resolutions to campuses, churches, and associations. However, different groups operated as decentralized hubs. Now the leaders are increasingly coordinating on particular campaigns and providing the “back office” strategy and resources to promote campaigns across constituencies. For example, the “Deadly Exchange” campaign, which calls for a ban on police exchanges with Israel, is on campus and in communities nationwide. Similarly, a “campaign in a box” to call for banning or boycotting study abroad programs in Israel was launched on campuses across the country. BDS supporters have determined they need to band together and benefit from “economies of scale”. So must we.