

ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

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Middle Eastern Realities: The BDS Movement and the New Middle East

The existential threat to Israel is real and has been since Israel was founded as a modern nation-state in 1948. The four major wars Israel has fought plus the numerous terrorist threats have defined Israel since its founding. But there is a new aggression being leveled at Israel—an economic aggression in the form of the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) campaign. Members of the European Union (EU) are working to develop economic sanctions designed to force Israel to accept political concessions such as ending the blockade against Hamas in Gaza. Further, major EU banks and financial firms have blacklisted various Israeli banks because they operate in the West Bank. Also, the UK's Trade and Investment agency in a 2013 report called on UK banks to avoid doing business with Israeli entities associated with the West Bank. In addition, in 2013 the Dutch water supplier Vitens was advised by the government of the Netherlands to terminate its contract with the Israeli company Mekorot, alleging that its presence in the West Bank violated international law. Ironically, this ridiculous order occurred one day after Mekorot announced a deal with Jordan and the Palestinian Authority to provide more water to the West Bank!! The United States must not be drawn into such BDS actions. Representative Peter Roskam of the House Ways and Means Committee correctly observes that "The US cannot allow its firms to be pressured to leave Israel or risk their commercial operations in Europe. This threatens not only our ally, Israel, but the health of our own economy . . . We must not be fooled by those marketing BDS as anything but blatant discrimination against the Jewish state. And we must seize the historic opportunity to push back forcefully against the BDS movement to ensure the strength of the US-Israeli relationship."

Joshua Muravchik, fellow at the Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies, gives a most helpful perspective on the BDS movement and its inherent hypocrisy and inconsistency. He argues convincingly that Palestinian nationalism did not exist before the 1967 War, for the major Arab and Palestinian passion was pan-Arabism. Gamal Abdul Nasser of Egypt promoted this pan-Arabism, which was humiliated by Israel in the 1967 war. Pan-Arabism died in 1967. Palestinian nationalism replaced it with a series of terrorist acts by various Palestinian radicals, including airplane hijackings, bombings and culminating in the murder of Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympic Games. The 1973 oil embargo followed this brutal terrorism, awakening especially the European world to the Arab cause. Muravchik writes that "Israel suddenly seemed the larger party and the Palestinians the ones deserving sympathy." But, it makes little sense for the European community to be so exercised about this. "When was the last time you saw an angry demonstration on a college campus over the brutal occupation of Tibet?" Over the last 15 years, Ehud Barak and later Ehud Olmert (in 2000, 2001 and 2008) offered Yasser Arafat everything he demanded (a Palestinian state, with

Jerusalem as its capital and with every Israeli settlement in the new Palestine uprooted), but the price was the recognition of Israel as the Jewish homeland. Arafat refused and went home to organize the Second Intifada. China has never offered anything like that to Tibet! He goes on, “For 100 years the core idea in leftist thought was economic: class struggle, poor against rich, workers against capitalists. After World War II ethnic, racial or national struggles become dominant, growing out of anti-colonial movements . . . Palestinians are the anti-colonial people of color.” The late Edward Said is the darling of this anti-colonial conviction, for he symbolized this new leftist idea that it is all about race and not about class; “the great moral drama is the history of the oppression of people of color by white people, and the rebellion of the people of color against this repression.” To EU leftists, the Palestinians are the new “people of color” and Israel is the white oppressor.

Finally, a brief review of the New Middle East places the genuine existential threat to Israel in perspective, and it further illustrates the absurdity of the BDS campaign:

- Iran has rekindled its relationship with Hamas in Gaza. Over the last few months, Iran’s Revolutionary Guards have transferred tens of millions of dollars to Hamas’s Izz al-Din al-Qassam brigades. According to intelligence reports, these funds are being used by Hamas to rebuild the network of tunnels destroyed by Israel during last summer’s conflict. Hamas is also replenishing their depleted stocks of medium-range missiles. As Con Coughlin, defense editor of the *Telegraph* in the UK, argues, “The Revolutionary Guards are eager to revive their relationship with Hamas because it gives them access to Israel’s southern border . . . Given that Hamas is designated a terrorist organization by the US and its allies, Iran’s fresh outreach to the group should raise another caution flag as world powers negotiate with Tehran over the Iranian nuclear program.”
- As Charles Krauthammer persuasively argues, “The fundamental reality remains: This generation of Palestinian leadership—from Yasser Arafat to Mahmoud Abbas—has never and will never sign its name to a final peace settlement dividing the land with Jewish state. And without that, no Israeli government of any kind will agree to a Palestinian state.” Hamas and Fatah (the Palestinian Authority) are again feuding—quite bitterly. So, with whom does Israel negotiate for a lasting peace in Palestine?
- Furthermore, given the current chaos in the Middle East, a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians is impossible. With the major authoritarian dictators gone in this region (e.g., Saddam Hussein, Hafez al-Assad), there is no reliable government in the crucial states of Syria and Iraq. No matter how you evaluate it, the nation states of Syria and Iraq no longer exist. The order imposed by the western powers at the end of World War I and re-affirmed at the end of World War II no longer exists. Egypt has had two revolutions and three radically different governments. Yemen is becoming a client of Iran. Libya no longer exists as a nation state either. In short, the “Arab Spring” is a complete disaster! With this incredible instability in the region, why must Israel be forced to make irreversible territorial concessions on the West Bank in return for promises and guarantees? As Krauthammer observes, “Israel is ringed by jihadist terrorists in Sinai, Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in

Lebanon, Islamic State and Iranian proxies in Syria, and a friendly but highly fragile Jordan . . . Peace awaits three things. Eventual Palestinian acceptance of a Jewish state. A Palestinian leader willing to sign a deal based on that premise. A modicum of regional stability that allows Israel to risk the potentially fatal withdrawals such a deal would entail.” These three items do not exist in today’s Middle East.

- There is one final reality: President Obama has fundamentally changed the relationship between the US and Israel. Former Israeli Ambassador Michael Oren has forcefully demonstrated that under Obama, two principles that have governed the Israeli-US relationship have been abandoned: (1) The principle of “no daylight,” meaning that Israel and the US would disagree but never openly. Doing so would encourage common enemies and render Israel vulnerable. (2) The principle of “no surprises,” meaning that the US would always keep Israel informed and engaged. The very first meeting between Obama and Prime Minister Netanyahu saw this principle violated. Thus, as Oren declares, “with the Middle East unraveling and dependable allies a rarity, the US and Israel must restore the ‘no daylight’ and ‘no surprises’ principles. Israel has no alternative to America as a source of security aid, diplomatic backing and overwhelming popular support.”

See Peter J. Roskam in the *Wall Street Journal* (25 May 2015); Marvin Olasky’s interview with Joshua Muravchik in *World* (16 May 2015), pp. 32-33; Con Coughlin in the *Wall Street Journal* (22 April 2015); Charles Krauthammer in the *Washington Post* (23 May 2015); and Michael B. Oren in the *Wall Street Journal* (16 June 2015).