

The Boycott, Divestment, & Sanctions Movement

J Street strongly opposes views and positions such as those captured at the Palestinian BDS National Committee's website, www.bdsmovement.net. As laid out in that site, the BDS movement fails to explicitly recognize Israel's right to exist and it ignores or rejects Israel's role as a national home for the Jewish people. In addition, the promotion by some in the BDS movement of the return to Israel of Palestinian refugees from 1948 and their families indicates support for an outcome incompatible with our vision of Israel and incompatible with a two-state solution to the conflict.

For some, the BDS movement has become a convenient mantle for thinly disguised anti-Semitism. While concern about the present and future of the Palestinian people is both legitimate and warranted, these concerns do not justify categorically delegitimizing and demonizing another people.

J Street recognizes the legitimate and urgent concerns related to peace, justice and human rights that have motivated calls on college campuses and beyond to boycott certain Israeli products or divest from U.S. companies that support continuing Israeli policies of occupation and settlement expansion, or for governments to impose sanctions on Israel. We recognize that the sluggish pace of diplomatic progress toward a two-state solution motivates some of these efforts. However, the urgent need for peace will not be reached through alienation. J Street believes that a peace resolution will be reached through international, and more specifically regional, cooperation. Long-term progress will be achieved through diplomatic means, not isolation.

We oppose the occupation of the West Bank and the expansion and entrenchment of settlements there. We also oppose encroachment on Palestinian areas of East Jerusalem, which must be part of a future Palestinian capital if a two-state outcome is to be achieved. We support loosening the blockade of Gaza, since – in addition to the humanitarian concerns it raises – Israel has smarter, more effective ways of ensuring security through monitoring rather than blocking imports into Gaza at secure crossings. We oppose governmental and NGO expenditures beyond the green line to the extent that their purpose is to expand and deepen the settlement enterprise.

J Street believes, however, that these legitimate concerns are best addressed through urgent pursuit and implementation of a two-state resolution to the conflict. A two-state resolution is, in our view, the only way for Israel to guarantee long-term international recognition and security. Failure to achieve it in the immediate future threatens the founding vision of Israel as both democratic and the national home of the Jewish people – as Israeli leaders including Ehud Barak, Tzipi Livni and Ehud Olmert have pointed out.

We note positively that some groups promoting BDS tactics are trying to narrow the scope of boycotts or divestment initiatives to oppose simply the occupation and not Israel itself. The Palestinian Authority, for instance, does not call for a boycott of Israel itself or Israeli goods, but of settlement products, unlike the all-encompassing boycott of Israel promoted by the global BDS Movement. J Street, however, will not participate in targeted boycott or divestment initiatives. We are focused on creating the political will and atmosphere necessary in the United States to promote strong American leadership to achieve a two-state resolution to the conflict.

We are concerned that the global BDS Movement will build momentum and enjoy viability so long as the occupation continues – and that makes the pursuit of the two-state solution all the more urgent. Efforts to target Israel's legitimacy as a Jewish state will probably continue even after the conflict is resolved and the occupation ended, but the strength of such efforts will dwindle.

Barring proponents of BDS from participation in communal discussion or events is counterproductive and, more important, is a violation of our values. We believe that the Jewish, democratic and most effective way to counter views one disagrees with is not to try to silence them, but to subject them to the scrutiny of a vibrant and open debate.

Finally, as Palestinians and others explore avenues to express non-violent opposition to occupation and

settlements, we would urge the pro-Israel community to distinguish carefully between the use of non-violent tactics to oppose Israeli policy and the violence that has so plagued the region in the past. We welcome the emergence of significant non-violent activism in the Palestinian community and beyond, and we recognize the vital difference between pursuing violent and non-violent forms of struggle for freedom and human rights.

Additional Reading

- [“The boycott law subverts Israeli democracy.”](#) Editorial. Haaretz July 11th, 2011.
- [“The boycott law plays to the hands of de-legitimizers”](#) by Roy Keidar and Eran Shayshon. Reut Instiutute, August 2, 2011.