

AJC Policy: Refuting the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement and other efforts to delegitimize Israel

The Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement is an attempt to isolate Israel diplomatically and economically in an effort to undermine Israel's very legitimacy. BDS demonizes and discriminates against Israel through a campaign of misleading and offensive criticism that too often crosses the line into outright antisemitism. While many rank and file supporters of the movement may simply be sympathetic to the Palestinian cause, BDS leadership openly advocates nothing less than the elimination of Israel as a Jewish state.

BDS movement does not purport to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or recommend a path forward towards a peaceable solution, rather it casts blame for the intractable conflict solely on Israel and demands that the state withdraw completely from the West Bank, Gaza, and the Golan Heights, dismantle the separation barrier in the West Bank, and allow for a full "right of return" for all Palestinian refugees and descendants. These conditions, taken together, would lead to the end of the Jewish state.

For not ceding to their demands, the BDS movement seeks to punish Israel by advocating for cessation of foreign and military aid, dissolution of free trade agreements, and suspension of Israel's membership in international fora. The movement pressures academic, sporting, and cultural institutions to boycott the state. Adherents urge states, banks, pension funds, and universities to withdraw investments in Israel and Israeli companies. Beyond these calls for nations, businesses, and academic institutions to sever ties with the only democracy in the Middle East, the BDS movement also rejects efforts for Israelis and Palestinians to build bridges and reduce tensions through people-to-people interactions and joint economic development, claiming that such actions would "normalize" Israel.

The United States and other countries should reject any attempts to exert undue economic pressure on Israel in lieu of constructive efforts to reach a two-state solution through direct negotiations. What's more, any negotiations must be premised on the notion that Israel has a right to exist as a Jewish state. The U.S. should continue to assure that opposition to BDS remains a principal U.S. trade objective and the U.S. should reaffirm the authority of state and local government entities to invest in Israel and Israeli companies and likewise refuse to invest in companies that engage in BDS. In January 2020, South Dakota became the twenty-eighth state to prohibit boycotts on Israel. Through state legislation and executive orders signed by governors, more than half the states in our union prohibit state funding from being used to contract with entities that boycott Israel.

AJC reaffirms the right of citizens and governments to criticize Israel. The freedoms of speech, thought, and conscience are a fundamental value underpinning our democratic society. But when a movement seeks to delegitimize Israel's right to exist, singles Israel out for censure while holding no other nation to the same standard, or irrationally demonizes the world's only Jewish state for no reason other than that *it is* the world's only Jewish state, criticism of Israel has ceased to be legitimate.

While Israel has demonstrated again and again a willingness to return to the negotiating table to find a long-term resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, BDS co-founder and leader Omar Barghouti has said, "We oppose a Jewish state in any part of Palestine." The aims of the BDS movement support that objective. By trying to demonize Israel within the world and undermine the Jewish state, BDS supporters hope to gain momentum for the imposition of one-sided solutions on Israel. A lasting peace will never evolve under these conditions. BDS is counterproductive for those who want peace and the creation of a Palestinian state living side by side with Israel.

This policy paper is meant to be a resource for candidates. It is one of several that outlines AJC standpoints and policies on issues of core concern to our organization and our community.

AJC, founded in 1906, is the Jewish community's global advocacy organization. Its mission is to enhance the security and well-being of the Jewish people and Israel, and to advance human rights and democratic values around the world. In addition to its New York headquarters and its Office of Policy and Diplomatic Affairs in Washington, D.C., AJC has 22 U.S. regional offices, 12 overseas posts, and 37 partnerships with Jewish communities and institutions worldwide.

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