

Update and Overview

Contending with BDS and the Assault on Israel's Legitimacy

Overview

This summer is crucial for preparing for the coming fall and aligning ourselves toward what promises to be a tough challenge for Israel on campuses and elsewhere. Therefore, **we have put together a concise summary of strategic principles to win against BDS, based on Reut's years' long work in this field.**

Background

In 2007 the Reut Institute framed the delegitimization of Israel as a "strategic threat with potentially existential implications." This was directly after the 2006 Second Lebanon War, in which we saw hundreds of thousands of Europeans marching against Israel, although it was Israel that was provoked and its civilian population that was systematically attacked and subjected to war crimes. We researched the challenge to acquire a deep understanding of its character, were the first to 'prove' that the BDS Movement was actually the long arm of that aggressively anti-Semitic ideology, and the first to design a strategy to fight and win against BDS.

We quickly realized that the delegitimization of Israel is fundamentally about challenging Israel's very existence, and not about correcting its policies, and does not emanate from liberal humanistic values but instead represents a modern-day version of anti-Semitism, directed against the nationhood of Jews. It has been primarily driven by the so-called 'red-green alliance' between the radical left-wing and Muslim groups, which has been effectively building coalitions with mainstream groups. Therefore, it is a challenge that merits the mobilization of all of us: left and right, Israel and Diaspora.

We then further realized that the BDS Movement emerged as the soft-gloved arm of the ideology that delegitimizes Israel, and has been gaining momentum around the world, with the 2014 Gaza War offering the most recent painful wake up call. So much so, that many in Israel frame the BDS Movement as more threatening than Hezbollah, and in recent weeks the Prime Minister of Israel and key Jewish leaders have reached similar conclusions. Today, an unprecedented focus and resources are available to wage this fight against the BDS Movement.

We tested and piloted some of our ideas in London and other locations in the U.S. and worked with dozens of organizations and government agencies. Initially, we encountered much resistance. The Government of Israel was in denial – at least until the Turkish Flotilla in May 2010 – that a strategic threat may emanate from a non-governmental network of NGOs and individuals. Liberal groups called our work a 'red herring' and refused to acknowledge that BDS would perniciously continue even if there would be a peace treaty with the Palestinians. Right-wing conservative groups played ostrich to the fact that not all boycott activities were inspired by Israel's destruction, and that a consistent and credible commitment of the Government of Israel to ending control over the Palestinians and to the integration and equality of Israel's Arab citizens is essential for success, even if delegitimization will continue anyhow.

Worse, many seeking to fight BDS lacked a strategy for winning against BDS, and struggled to define what 'victory' would look like and to articulate a credible strategy for achieving it. We are very proud that Reut did so by working with various communities and dozens of organizations, and also in initiating the Firewall effort to design and deploy technological tools to help fight the BDS Movement ([click here](#)), and the TOM initiative ([click here](#)) to help build the legitimacy of the State of Israel and the Jewish People.

Now it should be our collective duty and objective to win this fight. Following are a few points about understanding BDS, fighting BDS, and winning against BDS.

BDS and Combating the Delegitimization Campaign against Israel

What is the delegitimization of Israel?:

- **Delegitimization is the singular negation of Israel's right to exist and of the right of the Jewish People to self-determination.** *Explicit delegitimization* is evident when someone says: "I want Israel to be eliminated." Meanwhile, *implicit delegitimization*, which is always masked as criticism of Israel's policies, can be identified when Israel is singled-out and demonized. Furthermore, singling out the Jewish state is de-facto fundamentally anti-Semitic, and will eventually result in targeting Jews for being Jewish. In fact, this is beginning to happen in some campuses, on which it is no longer comfortable for students to put mezuzahs on their dorm's doors.

Understanding BDS:

- **Delegitimization of Israel envisions Israel's political implosion in non-violent ways. Its logic embraces the "one-state solution" and pits the BDS Movement against any political progress with the Palestinians.** Its vision requires Israel to first annex the West Bank and then grant all its Palestinian residents equal rights. Its leaders have said that the failure of the political process with the Palestinians will bring Israel's end, which will come in the form of a referendum. Hence, while BDS boycotts settlements, it is actually against any form of Israeli withdrawal from the settlements, whether within an agreement or unilaterally.
- **BDS frontloads criticism of Israel's policies and backloads its desire for Israel's implosion. Its strategy is 'convergence' around outstanding issues –** This allows the orchestrators of the BDS Movement to build coalitions with many groups that are critical of Israeli policies but do not necessarily seek Israel's elimination, and therefore are not 'delegitimizers.' For example, some of the entities that support boycotts of settlement recognize Israel's right to exist. The security fence, the Gaza blockade, and the Sheba'a Farms have all been examples of outstanding issues around which the BDS Movement has coalesced unaffiliated movements and organizations in order to delegitimize Israel.
- **The BDS Movement evolves as a highly decentralized network –** It has no central command-and-control, owner, or single group of funders. Its leaders do not have authority or exercise control over BDS activities, but they rather inspire it and allow its bottom-up organic growth. Every local BDS 'chapter' has great freedom to initiate and take grassroots action. Therefore, **there is no silver bullet**

against the BDS Movement, and ultimate victory will be achieved through the accumulation of a critical mass of local successes.

- **The delegitimization challenge and the BDS Movement are global and require a global response** – Recent concern has focused on American campuses, but BDS is also taking place among labor unions, trade associations, the arts and culture scene, and in sports. Furthermore, London is the hub-of-hubs of delegitimization, and the source of many if its most aggressive ideas; in Europe, the demographic rise of the Muslim community is transforming the public sphere against Israel and the Jews; South African Jews are facing the most acute government-backed challenge of BDS; and even in Latin America and Australia this movement is rising.

Winning against BDS:

- **Victory will be achieved when there is a political firewall around Israel and the right of the Jewish People to self-determination**, meaning that delegitimization of Israel brings with it a heavy political, societal, and personal price due to its being seen and framed as an act of prejudice and anti-Semitism. Because of its anti-Semitic foundations, delegitimization cannot be eliminated, but it can be contained and kept at bay. As mentioned, because of the network architecture of the BDS Movement, there is no silver bullet against it, and victory will be achieved incrementally through countless of small wins.
- **Unity – the broadening of the tent on a local basis – is essential for victory** – Most successes and effective campaigns against BDS were local, in the sense that they required a relationship-based local coalition, and involved a broad spectrum of Jewish and non-Jewish groups taking a clear stance against BDS. Thus, conservative groups must work with liberal groups and vice versa for a victory to be achieved. This is true on campuses and elsewhere.
- **A consistent and credible commitment of the government of Israel to ending control over the Palestinian population and to the integration and equality for Israel's Arab citizens is essential for keeping BDS at bay.**

Fighting BDS:

- **Drive a wedge between the delegitimizers and the critics** by focusing on those who are Israel-deniers and anti-Semites:
 - **Out-name-shame the delegitimizers**, focusing all available fire-power – financial, social, legal etc. – to expose their intellectual fallacies and eventually limit or eliminate altogether their ability to operate in a campus, labor union, or any other forum.
 - **Substantively engage the critics** on issues of politics, security, law, and any other related matter.
- **It's a clash of brands. We must build our brand and fight their brand:** The BDS Movement deeply understands branding, is uninterested in facts and logic and is instead invested in tarnishing the values and character of Israel as an apartheid state. They brand Israel and Jews as oppressors, manipulators and power brokers, serial violators of international law and of human rights, and the source

of all evil, thus tapping into classic anti-Semitic notions that are adjusted to the condition of Jewish sovereignty. Meanwhile the Palestinians are framed as the powerless victims of Israel and the Jews.

Israel's logic has been to build Israel's creative energy do-good brand, embodied by the Start-Up Nation book, by associating Israel with innovation, creativity, and contribution to humanity. We have also tried to brand the BDS Movement as unethical because of its double-standards and real goals toward Israel. On campus, the former logic seems to be winning.

- **It takes a network to fight a network** – This means that no one can win this fight on their own, as there is no silver bullet, and success requires all elements of the community to do their share. For example:
 - It is almost always the local team that wins. Therefore, **we must support the ability of local pro-Israel leaders** to wage effective local campaigns by building broad coalitions that bring together the political left and right to defend the right of the Jewish People to self-determination.
 - We must **identify and target the global and local 'hubs' of the BDS network**, and work aggressively to expose their fallacies.
 - We must **build the capacities of our hubs** – local community organizers, rabbis, funders, etc. – who are dedicated to this fight to understand what is happening around them; to launch political campaigns; and to strengthen their community-organizing and lobbying capabilities.
 - **The Government of Israel should focus on what it can do best:** Intelligence collection, providing information and resources, large-scale training, support for Israel visits, etc.
 - **The Jewish establishment**, primarily via the local JCRCs and other similar organizations, **should focus on funding, lobbying, and building broad coalitions within the broad tent approach.**
 - **Lobby groups should advance legislation and regulation** that will limit the ability of delegitimizers and BDS activists to operate.
- **Technology is vital** to compensate for our being relatively understaffed and under-resourced. We must develop apps that are designed to support the needs of local leader-activists based on the understanding of the decentralized network challenge that we face.
- **Build a 'legitimacy surplus':** Most people in most developed nations do not have an opinion about Israel, nor have they taken a stance. China and India are also virgin territory, in which Jews and Israel are very highly regarded. We must seize hearts and minds in such nations by Israel and the Jewish People together making a contribution to improving lives there and getting the credit for it.

Additional Resources

Please find hereinafter the following links to the Reut materials on the BDS movement and on fighting the delegitimization of Israel (please note that some of the materials date back to 2010, but are as relevant as ever):

- An [interview](#) with Reut Founder and President Gidi Grinstein on i24 News, which provides a broad overview of the BDS movement and the delegitimization of Israel.
- Reut's initial strategic framework: [The Delegitimization Challenge: Creating a Political Firewall](#). Please also see [The Assault on Israel's Legitimacy: London as a Case Study](#) and [The Gaza Flotilla: The Collapse of Israel's Political Firewall](#).
- Reut's [Broad Tent and Red-Lines Approach](#).
- Reut's paper on the BDS movement that demonstrates that it is a delegitimizing movement: [The BDS Movement Promotes Delegitimization against Israel](#).