welcome

The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) project targeting Israel that began in 2001 has been described in a number of ways. Is it an effective means of non-violent protest or part of a propaganda war? An effort to isolate and economically strangle the Jewish state or a program of striking poses which has not delivered the merest pinprick to the Israeli economy? A mortal threat or a public nuisance?

A debate on the relevance and significance of BDS carried on in the media over the last decade has focused on these questions, but has missed two important aspects of the BDS “movement.”

This *Guide* was created to show anyone dealing with BDS in their community that they are not alone, that the wheel does not need to be constantly re-invented, that others have learned lessons (and won victories) that can inform our choices.

To begin with, BDS rarely involves just boycott and divestment advocates and Israel, but instead tends to play out in communities such as college and university campuses, church meeting rooms and pews, City Hall chambers, union halls and the boardrooms of corporations and non-profits. *These civic spaces are what BDS tries to turn into new fronts in the Middle East conflict.* And, as stories in this *Guide* will attest, the price these civic organizations pay for getting onboard the divestment bandwagon (whether willingly or unwittingly) can be extraordinarily high.

The other quality of BDS that is rarely discussed is that the entire program has largely been a loser. After nearly ten years of tirelessly advocating for divestment on college campuses, not one school has sold a single share of stock targeted by divestment advocates. Churches that once embraced a BDS position have reconsidered and rejected BDS multiple times. Municipalities and non-profits (such as cooperative food markets) have said no to boycott advocates. In fact, *a decade of failure has reduced BDS activists to resorting to divestment hoaxes (see page 14) and a focus on increasingly marginal targets to keep their campaign alive.*

But these victories over the forces of BDS have not come from nowhere. They were the result of efforts of activists similar to those who may be reading this *Guide*. *As you will discover, those committed to an assault on Israel’s legitimacy do not rest.* They are ready to absorb losses and continue on with their campaigns, to look for new targets of opportunity, to reconfigure their tactics, to exploit weaknesses of civic organizations and to capitalize on any progress they make (no matter how trivial or temporary). If the price to maintain Israel’s security (like the price for democracy) is eternal vigilance, this resource is designed to help you man the walls and ensure the forces of Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions enjoy a second decade of irrelevance and defeat.
Nearly everyone supports peace between Israelis and Palestinians. And most Americans are in favor of a strong Israel-US relationship. BDS supports neither. BDS is a strategy unrelated to peace which fosters division and shuts down dialog as a tool of partisanship vs. reconciliation.

From where did this “anti-peace movement” emerge? As described on page 6, the BDS project started in 2001 at the now-notorious UN Durban I conference where anti-Israeli forces hijacked an event originally designed to deal with the global fight against racism, turning it into an unprecedented hate-fest targeting the Jewish state. **It was at this conference that the so-called “Apartheid Strategy” (a propaganda campaign designed to “brand” Israel as the heir of Apartheid South Africa) was born. And the tactic chosen to implement this strategy would be one of Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS).**

From this inglorious beginning, the BDS project spread to college campuses, mainline Protestant churches, unions, cities and other civic organizations. And it is the targeting of these civic institutions that is the key to understanding the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions “movement.” For anti-Israel activists refusing to buy Israeli products are simply making unremarkable personal choices. And organizations with names like The Palestinian Solidarity Movement (PSM) or Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) insisting that they have divested from the Jewish state would be rightly seen as partisan organizations claiming to be selling off assets they probably never owned.

But what if Harvard University, or the Presbyterian Church, or a respected union, a historic city or well-known retailer took part in the BDS program? Well, that would make news. That would allow anti-Israel activists to punch significantly above their weight, claiming that their efforts were supported by individuals and organizations far better known than the activists themselves.

This then is the mission of BDS activists: to get their message to come out of the mouth of a well-known institution. This explains the tremendous efforts they have exerted trying to get such organizations

**Top 10 Reasons to Defeat BDS**

1. BDS represents an attempt by narrow-interest partisans to stuff their propaganda into the mouth of a third party.

2. BDS tries to make every civic organization a new battlefront in the Middle East conflict.

3. BDS poisons and divides any community it enters.

4. BDS is based on falsehoods, such as the “Israel=apartheid” propaganda accusation.

5. BDS warps debate over the Middle East, making the quest for peace more difficult.
onboard and the even more extreme efforts made when an organization decides to jump off. It explains the questionable tactics and bizarre behavior described in the many case studies in this Guide (including manipulation of civic organizations to outright fraud). Simply put, the value of an endorsement by a famous person or institution is high enough for BDS champions that any tactic seems to be justified.

As the stories in this Guide describe, BDS has been repelled at most if not all of the institutions where it has been tried. But the cost has been high. Not necessarily to Israel (although BDS campaigns do distort debate on the Middle East and tend to crowd out discussions of all other human rights issues in the region and on the planet). Rather, the majority of the cost has been borne by the civic organization which (possibly naïvely) decided to give BDS a whirl.

Whenever an institution has accepted a BDS proposal, the results have been rancor, division and conflict within the organization. Divestment advocates who manage to convince (or trick) an organization into buying into BDS will pocket their (often brief) win, leaving the organization behind to deal with the wreckage left in the wake of a boycott or divestment debate.

While the rightness of the fight against BDS or the effectiveness of chosen tactics can sometimes be credited with a victory in a BDS campaign, more often than not the rejection of BDS comes from wise souls within the targeted civic organization who understand the true price they are being asked to pay.

For their sake, as well as for Israel’s, the battle against BDS belongs to all of us.

6. BDS seeks to unfairly punish just one side in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

7. BDS activists frequently use manipulation or fraud to get their way with an organization.

8. BDS has been rejected by every organization where it’s been tried, including some of the nation’s most progressive communities.

9. Defeating BDS helps discredit the discreditable endeavor to de-legitimize Israel.

10. BDS is a loser.

Boycott
To refuse to buy from or do business with a company, nation or other entity out of protest or as a means to coerce different behavior.

Divestment
To sell or dispose of an asset (such as stock in a company). While this term can refer to any buying and selling of equities such as stocks or bonds, in the context of BDS, divestment – like boycott – is a political act of protest or pressure.

Sanctions
A penalty or coercive measure, normally applied by one or more nations against another nation in protest of the behavior of the government of the targeted country.

BDS
A political campaign to target Israel using the tools of Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions described above.

Durban I
The UN “anti-racism” conference in 2001 that degenerated into an anti-Israel and anti-Jewish hate fest where the Apartheid Strategy (see below) and BDS were chosen as the focus of a worldwide campaign.

Apartheid Strategy
A political propaganda strategy adopted at the 2001 Durban I conference to brand Israel as the inheritor of the mantle of Apartheid South Africa, worthy of punishment by BDS.

PACBI
The Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, an organization of political groups in the Middle East and beyond founded in 2004 to buttress support for BDS in the region and elsewhere.
What are the goals of BDS campaigns?

Because the desire to punish Israel economically represents such a small minority of public opinion, the goal of BDS activists is to attach their message (that Israel is an “apartheid state” worthy of economic punishment) to a well known institution such as a university, church or city. This allows them to “punch above their weight” by declaring their anti-Israel message is not simply emanating from a small, non-representative minority, but rather represents the policy of a respected organization.

Another goal is to infuse a campus or other institution with their Israel=apartheid messaging, attempting to make this slander stick, even if boycott or divestment motions themselves get defeated (as they have been, time and time again).

What are the origins of BDS campaigns?

This is an extremely important and relevant question since BDS activists are responsible for many false claims related to ambiguity over the word “divestment.”

As you note, divestment is simply the selling of an investment, such as a stock, bond or mutual fund. Every time you see someone shouting “Sell!” on the floor of the stock exchange, for example, divestment is taking place.

Divest-from-Israel campaigns fall into the category of political divestment. Rather than selling investments for economic reasons (such as fear that share price will go down in the future), political divestment involves selling an investment due to a political disagreement with the company or country the investment benefits.

This is an important distinction since, without a public explanation or announcement that investments are being sold for political, rather than economic reasons, political divestment cannot be said to have taken place.
In 2004, a number of mainline Protestant churches (such as the Presbyterians and Methodists) began looking at divestment policies targeting Israel with the Presbyterians voting to begin exploration of a process of “phased, selective divestment” at their bi-annual conference.

As with universities, however, support for divestment in the churches turned out to be extremely shallow. While some church leaders and regional churches supported divestment, the rank and file categorically rejected divestment calls, with the Presbyterians rescinding their 2004 “phased, selective divestment” policy vote in 2006 by a margin of 95%-5%.

During this period, divestment was also attempted in some US cities (notably Somerville, Massachusetts and Seattle, Washington), but lost badly in both places. When BDS made a comeback in 2009 after a three-year lull, new “targets of opportunity” were chosen such as food co-ops and famous entertainers. See pages 24-27 to learn more about these BDS stories.

Despite its losing streak, calls for BDS have gained considerable momentum based on a single victory, such as the temporary support divestment had with the Presbyterian Church which was used to inspire hundreds of divestment projects between 2004 and 2006.

BDS controversies also tend to distort debate, demanding discussion only over whether or not Israel should be punished for its “crimes,” rather than pointing out the inaccuracy and unfairness of these very accusations or the responsibility of Israel’s accusers for the situation in the Middle East.

Finally, calls for boycott or divestment do tremendous damage to the institutions which embrace them, poisoning the atmosphere and creating hostile environments on campuses and elsewhere. For all these reasons, BDS needs to be fought whenever it rears its head within any civic institution.
<table>
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<th>BDS Timeline</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2001</strong></td>
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<td><strong>September 11, 2001</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Durban I</strong></td>
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<td><strong>September 8, 2001</strong></td>
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<td><strong>February 2002</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Fall 2002</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Spring 2002</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Harvard President Lawrence Summers</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Fall 2004</strong></td>
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<td><strong>December 2004</strong></td>
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<td><strong>July 2004</strong></td>
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### 2001 vs. 2005? When did BDS start?

Most current BDS campaigns claim the “movement” originated with a call from “Palestinian civil society” to engage in boycotts and divestment. This refers to statements from *The Palestinian Civil Society Calls for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Against Israel* in 2005 (see page 18). So how does this square with the fact that BDS started in 2001 with many well-documented campaigns across the country years before this 2005 boycott call?

The 2005 date may be highlighted simply to establish “indigenous” origins (and credibility) for a BDS project that actually started abroad years earlier. Alternatively, the middle of the last decade was a difficult time for BDS activists who saw their proposals rejected and their gains reversed, to the point where BDS went largely silent from 2006-2009. Could this record of failure be the reason “the movement” is so desperate for a 2005 restart?

### 2009 – The Year of the BDS Hoax

After a three-year lull, BDS made a rebound with a major announcement in February of 2009 that Hampshire College, a small liberal arts college in Massachusetts, had become the first US school to divest from Israel. Despite highlighting the fact that this meant 2001-2009 was spent without a higher education success, the Hampshire story gave the impression that BDS had again gained considerable momentum. If that story was true – which it wasn’t (see page 14).

Hampshire began a year of similar hoaxes, including false claims that major firms like TIAA-CREF and Motorola had followed BDS activist’s advice and engaged in politically-motivated divestment from Israel (they hadn’t). In 2010, BDS advocates seem to have gotten back to trying to win real vs. pretend victories, but 2009 points out the lengths boycotters will go to boast about a victory, even a fake one.

### Key Events

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>April 2005</td>
<td>Leaders of the UK’s Association of University Teachers (AUT) vote to boycott two Israeli universities, the first successful union vote on an academic boycott.</td>
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<td>July 2005</td>
<td>The “Palestinian Civil Society Calls for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Against Israel” declaration is released (see page 18).</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 2009</td>
<td>Announcements that Hampshire College has become the first US university to divest in Israel are exposed as a hoax.</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 2005</td>
<td>The AUT repeals its boycott after members insist on a vote over the issue.</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 2006</td>
<td>Members of the Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) rescind their initial 2004 divestment resolution by a vote of 95-5%.</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 2010</td>
<td>UC Berkeley student government rejects divestment recommendation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2010 and beyond</td>
<td>After a three-year lull, BDS made a rebound with a major announcement in February of 2009 that Hampshire College, a small liberal arts college in Massachusetts, had become the first US school to divest from Israel. Despite highlighting the fact that this meant 2001-2009 was spent without a higher education success, the Hampshire story gave the impression that BDS had again gained considerable momentum. If that story was true – which it wasn’t (see page 14).</td>
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**Additional Note:**

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Characterizing the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions “movement” as a loser might seem strange to those who have heard for years that BDS is “on the march” and “moving from strength to strength.”

Numbers might give us a better idea of how BDS has been faring in the decade since it began. After all, the goal of boycott and divestment campaigns is to bring economic pressure to bear on Israel. That being the case, what’s been going on with Israel’s economy since BDS was launched in 2001?

Well, as shown in figure A, during the very period when BDS was supposedly on the rise, the size of Israel’s economy (as measured by GDP) nearly doubled from $110B to over $190B. Given that the BDS project is based on their activity having economic consequence for the Jewish state, the takeaway from this chart seems to be that such consequence has been an explosion of growth in the Israeli economy.

Some divestment activists might complain that their efforts are concentrated outside of Israel and are based on getting individuals and organizations to stop buying or investing in companies that in some way benefit the Jewish state. In which case, the numbers that would be more relevant would be Israel exports, not GNP.

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Israel Exports
NIS, New Israeli Shekel, in billions

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2000</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>161.8</td>
<td>171.9</td>
<td>197.5</td>
<td>165.8</td>
<td>186.7</td>
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Israel Gross National Product
US dollars, in billions

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<td></td>
<td>110.1</td>
<td>123.7</td>
<td>121.7</td>
<td>111.8</td>
<td>117.8</td>
<td>125.8</td>
<td>133.2</td>
<td>143.8</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>199.5</td>
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figure A
Yet comparative export figures (figure B) show Israeli exports growing just as rapidly as GDP (not surprising for an export-driven economy). And as far as divestment goes, Europe (which has seen even more aggressive demands to stop investing in Israel) now invests more venture capital in Israel than into any European country.

Now BDS champions can always retreat to the unstated fact that the whole enterprise is really a propaganda exercise, more concerned with eroding public support for Israel than having an actual economic impact. In which case, the most important numbers appear in figure C.

Yes, as it turns out, after nearly ten years of BDS-related propaganda targeting Israel’s most important ally, the United States, support for Israel has grown almost 20 percentage points since boycott, divestment and sanctions first came onto the scene.

So despite a decade of tireless BDS efforts, Israel has become more economically successful than at any other time in its history. And despite (or possibly because) of boycotters’ non-stop attempts to insert the Arab-Israeli dispute into every civic institution in the land, general public support for Israel is today at an all-time high.

This reality check does not mean that BDS campaigns are meaningless or should be ignored. But this track record of ten years without accomplishments should provide perspective to anyone now dealing with the phenomenon.
reality check

People opposing BDS have raised questions regarding the legality of boycott and divestment activities.

Most of these questions hinge on the Office of Antiboycott Compliance within the Department of Commerce which was created in 1977 to ensure American companies were not participating in the Arab boycott of Israel which has been formally in place since 1945.

While originally created to coordinate a primary boycott whereby the Arab states would refuse to do business with Israel, the Arab boycott soon encompassed a secondary boycott (refusal to do business with companies in other countries who do business with Israel) and a tertiary boycott (requiring companies who want business in the Middle East to certify that they do not have clients, suppliers or partners either located in or doing business in the Jewish state).

These secondary and tertiary boycotts (which effectively gave foreign governments veto power over what American businesses could and could not do) eventually made this an issue for the US government which passed anti-boycott legislation in the 1970s, penalizing companies complying with such boycotts with heavy fines. Threat of further prosecution, associated bad publicity, and the courageous stand of some companies (such as Hilton hotels) who publicly defied and denounced the boycott dramatically diluted its effectiveness (as did the Oslo Accords – at least temporarily). While some companies (especially in Europe) still avoid the small Israeli market to assuage the larger Arab one, anti-Israel boycotts have been off the agenda of US companies for many decades.

It is an open question whether US-based boycotts of Israeli products or domestic calls to divest from firms doing business with Israel fall under the jurisdiction of federal anti-boycott law. If a BDS project was successful and then challenged in court, the prosecution would have to demonstrate a link between local BDS proponents and Middle East boycott initiatives covered by anti-boycott legislation. Divestment groups deny such a relationship exists, and their claim has never been thoroughly investigated since, to date, BDS has had virtually no concrete results to challenge in court.

In addition to this criminal law question, BDS also triggers issues related to civil law regarding the fiduciary duties of those managing investments. Managers of endowments and retirement funds that are being asked to make politicized divestment decisions have an obligation to make responsible financial investments on behalf of their clients. Making those decisions in order to take a political stance could lead to shareholder complaints and even lawsuits based on a breach of fiduciary responsibility.

Again, the fact that BDS projects have been defeated politically time and time again means they have never gotten to the point where legal matters (civil or criminal) come into play. But this does bring up the point that if a legal challenge was ever triggered, it would not be divestment advocates that would face prosecution but the institution BDS advocates convinced to take part in a boycott or divestment program. So while legal questions are far from settled, schools and other institutions should be alerted of the risks they might be taking if they go down this route.
It should come as no surprise that divestment (the “D” of “BDS”) has been the primary focus of Israel de-legitimization activities on college and university campuses. After all:

- Campuses represent high concentrations of political activity and experimentation.
- In recent decades, organizations devoted to attacking Israel have taken root on many campuses.
- Respected institutes of learning have high name recognition. (Remember that the goal of BDS advocates is to claim that they speak for more than just themselves, making famous universities a tempting target.)
- Campus controversies make news.
- School endowments and retirement funds include stocks from hundreds, if not thousands of companies. Somewhere in those portfolios likely rests an investment upon which divestment activists can hang their campaign.

It often takes nothing more than ownership of a single share of Caterpillar (or some other stock in the divestment blacklist) for BDS campaigners to manufacture campus controversy and launch a divestment campaign.

Historically, such campaigns have consisted of:

- Petitions (signed by students, faculty and/or alumni) calling on a college or university to divest from companies that benefit Israel
- Meetings with campus administrators and investment managers to discuss divestment
- Calls to have divestment endorsed by student groups and student government bodies

The availability of free Internet petitioning software and the growth of social networks to publicize divestment campaigns made online petitioning the tactic of choice from 2002-2004. But while such petition-driven campus divestment campaigns (especially one at Harvard and MIT – see page 12) received a great deal of media attention, these online tools were also available to divestment opponents who used them to out-petition BDS supporters by margins of 10:1.

Even before such petitioning helped establish BDS as a minority opinion, college and university presidents and investment managers took a dim view of propaganda campaigns designed to draw their campuses into branding Israel as the new South Africa, with then Harvard President Lawrence Summers warning in 2002 that divestment campaigns could be “anti-Semitic in their effect, if not their intent.”

While it was uncertain how administrations would react to BDS activity on campuses in the early part of the decade, in the ten years BDS has been attempted at colleges and university no school has divested a single share of stock targeted by divestment activists. And antics like those that took place at Hampshire College in 2009 (see page 14) warned administrations of the perils involved with even giving BDS campaigners a hearing.

A decade of failure has created a credibility gap for BDS campaigners trying to portray their “movement” as having unstoppable momentum. Campaigns to get divestment measures passed by student government organizations, like the high-profile controversy at UC Berkeley in 2010 (see page 16), seem to be the latest tactic of choice, likely to surface at many campuses in the coming months and years. As the following stories will attest, victories over BDS require alliances, creativity and eternal vigilance.
The endowments and retirement funds of Harvard and MIT total many billions of dollars, diversified into thousands of investments. Unsurprisingly, the giant list of stocks owned by these academic institutions means that Harvard and MIT (like most schools with large portfolios) own stocks in companies such as Caterpillar Tractor or Motorola that appear on divestment blacklists. The fact that stocks in these companies are so widely held has allowed BDS advocates to create campus controversy at virtually any school they choose.

In 2002, an online petition appeared signed by 613 students, staff and alumni of the two Cambridge-based universities calling for the schools to divest their portfolios of stocks identified by divestment proponents as benefiting the Jewish state. While similar petition-driven divestment projects had appeared on other campuses before then, the prominence of Harvard and MIT gave divestment its first major media boost, with newspapers around the country asking if divestment from Israel was the wave of the future.

Because divestment was such a new controversy, it was not entirely clear how the administrations of these two schools (or any school facing a similar situation) would react to petition-driven requests to divest from Israel. Nor was it clear where campus attitudes sat regarding BDS activities.

Those campus attitudes were confirmed when a second petition condemning divestment gathered nearly ten times the number of signatures as the original pro-divestment petition. And administration attitudes towards divestment requests were quickly clarified by official statements saying the schools would never divest from the Jewish state. By the time then Harvard President Lawrence Summers took the podium at Harvard to condemn divestment as “anti-Semitic in effect, if not intent,”
it was already clear that divestment calls would lead to no concrete action, beyond condemnation by large numbers of the campus community.

This did not stop Harvard from inspiring dozens of copycat petition-driven divestment campaigns at other colleges and universities. But once the smoke cleared, it became clear that this aspect of the BDS phenomenon was driven more by technology than by changes in political attitudes. It was during the early period of BDS that free online petitioning software became available, and new media such as blogs and social networks provided easy means for word to travel from campus to campus regarding this new tactic. But these same tools were also available to BDS critics, as testified by the anti-divestment counter-petition pulling in nearly 6000 signatures in just a few weeks.

More importantly, decisions and statements made by the leaders of Harvard and MIT set a precedent for other colleges and universities who joined in refusing to consider divestment from Israel. So while BDS proponents were able to leverage the initial publicity they received from their activities at Harvard and MIT to push their program elsewhere, several years of campus divestment activity leading to zero results eventually led to credibility challenges for those claiming that BDS represented an unstoppable political wave.

Lessons Learned
1. Online petitioning software and other Internet-based communication tools are available to both sides in a divestment debate.
2. Leverage tactics based on the fact that anti-divestment attitudes generally outpoll pro-divestment ones by substantial margins.
3. Publicize that college and university divestment campaigns have led to zero results, despite a decade of BDS efforts on campuses.
4. Highlight that the only real result of BDS campaigns is bitter divisiveness on college campuses, often including ethnic and religious conflict.
Hampshire, a small, liberal arts college in Western Massachusetts, has one of the smallest endowments in the country. But, as the first college to publically divest from South Africa in the 1980s, Hampshire was seen as a symbolic potential prize for the campus divestment organization Students for Justice in Palestine (SJp).

While college administrators respectfully listened to SJp’s concerns, they made it clear as recently as 2008 that they had no intention of divesting or of joining SJp in denouncing the Jewish state as the next South Africa.

Fast forward to 2009 when the college brought in an outside consultant to review Hampshire’s investment holdings against the school’s policies for ethical investment (policies that included support for unions, and statements on issues such as Sudan/Darfur, but no stance regarding Israel). This review led to the sale of a particular fund, a fund that happened to include shares in a company previously targeted by BDS activists.

Despite the fact that the sale of this fund said nothing about Hampshire’s position on the Middle East conflict, SJp quickly declared victory, announcing to the world that Hampshire had become the first US college to divest from the Jewish state.

Given the importance of this alleged “victory,” it was curious why SJp made these public pronouncements on its own, rather than standing alongside college administrators and investment managers they were alleging had made this supposedly historic decision. The reason for SJp’s independent action quickly became clear when the administration announced that its investment decisions had nothing to do with Israel or the Middle East, and that SJp was deliberately misleading the public for its own political ends.

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“No other college or university should use Hampshire as a precedent for divesting from Israel, since Hampshire has refused to divest from Israel. Anyone who claims otherwise is deliberately misrepresenting Hampshire’s decision and has no right to speak for the college.”

Ralph Hexter, President
Sigmund Roos, Chair of the Board of Trustees
Hampshire College

Spring, 2009
BDS is all about trying to get a prominent institution to lend its name to a boycott or divestment program’s propaganda message. But what happens when an institution refuses to play along? You then end up with strange cases like the 2009 divestment controversy at Hampshire College.
Lessons Learned

1. If BDS campaigns are active on your campus, assume they may be meeting with campus administrators and investment managers.

2. Make sure to arrange your own meetings with the school administration to provide them accurate information on the Middle East and the true nature of BDS.

3. Use the Hampshire Hoax to alert the campus community about the excesses and fraud that have accompanied BDS in the past (especially if Hampshire is being used as an example of BDS success on your campus).

4. Don’t accept claims by BDS activists as accurate without confirmation.

For several weeks, a bizarre drama unfolded with Hampshire’s administration alerting media and alumni that the divestment story was not true while BDS advocates fired off press releases claiming it was (and denounced as liars an administration they had previously courted). After some unsuccessful attempts to get everyone on the same page, Hampshire’s President Hexter finally announced in no uncertain terms that (1) the school had not divested in Israel; (2) the school maintained investments in the very companies SJP claimed were being boycotted and would continue to invest in Israel in the future; and (3) that SJP was inappropriately speaking on behalf of the college, unacceptable behavior that could have consequences for the student group.

On one hand, this campaign of deception did give the campus divestment effort a new lease on life, with Hampshire still being held aloft as an example for other institutions to join similar campus Boycott, Divestment and Sanction (BDS) campaigns.

At the same time it may have also doomed any divestment project requiring negotiating with campus administrators. After all, having seen the excesses and dishonesty that led to the Hampshire Hoax, how likely is it that other schools will let themselves fall into the same trap?
It was fitting that the biggest divestment fight in the 2009-2010 academic year took place at the University of California at Berkeley, one of the first campuses where BDS petitioning made an appearance in the early 2000s. And the venue for this particular battle was also telling: the chambers of student government.

With school administrations no longer taking their calls and petitions showing the unpopularity of BDS on campuses, divestment advocates turned their attention to getting student governments to pass resolutions condemning Israel and demanding colleges divest from the Jewish state. Unlike other divestment activities, advocating for such resolutions only requires convincing a small group of student leaders to take what amounts to a symbolic vote (or, if you prefer, striking a pose) on the Middle East conflict.

In March 2010, leaders of Berkeley’s Student Senate passed such a resolution, one which started with a paragraph claiming that the issues in the Middle East were too complicated to allow student government to take sides in the matter, followed by a dozen paragraphs doing just that. As with so many other institutions, students woke up the next morning to discover that the vote was being broadcast around the world as UC Berkeley (all of it, not just the Student Senate) condemning Israel for war crimes.

Reaction was as swift as it was predictable. Students opposed to the bill expressed outrage at what was being said in their name and without their permission. Divestment advocates fired back, fiercely defending the *fait accomplis* they had just pulled off with student leaders. The campus newspaper and other venues became free-fire zones of accusations and counter accusations of racism, anti-Semitism and apology for murder, demonstrating the poison that always accompanies BDS dragging the Middle East conflict into a community.
At Berkeley, the student government’s constitution allows the Student Senate President to veto bills (which he did to the BDS resolution), and also allows the senate to override those vetoes (which they didn’t — although not for lack of trying). At several meetings, some of which went all night, BDS advocates and critics packed student chambers to demonstrate their support for one side or the other, turning usually sleepy venues into battlefields complete with emotional testimony and photos of bloody babies (not necessarily the best framework for making decisions on international affairs).

At the end of the day, all attempts at veto override failed. Interestingly, while the Berkeley story was playing out, similar divestment motions were presented at two other UC campuses at San Diego and Stanford: the first one failing and the second one being pulled in order to avoid three BDS defeats in one month on campuses once considered “in the bag” for divestment advocates.

The Palestinian iconoclast Hussein Ibish aptly noted “The bottom line is this: if you can’t get divestment through UC Berkeley, you’re done.” But if history is any guide, these defeats are not likely to deter BDS advocates from pushing their project within more student governments in the coming academic years.

Lessons Learned

1. Keep abreast of activity happening within student government organizations at your school. If BDS is being discussed and you don’t know about it, shame on you.

2. Cultivate good relations with student leaders of all political parties and organizations. Make sure everyone knows there is more than one campus opinion on the Middle East.

3. If your campus does get embroiled in a BDS fight and divestment fails (which it usually does), communicate this as a victory for the campus (and for common sense) with as much energy as BDS advocates communicate their stories.
While this may simply be a way to make a long string of losses they experienced during this early period disappear, 2005 was also chosen as a new start date because on July 9th of that year a coalition of 170 Palestinian organizations in Israel, the Palestinian Authority and overseas released “The Palestinian Civil Society Calls for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Against Israel.” When divestment campaigners refer to their campaigns originating from calls within Palestinian civil society, this is the document to which they refer.

The notion of BDS welling up from the Palestinian grassroots certainly gives the “movement” more credibility than its real origin at the long-discredited UN’s 2001 Durban I “anti-racism” conference. But a quick look at who makes up the 170 organizations listed in the boycott call reveals some interesting details.

First off, the organization that tops the list of supporting “Unions, Associations, Campaigns” is the Council of National and Islamic Forces in Palestine, a coalition that includes Hamas, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and some of the more violent sub-sets of Fatah. While it is possible that everyone signing the list did so out of unvarnished solidarity, it is also appropriate to note that it must be much easier for this Islamic Forces Council to get the Palestinian Dentist’s Association to agree to its requests, rather than vice versa.

Also, it turns out that at least 10-15% of the signatories come from organizations outside Israel and the territories, including over 20 organizations from surrounding countries (13 from Syria, 6 from Lebanon and 2 from Jordan) and another 9 from Europe or North America. Now it may be that some or all of these are refugee or diaspora groups, but given the large Syrian contingent in the boycotters’ roster, the notion that we’re talking entirely about uncoerced volunteers becomes questionable.

The potential that this “Civil Society” boycott call arises from coercion within Palestinian society (vs. being a consensus welling up from the grassroots) also points out an interesting paradox. The claim that Israel uniquely deserves the BDS treatment is, to a certain extent, based on Israel supposedly being exceptional with regard to its level of human rights abuses (vs. Iran, China, North Korea, etc.). And yet the organizations making the boycott call can only be seen as legitimately representing Palestinian civic society if Israel’s “repression” does not extend to eliminating such civic space in both Israel and the territories.

Despite the circular arguments BDS activists often make to explain why they are targeting Israel vs. far greater human rights abusers, we must conclude that the best way to avoid being a target of alleged “human rights” activists pushing boycott, divestment and sanctions is to actually be a repressive dictatorship that crushes civic society rather than letting it exist to sign boycott petitions.
Divestment debates are ongoing at many mainline Protestant churches, such as the Presbyterian Church in the US (PCUSA) and Methodist Church. Over the last ten years, numerous anti-Israel divestment resolutions (usually started by local BDS activists within a church) have found their way to national forums where church members meet to chart institutional policy. While these resolutions are routinely voted down at a national level by large majorities, that seems to just give local activists the go-ahead to try to re-craft their rejected BDS calls for resubmission two or four years later.

Rabbi Yehiel Poupko’s booklet *Looking at Them Looking at Us: A Jewish Understanding of Christian Responses to Israel* (published by the Jewish Center for Public Affairs, see Resources on page 37) is required reading to fully understand why these votes keep coming up again and again among various Protestant denominations. Notably, Poupko highlights two critical points:

- **Mainline churches are in steep decline**, due to falling birthrate/aging of members, and a lack of perceived spiritual vitality, especially among youth who (if interested in religious affiliation at all) are increasingly attracted to growing evangelical churches, whom “mainliners” perceive as competitors.

- **Mainline churches are the most prominent American institution committed to dissent on US foreign policy matters**. Quoting Poupko: “while a variety of advocacy efforts are centered in labor unions, universities, and interest groups, it is primarily in the mainline Protestant churches that persistent voices against American foreign policy are heard. It is from the churches that the resources flow which facilitate dissent.”

These two issues are linked, with politics filling a void left by a spiritual vacuum among churches dealing with modernity and struggling to find their own unique identity in an increasingly secular and ecumenical world. And **having staked out foreign policy as their “turf,” choices often are made based on competitive positioning with rival churches (notably more conservative fundamentalists).**

While it would be an oversimplification to say that Presbyterian or Methodist choices on matters such as Israel and the Middle East boil down to “if the fundamentalists support Israel, we oppose it,” it’s also fair to say that mainliners’ choices are impelled as much by secular and church politics as they are by “Christian witness.”

Despite their decline (the Presbyterian Church in the US has lost nearly half its members in the last 40 years), these large churches still maintain retirement fund holdings and other investments worth billions of dollars. Within these diverse portfolios, widely held stocks such as Caterpillar and Motorola can be easily found and used by BDS activists as the basis of a divestment campaign.

Why do BDS activists continue to target churches, despite the fact that divestment has been voted down again and again? Keep in mind that **the goal of BDS is not economic punishment of Israel per se, but to get the BDS message that Israel is an “apartheid state” to come out of the mouth of a prominent institution.**

And, even in decline venerable churches with centuries of history behind them are just too tempting a target for divestment advocates to leave alone.
By 2004, BDS (still largely a campus phenomenon) had managed to generate a fair amount of noise, but no institutional wins. Just as a lack of actual boycott or divestment victories was straining the credibility of BDS organizations, divestment was thrown a lifeline when the Presbyterian Church in the US (PCUSA) voted at its biennial convention to begin a process of “phased, selective divestment” in companies doing business with the Jewish state.

**Presbyterian Church in the US (PCUSA)**

"'Thus sayeth the Lord.' This description of our own opinions can easily result in an unwillingness to actually entertain evidence that contradicts what we have declared to be true – namely that Israel is to blame for violence in the region, that Israel is to blame for the Palestinian refugee crisis, and that Israel is morally deficient for attempting to use a physical barrier to protect its citizens. Since this prophecy has been issued in our name, we, as Presbyterians might do well to remember the stern biblical condemnation of the practice of claiming to speak for God where God has not spoken.”

*Will Spotts*, author of *Pride and Prejudice*, the Presbyterian Divestment Story

From 2004-2006, the PCUSA’s divestment policy became the jewel in the crown of the BDS “movement,” an example held up to other institutions (including schools, municipalities and unions, as well as other churches) to follow.

Like the few other successful institutional divestment votes that took place over the last decade, PCUSA’s divestment decisions were made by a small group that acted with minimal input from members. In the case of the Presbyterians, however, this small group was not a radical fringe but rather included members from the Church’s top leadership.

The Church currently faces a pair of linked institutional crises: a dwindling membership (which has fallen by almost half in the last four decades) paired with growing centralization of power within a bureaucracy that has assumed quasi-executive authority. Church management of several billion dollars in assets (including property and huge investment and retirement funds) created the need for a large, full-time, paid professional church staff, located in Louisville, Kentucky. Over the years, Louisville has shown an increasing tendency to manage denominational issues (including theological and political disputes) from the top.
This bureaucracy’s hostility to the Jewish state has been manifest for more than twenty years, and has included several pronouncements that effectively lay blame for all problems in the Middle East at Israel’s doorstep. The Presbyterian News Service (PNS) is uniformly uninterested or hostile to Israeli versions of events, and much of the theological language used to describe the conflict has been lifted from the Church’s partners in Middle East “peacemaking:” the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, a radical Palestinian Christian group behind many church divestment programs.

Divestment was one of many Middle East-related issues voted on during the last hours of the PCUSA’s 2004 General Assembly. While Church leaders first assumed this vote to be unremarkable, they were unprepared for the controversy their divestment resolution would cause. Within days of the vote, divestment champions were traveling the globe broadcasting their success and using the PCUSA resolution to convince other churches that they should join their Presbyterian brothers in punishing the alleged crimes of “apartheid Israel.” At the same time, Jewish leaders let it be known that inter-faith dialog could not continue with divestment on the table as condemnation of the Church poured in from across the country and around the world.

Although outsiders played a role in lobbying PCUSA between 2004 and 2006, it was the disaffection of numerous Church members that led members to rescind divestment at the Presbyterians 2006 General Assembly by a margin of 95%-5%. While the Church hierarchy fought hard to prevent this substantial reversal, they could not avoid the fact that hostility to Israel dissipates quickly the closer one gets to the pews.

Just as PCUSA’s 2004 decisions blazed the trail for other churches to pass their own divestment resolutions, so the Presbyterian’s 2006 reversal on divestment has led to an abandonment of the tactic by other churches as well as a general unraveling of BDS (which lay largely dormant until 2009).

During the next two PCUSA General Assemblies (in 2008 and 2010), anti-Israel activists within the Church have continued to try to leverage the Church’s reputation for their own purposes, although today they tend to dance as close as possible to the red line of divestment without actually crossing it. There was evidence in 2010 that the larger churches within the organization have finally been aroused to stand up against the general hostility to the Jewish state that has been allowed to pervade Church discourse for the last two decades. Time will tell if this has a long-term impact on Church opinion and behavior.
In April of 2009, a dozen protestors gathered outside a Toronto liquor store to protest the shop’s carrying of Israeli wines. Little did they realize that they were about to trigger a block party, and then an international movement.

When word got out about the Toronto liquor boycott, hundreds of members of the Jewish community descended on the store and proceeded to purchase the shop’s entire Israeli stock. Over 500 cases of Israeli wines were sold in less than half an hour, with the buyers pouring into the street for a celebration, well lubricated with Israeli cabernet and merlot. As the party was joined by Yids on Wheels (a Jewish motorcycle club) and Chabad (in a van blaring Israeli music), the protestors quietly slinked off into the night.

Perhaps it was a protest scheduled for Passover that generated this level of passion, but the ramifications of the Israeli wine protest victory did not end in Toronto. “BUYcott Israel,” a campaign designed to counter anti-Israel product boycotts with pro-Israel Buycotts got a major boost from this victory, with thousands of people joining a BUYcott Israel Web site and various Facebook pages designed to coordinate similar anti-boycott activity.

Since 2009, threats of boycott in Canada, the US and Europe have been met with immediate Buycott responses, usually ending up in sellouts of Israeli goods.

In Vancouver, Canada, protests at a local sporting goods co-op led to a 2000% increase in sales of Israeli outdoor clothing. In Maryland, protestors calling for a retailer to boycott Israeli Ahava beauty products led to the largest sales of Ahava in the store’s history. And in the UK, where boycott calls have been more prevalent than in North America, a grassroots Buycott campaign has been active in countering boycotts of Israeli food products at local supermarkets.

In a way, Buycott vs. Boycott provides supporters of Israel with a perfect win-win. For to instigate a boycott, BDS activists must convince a retailer to follow their dictates (a hurdle they have rarely if ever overcome), or gather together to spend a day protesting in front of a store that has already rejected their demands. In contrast, the only thing Buycotters need to do to show their support for the Jewish state is to go shopping.
focus on product boycotts

Product boycotts are one of the most difficult campaigns for BDS activists to pull off.

To begin with, getting a commercial retailer to agree to a boycott of Israeli products presents several major hurdles. In addition to being responsible to managers, employees, customers and shareholders, these large organizations also know the ins and outs of commercial law and public relations well enough to understand what the boycotters are really asking them to do. They also understand that if there are any consequences of a boycott, it will be the retailer and not the boycotters that have to pay the price.

Just as importantly, contemporary consumers tend to react poorly to being told what they can and cannot buy. Personally choosing to boycott a product for political reasons is one thing, but once boycott advocates start making demands that retailers no longer carry Israeli goods, that involves taking personal choice away from others, a highly unpopular position (especially among those with no stake in the Arab-Israeli conflict).

Boycott calls are also highly vulnerable to the counter-tactic of Buycott—a call to supporters of Israel to buy out Israeli products that have been targeted by the boycotters (see page 22). When boycotters threatened the popular Trader Joe’s chain if they refused to take Israeli couscous and other products off their shelves, the result was a mass sell out of these foods at Trader Joe’s stores around the country. Similar Buycotts countering boycott calls against Israeli cosmetics and sporting goods led to 2000% increases in sales in stores across North America in 2009 and 2010.

Less dramatic (but no less important) is the reaction major retailers receive when they refuse to take part in boycotts being demanded of them by BDS activists. When Trader Joe’s refused to take Israeli couscous off their shelves, they were not only rewarded by a massive sellout of those products across the country, but gained the good will of consumers and the respect of fellow retailers. Facing down threats of disruptions at their stores, Trader Joe’s sent a message to other retailers across the country that principle required them to reject (rather than accede to) BDS demands.

There are retail “niches” where boycotts have recently been attempted, notably food cooperatives (or co-ops) that often have political as well as retail missions. As described on pages 24-25, these have also been largely unsuccessful, although the ambiguous rules governing some co-op organizations continue to make them vulnerable to boycott calls.

As Israel’s economy and exports continue to expand, the availability of Israeli goods in more and more locations increases the likelihood that boycotts will be proposed to (or demanded of) more retailers. While nearly always unsuccessful, boycott-related protests does provide BDS advocates an opening to drag the Middle East conflict into more parts of people’s everyday lives, even as they allow Israel’s supporters an opportunity to demonstrate the lack of popularity of BDS in ways that are both fun and dramatic.
Unlike large commercial retailers, locally owned food cooperatives are highly responsive to local constituencies, notably the members who are the co-op’s official owners. But the very things that make member-owned co-ops an important part of a community (an open ear to member concerns and a commitment to political causes of local interest) also make them vulnerable to BDS advocates claiming that co-op principles require them to take part in a boycott of Israeli goods.

A Tale of Two Co-ops

“...modern cooperatives, particularly food cooperatives, that have failed to abide by [the] essential principle of political neutrality have been harmed by the divisiveness that such issues cause among members and shoppers, including: an unwelcoming atmosphere for all, reduction in shoppers and sales, member resignations and return of capital, staff layoffs, disrupted operations, distraction from priorities.”

Davis Food Co-op,
March 15, 2010 Resolution rejecting a boycott of Israeli products
Unlike large commercial retailers, locally owned food cooperatives are highly responsive to local constituencies, notably the members who are the co-op's official owners. But the very things that make member-owned co-ops an important part of a community (an open ear to member concerns and a commitment to political causes of local interest) also make them vulnerable to BDS advocates claiming that co-op principles require them to take part in a boycott of Israeli goods.

While their complete resolution rejecting the boycott runs several pages, the key points they made included statements pointing out that:

- A boycott would require the organization to accept as truth statements made by BDS advocates that could, at best, be characterized as opinion or selective presentations of fact.
- A boycott would require the organization to hand administration and discretion over the running of parts of the organization to a third party (BDS) that had no fiduciary or any other responsibility to the co-op or its members.
- A boycott would conflict with general principles of the international co-op movement (called the Rochdale Principles) which emphasize "political (and religious) neutrality and the dangers of meddling in political (and religious) affairs," as well as calling for cooperation with other co-ops (including ones in Israel).

The resolution also noted that cooperatives “that have failed to abide by this essential principle of political neutrality have been harmed by the divisiveness that such issues cause among members.”

What is most remarkable about the Davis decision was that it was not based on any particular reading of rights and wrongs in the Middle East conflict, but rather analyzed the significance of a boycott decision solely with regard to its impact on the co-op itself. As such, the Davis resolution rejecting a boycott as not serving a proper purpose stands as an example not simply to other co-ops, but to any civic organization flirting with boycott, divestment and sanctions.

To see what happens to an organization that fails to heed these warnings, one need look no further than the Olympia Co-op in Olympia, Washington which passed a boycott measure months after the Davis decision.

Unlike Davis (and unlike other co-ops where boycott proposals before and since were rejected after public debates), input from members with differing perspectives and opinions was deliberately avoided in the Olympia decision-making process.

At Olympia, a written boycott policy states that boycott decisions are to be made based on a consensus of the store’s staff (not by a member vote, and not by the organization’s board). Yet when such a staff consensus failed to emerge, the board exercised a conflict-resolution clause in the organization’s bylaws that allowed it to intervene in staff disputes. While it became a subject of debate as to whether this represented a bending vs. breaking of the rules, what is not in dispute is the fact that the decision to boycott was made solely by the board in the presence of a group of 50 BDS activists, with no room for dissenting voices in the conversation.

The results of this decision were predictable. After the boycott was decided, members woke up to discover from the international press that their co-op had joined the global BDS movement and that the store where they had shopped for years was now being hailed as unquestionable accepting the truth of accusations against “apartheid Israel.”

The conflict continues to play out with some members resigning in disgust and accusations of racism, anti-Semitism, indifference to human rights abuses and bad faith pouring out in forums throughout the organization.

While it is unclear whether Olympia will join other organizations that have recognized their mistake and reversed direction on boycotts, the organization (like all civic institutions) could have truly benefited from the wisdom generated a few hundred miles south at Davis.
Short Takes
In addition to colleges and universities, churches and retailers, BDS has also targeted other communities over the years. See the Resources section on page 37 for more information on boycott and divestment activities in unions and municipalities, as well as academic and cultural boycotts.

Unions
Getting mainstream American unions to take part in BDS activities runs into the problem that, aside from Jews and Evangelical Christians, the US Labor movement represents the most pro-Israel community in the country. The AFL-CIO continues to be the nation’s largest holder of Israeli bonds, and labor leaders are routinely on the speakers’ list at national and local pro-Israel events. In fact, one (although certainly not the only) reason why both the Democratic and Republican parties remain equally supportive of the Jewish state is that both parties have key constituencies (unionized workers for the Democrats, Evangelicals for Republicans) solidly supportive of Israel.

Outside of the US, the story is quite different. In the UK, attempts to boycott Israeli universities have been driven by the country’s chief academic union, and other trade unions such as the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) and even the Trade Union Council (TUC) – an umbrella group of Labor organizations in Britain – have put divestment and boycotts on their agendas. Generally, BDS activities within these unions are driven from the top with the rank and file strongly protesting and/or rejecting boycott and divestment motions when given the opportunity.

Given Israel’s historic and continued strong presence in the world-wide labor movement, it remains to be seen whether the future will look more like the US or the UK in terms of union support for BDS.
Academic Boycotts
One would be hard pressed to find an aspect of BDS more universally loathed than academic boycotts which fly in the face of the borderless sharing of knowledge and ideas that define academic freedom.

That’s not prevented BDS activists from pursuing this avenue, especially in the UK where the University and College Union (UCU – the country’s leading educators’ union) has been attempting to blacklist Israeli universities and academics for years. Because these boycotts have been driven by a radicalized union leadership and are despised by the rank and file, UCU leaders have had to spend considerable energy preventing the issue from coming to a member vote, as well as trying to craft union boycott policy that does not run afoul of UK anti-racism law.

Academics outside of the UK made their low opinion of academic boycott clear, with hundreds of colleges and universities publicly declaring that for purposes of any boycott they, too, should be considered Israeli academics and boycotted. Perhaps that is why a US Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel consists of little more than a blog and an online petition signed by a few hundred US-based academics, with organizations like the 1,000,000+ member American Federation of Teachers (AFT) slamming boycotts as an “anathema to academic freedom.”

Cultural Boycotts
“Cultural Boycott” has become a catch-all term for any non-financial, non-academic BDS activity ranging from disrupting visiting Israeli artists and performers to international celebrities choosing to remove Israel from their tour schedules.

Because cultural boycott stories involve the famous, they often make headlines beyond their newsworthiness. For example, when Elvis Costello acquiesced to boycotters’ demands by canceling an Israeli concert, that gave BDSers a huge publicity boost. But the ripple effect of this cultural boycott “victory” did not even extend to the rock star’s own home (Costello’s wife Diana Krall played in Israel just a few months after Costello’s boycott announcement). And it did not prevent other celebrities such as Elton John and Johnny Lydon (formerly Johnny Rotten of the Sex Pistols) from both playing to packed Israeli crowds while giving the finger (figuratively speaking) to those insisting that the rockers’ only moral choice was to take part in a cultural boycott.

Cultural boycotts are prone to Buycott counter-activism (a protest of Israeli films at the Toronto Film Festival led to sellout performances) as well as the occasional hoax (an infamous boycott request letter to film studies schools carried a forged signature of Avatar director James Cameron). Perhaps it is hope of free publicity that causes BDS activists to act so recklessly when trying to create news of a cultural BDS success.

Cities and Towns
Calls for divestment have floated around the fringes of municipal politics in cities such as Seattle, Ann Arbor and Dallas for years. However, it was in the city of Somerville, Massachusetts that divestment forces came closest to victory in the winter of 2004.

It was in that year that a group of BDS activists, meeting behind closed doors with the city’s aldermen, convinced them to pass a resolution calling for divestment of the city’s retirement funds of stocks identified as being on the BDS blacklist. Fortunately, two of the Aldermen insisted that the public be made aware of what was being done before a final vote was taken and, unsurprisingly, a firestorm erupted.

Citizens became enraged that city leaders were taking a stand so far beyond their mandate, based solely on information coming from a single group of partisans. Meanwhile, BDS activists wasted no time communicating around the world that Somerville was now fully onboard the Israel=apartheid bandwagon. The Aldermen (who soon realized that they had been sold a bill of goods by divestment advocates) were not amused and rejected divestment unanimously. Subsequent attempts to put divestment to a public vote were rejected by the court in 2005 and by voters in 2006. Since then, BDS has largely been silent in municipalities.
The reason sanctions (the “S” of BDS) are so infrequently mentioned during BDS campaigns is that the only entities capable of enacting such sanctions are governments. And, to date, governments (local, regional and especially national) have shown even less interest in punishing Israel than have civic organizations that have flirted with boycott and divestment campaigns.

Given that the US is the only country providing direct financial assistance to Israel, the Holy Grail for anti-Israel campaigners is an end to this American support which, according to BDS campaigners, would result in the Jewish state’s immediate collapse.

This analysis misses a number of key facts, notably:

• Israel’s most impressive period of nation building, between its founding in 1948 through the late 1960s, was during a period when Israel received little to no aid (financial or military) from the US. During this period Israel managed (without Uncle Sam’s help) to build its national institutions, integrate millions of citizens (including over a million Jews expelled from the Arab world), and win three major wars in ‘48, ‘56 and ‘67.

• The $3 billion per year currently granted to Israel is part of a network of US defense expenditures most similar to the $50 billion per year the US invests in NATO. By categorizing this money as foreign aid, the US can maintain the fiction with key Arab allies (such as Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States) that they did not have a military alliance with the Jewish state.

• Because foreign aid has historically been unpopular with the US Congress, putting Israeli aid into Foreign Aid bills helped get those bills passed. In other words, far from taking money out of the mouths of starving Bangladeshis, Israel aid (disguised as general foreign aid) was the only way to ensure those Bangladeshis got anything at all.

Non-military financial aid (which ended in 2007) was historically used by Israeli governments to mask their own economic failings and would probably have been phased out earlier, but for the fact that US aid to Egypt (which is in dire need of such financial support) is directly tied to grants to Israel.

The changing financial relationship between the US and Israel has only become more stark in the last year when the Israeli economy continued to surge while the US continued to accumulate more and more debt. Just recently, talk of using US loan guarantees to put pressure on Israel induced giggles between Israeli and US negotiators who realized that today it is Israel that is helping to support US deficit spending, rather than the other way around.

As with so many things, those who talk of sanctions or US financial pressure on Israel are demonstrating nothing more than their ignorance. They are also exhibiting wishful thinking that an Israeli economy that today receives more venture capital from Europe than does any European country is in imminent danger of financial destruction due to the noisy, but increasingly irrelevant, efforts of BDS.
“...nobody has suffered more than the Palestinian people from the failure of the Palestinian leadership to recognize Israel, to renounce violence, and to get serious about negotiating peace and security for the region.”

_Barrack Obama_,
US President

“The Government does not agree with or support any form of boycott which would be completely inimical to the frank and honest dialogue we have always pursued with the Israeli government.”

_Míchéal Martín_,
Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs

“British people of all backgrounds are distressed and frustrated by the Arab-Israeli conflict. Many wish to take action to advance the goals of peace and justice, a response I understand and share intensely. But I am saddened when this proactive energy is channelled into boycotting economic and academic events, as well as cultural events which seek to increase understanding between people. Such boycotts would, I believe, obstruct opportunities for co-operation and dialogue and serve only to polarise debate further. Boycotts would only make it harder to achieve the peace that both Palestinians and Israelis deserve and desire.”

_İvan Lewis_,
UK Minister of State responsible for the Middle East

“To de-legitimise Israel is not only an affront to Israelis but to all who share the values of a free human spirit.”

_Tony Blair_,
Former UK Prime Minister and Quartet Envoy to the Middle East Peace Talks

“I reject the calls for boycott. I agreed to come here this evening as a longstanding champion of the Palestinian cause, as a friend of the Palestinians to say to you that we are opposed to the calls for boycotts that you are supporting. Don’t be mistaken, calls to boycott are not directed against products, companies or investments alone. They are also, principally, directed against your partners, those with whom you have to conduct dialogue and build peace.”

_Bernard Kouchner_,
French Minister of Foreign Affairs and Co-founder of Doctors Without Borders
What’s happening?

NoMajorYet wrote:
I’ve just started my junior year at college and am concerned that a BDS battle might break out on campus. Is there anything I can do?

BePrepared wrote:
First off, most BDS fights occur because too little was done beforehand to prevent them. Student governments are likely targets for BDS activity. Are you doing anything to stay on top of what’s being discussed at student council meetings?

CitizenoftheWorld wrote:
Or better yet, are you involved with student government yourself or do you have friends who share your concerns who have an interest in taking part in student politics? The best way to pre-empt BDS subversion of your school is to be on the inside. If BDS hits your campus and you could have done something about it beforehand, shame on you!

Belisarius wrote:
As exhilarating as it might be to win a dramatic victory over the forces of BDS, the best battles are the ones you don’t have to fight to win. So your best weapon in this battle is eternal vigilance.

IsraelisJustGreat wrote:
There’s always been a big anti-Israel presence on campus and petitions are already floating around calling for divestment. Most Israel supporters around here are not into confrontation. Do positive campaigns work or are they just a waste of time?

HappybutWise wrote:
Positive campaigns can be extremely effective, although they need to be ongoing to counter the constant “background noise” of anti-Israel invective. Highlighting Israel’s positives (democracy, openness, contribution to environmental technology, gay and women’s rights, etc.) will not be as useful if you find yourself in the middle of a specific time-bound fight (like a BDS student government vote battle).
CitizenoftheWorld wrote:
One advantage of positive campaigns is that there are many, many resources available to help you promote Israel’s image on campus (see Resources on page 37). And many Jewish groups (both on and off campus) that might be squeamish about confrontation are likely to be supportive of a positive campaign.

Belisarius wrote:
Keep in mind that there is a time and place for different types of political activity. As HappybutWise points out, positive campaigns should be ongoing. And I’ll add that they should be tied to other continuing activities such as building alliances with individuals and organizations around campus and across the political spectrum before a crisis hits. But they should not be seen as the solution to every problem, even if they might be the only tactic that can achieve wide consensus.

DoginFight wrote:
So how about taking the fight to the enemy! After all, Israel is being charged with crimes that its accusers are actually guilty of. So why don’t we start our own divestment campaign or our own Apartheid-Week targeting them? Sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander after all.

Belisarius wrote:
Hold on a minute soldier! I agree that the slanders that are part of BDS and other anti-Israel campaigns are grotesque and unfair, but remember that your political activity is targeted at a wider audience. I have no problem recommending going on the offensive, but think about how your campaign will be perceived by any ultimate decision makers. And decide if you can sustain an attack-based campaign long enough for it to be effective.

StatGeek wrote:
I read somewhere that pro- and anti-Israel activity on most campuses never involves more than 5% of the student body on either side. And the remaining 90% either don’t care about the issue, or believe that pro- and anti-activists only talk to themselves and shout at each other.

BDSSurvivor wrote:
At Berkeley, students succeeded in turning back a BDS resolution with a combination of tactics which included a forceful offense targeting not Arabs or Palestinians but attacking the BDS movement itself. Combined with efforts to build bridges to student and community leaders, it was a very effective part of an ultimately successful strategy that took into account the important numbers StatGeek mentions.
DoginFight wrote:
What do you mean by attacking the BDS movement itself?

BDSSurvivor wrote:
BDS is about subverting an organization (be it a university, church or food store) for the narrow political goals of boycott and divestment activists. Many of the 90% of those who don’t care one way or another about who’s right and who’s wrong in the Middle East do care about having their school or other organization manipulated. But manipulation is what BDS is all about and they should be called out on it early and often.

CitzenoftheWorld wrote:
BDS advocates can also be shrill and over the top which highlights their character as single-issue fanatics who don’t give a damn about the organizations they’re trying to subvert. And they’ve been caught with the hand in the cookie jar again and again trying to pass off divestment hoaxes as genuine victories. Don’t give their misbehavior a pass just to be polite. Hold them accountable!

BDSSurvivor wrote:
And don’t forget that BDS is a loser! It’s been rejected by every organization where it’s been tried over the last ten years, including some of the world’s most progressive institutions. No matter when and where a boycott or divestment battle is breaking out, chances are there are precedents for similar organizations rejecting divestment that should be communicated to any community contemplating BDS.

GroktheCaveman wrote:
BDS stoopid. Grok smash BDS!

Belisarius wrote:
Interesting contribution Grok. You certainly get today’s award for enthusiasm.

WoeIsMe wrote:
Why couldn’t I have found this Guide sooner? I’ve been dealing with BDS battle at my food co-op for several weeks and there’s an open meeting tonight to discuss the issue. I’m going to go and speak up, as will other angry members, but I know we’re going to be outnumbered. Any advice?

Belisarius wrote:
First off, don’t get hung up on numbers. Most of history (from the 300 Spartans to the Israelis) involves smaller armies defeating larger ones. If you understand the terrain on which you’re fighting (which, in your case, involves understanding the rules under which a boycott is approved and concentrating your attention on the actual decision makers), it won’t necessarily matter how loud, passionate or numerous your opponents are in a public hearing.
StatGeek wrote:
Don’t forget, both BDS supporters and opponents combined probably represent far less than 10% of the membership of your organization. The other 90% is likely to be far most concerned with whether or not a boycott fight will damage their co-op (or other institution).

BDSSurvivor wrote:
Very true. Time and time again I’ve seen groups that might not be all that sympathetic to Israel’s side of the story reject BDS initiatives by huge majorities simply because they recognized that boycott and divestment activists were trying to use the organization’s name and reputation for their own gain.

CitizenoftheWorld wrote:
And don’t forget precedent! Whether it’s a food co-op, a college, a church or other institution, there are examples of similar institutions rejecting BDS for all the right reasons. Don’t keep these stories to yourselves! Share them (especially with decision makers).

WoeIsMe wrote:
I think you’re absolutely right that a vast, vast majority of people in the organization aren’t pro- or anti-Israel partisans. But this majority identifies with social causes and human rights issues. The boycotters are presenting their proposals as a human rights initiative. How can I attack them without seeming like I’m standing against something that sounds virtuous to people who don’t know that much about the Middle East?

BDSSurvivor wrote:
It’s absolutely critical that you do not allow BDS advocates to “own” the language on human rights or any other vocabulary that resonates with audiences like the ones you are dealing with. Make sure to frame your arguments within the context of human rights and a search for peace in the Middle East. In addition to ensuring that you are seen as representing something positive (the quest for peace), rather than negative (just being anti-BDS), the fact is that your position is much more representative of these virtuous ideas than are the positions and propaganda goals of the boycotters.

DoginFight wrote:
Or you also could point out that Israel’s harshest critics represent some of the world’s worst human rights abusers.

CitzenoftheWorld wrote:
Or highlight that the BDSers are exploiting the language of human rights for purposes of a narrow, partisan propaganda campaign, putting yourself in the position of defending not just Israel but also the non-partisan use of the language of human rights.
HappybutWise wrote:
There are also a number of positive actions you can recommend, such participating in the many organizations dedicated to peace and reconciliation between Jews and Arabs (organizations BDS proponents often attack, BTW).

Belisarius wrote:
All of these ideas (positive campaigns, providing alternatives to a negative boycott or divestment campaign, etc.) have their place. It’s hard to defeat something with nothing, so if you can provide the members of your organization a positive and appropriate alternative to BDS, that gives them an option to do some actual good rather than being manipulated by the boycotters into doing something destructive.

NarratorMan wrote:
Any final advice for readers out there?

HappybutWise wrote:
Don’t forget that BDS hasn’t won a single significant victory in ten years. So we must be doing something right! (That or other people pretty much have the BDSer’s number.)

BDSSurvivor wrote:
While it’s important to communicate BDS’s track record of failure, not to mention fraud (especially to organizations who may think they’re dealing with something brand new), no one should be complacent. Despite their many vulnerabilities and faults, those attacking the legitimacy of Israel are very good at capitalizing on even tiny, temporary victories. Remember that they love fighting these campaigns almost as much as the rest of us hate such confrontations (no matter how necessary).

Belisarius wrote:
Speak for yourself! Nothing thrills me more than watching BDS get its ass kicked around the block for the umpteenth time. That said, expending energy in a boycott or divestment battle that could have been avoided is more aggravating than energizing. If vigilance and preparation can avoid such a battle before it begins, that will save everyone a whole world of pain.

CitzenoftheWorld wrote:
Keep in mind that BDSers are only fighting for themselves. While you should never hide your support for Israel, don’t lose site of the fact that you are also fighting on behalf of the 90%+ members of an organization that will suffer if BDS manages to stuff their propaganda message into an institution’s mouth.

StatGeek wrote:
And stop keeping our side’s victories a secret! (See page 35.)

GroktheCaveman wrote:
Grok tell whole world that BDS stoopid. World will listen to Grok!

IsraelisJustGreat wrote:
Well, I guess it’s unanimous! (Cue laugh-track, roll credits.)
The persistence of BDS activists (regardless of how many times they are told “no”) is one possibility for this phenomenon, as is the readiness of some media outlets to buy into a divestment or boycott story (including false ones, like 2009’s Hampshire College hoax (see page 14).

But a more likely explanation is that there is one area where Israel’s defamers have an edge over its defenders: the use of alternative PR fueled by Web 2.0 technology (including social networks, blogs, online syndication and messaging services like Twitter).

To demonstrate this gap, in March of 2010 two newsworthy BDS events took place: The Davis Food Co-op rejected a boycott (see page 24) and Berkeley student government voted in favor of divestment (see page 16).

Within 72 hours, the Berkeley story generated over a dozen news hits, was being discussed in over 60 blogs and generated 100+ general Google entries. In contrast, the Davis story never received a single news hit and ended up generating less than a dozen blog entries and general search hits during this same 72-hour time period. So should it come as any surprise that Berkeley hit the mainstream media (which multiplied the Web presence of the story a hundred fold) while the Davis tale remained a secret?

One can make the case that a famous university like Berkeley is inherently more newsworthy than a local food co-op, but the fact that the co-op made an actual decision (to reject a boycott) while the Berkeley student government simply voted (temporarily) to strike a pose brings the two stories more in line vis-à-vis noteworthiness.

The fact is that creating an online newswave requires getting your story out immediately on as many different sites as possible. And if you look at the sites that were used to spread the Berkeley story, you’ll find press releases that were UpTweeted and shared on Facebook hundreds or thousands of times. You’ll also find that within hours of the Berkeley vote, word was going out to mailing lists with tens of thousands of names calling on them to spread the word that “Berkeley Votes Yes on Divestment” on any sites they could find.

Has any similar effort ever been made to communicate a divestment defeat, much less the thousands of investment victories represented by Israel’s exploding economy during the BDS era (see page 8)?

During any BDS battle, someone will always bring up that to truly boycott Israel one would have to throw away your computer, erase your software and stop using the Internet since much of the technology behind these innovations were invented in Israel. It’s a fair rhetorical point, although it would be much better if Israel’s advocates simply used this Israeli-made technology to engage in the Web 2.0 media war at least half as effectively as do BDS’s champions.

Given how little actual success BDS has had over the last decade, it’s reasonable to ask why boycott and divestment stories continue to make news.
Since BDS started in 2001, it’s faced so many failures and reversals that it must resort to fraud to create the illusion of victory. And after a decade of boycott and divestment activity dedicated to causing Israel economic distress and lessening its support abroad, the size of the Israeli economy and public support for the Jewish state (certainly within the US) have never been higher.

So should BDS be treated as a serious threat, or simply ridiculed or ignored?
The existence of this Guide (as well as other resources dedicated to fighting boycott and divestment) testifies to the fact that the battle against BDS should be taken seriously, although not necessarily because it represents an existential threat to the Jewish state.

BDS is part of a broader campaign to challenge Israel’s very legitimacy which emanates from certain national governments, as well as corners of the media, academia and international organizations such as the United Nations and partisan non-governmental organizations (NGOs). So the continued defeat of BDS efforts at universities, churches and other institutions contributes to the de-legitimization of Israel’s de-legitimizers.

Even when unsuccessful, BDS has the effect of distorting debate over the Middle East, assuming as it does Israel’s guilt and only being willing to debate the nature of how it will be punished. And as BDS continues to lose abroad, it is turning its attention to the Middle East itself, seeking to punish the very individuals and organizations (Israelis and Palestinians working together on common causes) trying to bring about understanding between peoples. Despite claims to represent a peaceful alternative to violent conflict, the BDS propaganda campaign is increasingly looking like a strategy that will make peace more difficult (if not impossible) to achieve.

In addition to being both anti-Israel and anti-peace, the most insidious aspect of BDS is the way it selfishly attempts to drag the Middle East conflict into every civic organization in the land. Must every college and university become a battleground between Israel’s detractors and supporters, just because a school’s endowment contains a few shares of Caterpillar stock? Must retailers be subjected to moral blackmail and threats, just because they carry a few Israeli oranges? Must a distorted debate on the Middle East become the defining issue of a church, union or city just because a few anti-Israel activists demand it?

Wherever BDS advocates pitch their tents, be it UC Berkeley or the Presbyterian Church or the Olympia Food Co-op, divisiveness, hostility and misery inevitably follow. Even if it does not represent a threat to Israel, BDS can do untold damage to the often-fragile elements of our civil society: our schools, churches, towns, unions – even our cultural institutions, all in an effort to stuff the propaganda message that Israel is an “apartheid state” into the mouth of a respected institution, by any means necessary.

It is for these institutions that you fight, as well as for the state of Israel and for the Jewish people.
additional resources

**blogs and web sites focusing on BDS**

**Divest This**
www.divestthis.com
A blog focused exclusively on the fight against BDS

**BDS Cookbook**
www.stopbds.com
“Recipes” on how to confront and defeat BDS

**BDS Israel**
www.bdsisrael.com
A guide to unlocking the anti-Israel rhetoric of the BDS “movement” and a whole lot more

**Buycott Israel**
www.buycottisrael.com
Site of the creator of the successful Buycott Israel counter-boycott program

**Engage**
engageonline.wordpress.com
A group of UK academic union members that has led several successful campaigns against the academic boycott of Israel

**Divestment Watch**
www.divestmentwatch.com
A site dedicated to fighting divest-from-Israel campaigns by the creator of BoycottWatch

**important documents**

**Berkeley**
www.jewishpublicaffairs.org/IAI/CombatingAnti-Israel/DivestmentResolutionsonCampus.pdf
A first-hand account of how divestment was defeated at Berkeley in 2010

**Looking at Them Looking at Us**
Rabbi Yehiel Poupko’s masterful booklet on the relationship between Christian churches, Jews and Israel

**JCPA**
engage.jewishpublicaffairs.org/p/salsa/web/blog/public/entries?blog_entry_KEY=1078
A resolution by the Jewish Council for Public Affairs on the issue of Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaigns against Israel

**Legal and Political Answers to BDS**
www.ajc.org/atf/cf/%7B42D75369-D582-4380-8395-D25929B85EAF%7D/DivestmentDeception.pdf
A political and legal analysis of the BDS movement by the American Jewish Committee

**organizations you can turn to when (or, ideally before) BDS comes knocking**

**ADL**
www.adl.org/main_Anti_Israel/boycott_divestment_campus_09.htm
The Anti-Defamation League’s backgrounder on BDS

**CAMERA**
www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=8&x_nameinnews=121&x_article=383
The legendary watchdog group provides ongoing commentary on the coverage of BDS campaigns in the media

**David Project**
www.davidproject.org
This Boston-based activist organization provides training and support to students across the country

**Israel on Campus Coalition**
www.israelcc.org
A coalition of Jewish organizations committed to Israel education and advocacy on campus

**Israel 21c**
www.israel21c.org
“Beyond the conflict” news from Israel

**Scholars for Peace in the Middle East (SPME)**
www.spme.net
A coalition of 28,000 faculty working on over 3,500 campuses to promote accurate and civil dialog on Middle East issues

**StandWithUs**
www.standwithus.com/BDS (public)
www.standwithus.com/divestment (requires registration)
This West Coast-based activist organization provides a wealth of materials and support for pro-Israel activists around the world

**The Israel Project**
www.theisraelproject.org
A non-profit organization providing factual information about Israel and the Middle East to the press, policy-makers and the public

**Tulip**
www.tuliponline.org
Trade Unions Linking Israel and Palestine – The voice of the trade union movement seeking true peace in the Middle East