

THE GLOBAL BOYCOTT, DIVESTMENT AND SANCTIONS (BDS) MOVEMENT



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JEWISH COMMUNITY
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History of the BDS Movement

The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) Movement is the main component of an international strategy to pressure and isolate Israel. This strategy originated at the NGO Forum of the 2001 World Conference on Racism in Durban, South Africa. The NGO Forum branded Israel a “racist, apartheid state in which Israel’s brand of apartheid [is] a crime against humanity.” The Forum also issued a call to the international community to completely isolate Israel with comprehensive boycotts and sanctions, comparing it to Apartheid South Africa.¹

Boycott and divestment efforts from Israel in the United States began shortly thereafter. The college campus divestment campaign started in February 2001 by Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), a newly formed student group at the University of California, Berkeley, in collaboration with the San Francisco chapter of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee² (now the Arab Resource & Organizing Center.³) The first divestment initiative to pass on a U.S. college campus was in 2003 at Wayne State University, whose student government passed a resolution to divest from companies doing business in Israel.⁴

In 2004, the Palestinian Campaign for an Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) called for an academic and cultural boycott of Israel.⁵ Also in 2004, the Presbyterian Church USA passed an overture (resolution) at their General Assembly directing the church's committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investment "to initiate a process of phased, selective divestment in multinational corporations operating in Israel."⁶



Figure 1: US Campaign for the Academic and Cultural

The “official” BDS Movement began in 2005 with what is known as the original “Palestinian United Call for BDS Against Israel”,⁷ in which 170 Palestinian “civil society” organizations⁸ signed a statement with three main goals:

1. *Ending Israel's occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantling the Wall;*⁹
2. *Recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality; and*
3. *Respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN resolution 194.*

While the BDS Movement is a recent development, boycotting Israel is not a new strategy. Since the founding of the State of Israel, the Arab League has prohibited trade with the State of Israel, as well as a secondary boycott of companies that do business with Israel and a tertiary boycott that blacklists firms that trade with other companies that do business with Israel.¹⁰ Since 1977, the United States has prohibited U.S. companies to cooperate with the Arab boycott of Israel.¹¹

Goals of the BDS Movement

The BDS Movement states that it will promote BDS against Israel “until it complies with international law and Palestinian rights.”¹² As outlined in Durban in 2002, this goal is part of the broader strategy of isolating Israel and turning it into a pariah state.¹³

The realization of the goals in the *Call to BDS*, even in the modified version, is incompatible with a two-state solution which recognizes the right of self-determination of both peoples. If the demand that the descendants of the refugees be allowed to return to Israel was met, within one generation there would be an Arab majority in Israel.¹⁴ Because Israel is a democracy, this demographic shift would most likely lead to the end of the Jewish state of Israel and its function as a safe haven for Jews after millennia of persecution and statelessness.

Some supporters state that the BDS Movement is agnostic on whether it supports a two-state, one-state, or other solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, statements emanating from much of the prominent leadership, locally and internationally, show broad support for a one-state solution, meaning the dissolution of the Jewish State of Israel, and are anti-Zionist (don't believe Israel has the right to exist). For example, Omar Barghouti, a co-founder of the BDS Movement and the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, has said the following: “*I clearly do not buy into the Two-State Solution*”¹⁵ and “*Definitely, most definitely we oppose a Jewish state in any part of Palestine. No Palestinian, rational Palestinian, not a sell-out Palestinian, will ever accept a Jewish state in Palestine.*”¹⁶

In the original *Call to BDS*, the first goal (“*Ending Israel's occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantling the Wall*”) is decidedly ambiguous as to whether “all Arab lands” refers solely to the West Bank and Gaza or also includes Israel proper. Language was changed at some point on the global BDS Movement website under the introductions section (original call remains unchanged) adding in “occupied in 1967” to the first goal.¹⁷ This change was a source of great contention within the BDS Movement, and there remains

variance among BDS supporting groups as to which version they use. The Free Gaza Movement and Al-Awda (Palestinian Right of Return Coalition), for example, strongly prefer the original version and outright disavow the two-state solution and the right of Israel to exist.¹⁸ Professor Norman Finkelstein, a prominent activist and harsh critic of the State of Israel, has called BDS deceptive, stating that it should be forthright with its true goals—the destruction of the State of Israel.¹⁹

Some argue that the BDS Movement is and should be open to those who want to end the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza but support the right of Israel to exist and the two-state solution²⁰. However, these individuals and organizations are often harshly criticized as unacceptable “soft Zionists” even if they are decidedly critical of Israel and support BDS.²¹

Structure

The BDS Movement is a large, comprehensive and coordinated movement with hundreds of independent groups and organizations brought together in coalition, supporting similar goals. According to the official website of the global BDS Movement, its organizing committee includes 27 Palestinian groups and organizations.²² In the United States, the U.S. Campaign to End the Occupation is the umbrella group for the various groups supporting BDS and groups officially “join” BDS through it.²³

For the past few years, advocating for BDS has been the main activity and organizing focus of pro-Palestinian activism. In fact, support for BDS has become a litmus test in many activist circles. For example, Professor Norman Finkelstein has been ostracized in many activist circles after he came out publically against BDS in 2012.²⁴

Over the years, the BDS Movement has become increasingly professionalized, with more sophisticated tools, websites, and professionals assisting those in the field who are supporting the different facets of the movement. Most divestment campaigns, for example, target the same companies, such as Caterpillar, Motorola Solutions, Hewlett-Packard, and more recently, Veolia, G4S and Combined Tactical Systems. They use similar language and much of the research on these companies comes from an Israeli NGO called Who Profits.²⁵ Additionally, there is a national organization providing legal assistance to BDS supporters, the Palestine Legal and Center for Constitutional Rights.²⁶

The main organizations promoting BDS in the San Francisco Bay Area include: American Friends Service Committee, Arab Resource and Organizing Center (AROC), Jewish Voice for Peace, US Campaign to End the Occupation, Students for Justice in Palestine (multiple

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campuses), Friends of Sabeel North America, Labor for Palestine, Israel-Palestine Mission Network of the Presbyterian Church USA, and American Muslims for Palestine.

BDS Movement Campaigns

BDS on Campus

Student government and other student bodies on a few dozen campuses across the U.S., including many campuses of the University of California (UC) system, have passed resolutions calling on their institutions to divest holdings from Israel. Only one, Hampshire College, has actually implemented divestment; however the administration of Hampshire College distanced itself from BDS, stating that the "decision expressly did not pertain to a political movement or single out businesses active in a specific region or country" and it was part of "well over 100 companies engaged in business practices that violate the college's policy on socially responsible investments."²⁷ The primary drivers of these resolutions have been chapters of the national organization Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP). Many university presidents, investment and governing bodies have issued statements opposing BDS, indicating it will not be implemented on their campuses, citing numerous reasons including the divisive nature of the issue and the unfairness of singling out only one country, Israel.²⁸ In December 2015, the UAW International overturned a BDS resolution that passed in the UAW Local 2865 (UC Graduate Student Worker Union) for violating its constitution and because provisions of the resolution "can easily be construed as academic and cultural discrimination against union members on the basis of their national origin and religion."²⁹

Separate from the campus divestment campaigns, there have been efforts to initiate academic boycotts of Israel. Although most have avoided this issue altogether, several professional organizations have voted to boycott Israeli academics, such as the American Studies Association. The academic boycott has been rejected by over 250 universities.³⁰

Many Jewish students report a negative effect on their campus as a result of BDS campaigns, including a rise in anti-Semitism. In March 2016, the UC Regents adopted a policy statement "Principles Against Intolerance" after an investigation into reports of increased anti-Semitic incidents on campus. In particular, it observed that "Fundamentally, commenters noted that historic manifestations of anti-Semitism have changed and that expressions of anti-Semitism are more coded and difficult to identify. In particular, opposition to Zionism often is expressed in ways that are not simply statements of disagreement over politics and policy, but also assertions of prejudice and intolerance toward Jewish people and culture."³¹

BDS in Churches

Several Mainline Protestant denominations have debated resolutions calling for selective divestment from Israel over the past several years. The Episcopal Church overwhelmingly rejected divestment, opting instead for solidarity and reconciliation,³² while others denominations such as the United Church of Christ and the Presbyterian Church USA, have passed selective divestment resolutions.³³ The American Friends Service Committee (Quakers) has long been active in the BDS Movement and in 2012 divested its holdings from Hewlett Packard and Veolia.³⁴ Catholic Churches have not been very active in the BDS Movement. While promoting peace between Israelis and Palestinians, most recently Pope Francis decried attacks on Israel and expressed that not recognizing the Jewish people and Israel is anti-Semitic.³⁵

BDS in the Community

BDS has manifested in community settings in a variety of ways. Over the years, there have been protests in front of stores selling Israeli goods; goods vandalized with stickers urging customers to not buy the product;³⁶ attempts to pass BDS resolutions at local government bodies, such as the Berkeley Human Welfare and Community Action Commission;³⁷ programming with labor unions and social justice organizations promoting BDS;³⁸ billboards on city buses;³⁹ resolutions at shareholders meetings;⁴⁰ and higher profile efforts such as the “Block the Boat” protests at the Port of Oakland and elsewhere in 2014 that sought to block the partially Israeli-owned shipping line Zim from unloading its goods (which were of mixed origin) at the Port.⁴¹ The BDS Movement is also targeting the socially responsible investment field, promoting shareholder resolutions and corporate engagement to stop multinational companies from bidding on projects in Israel.⁴²

Cultural Boycott

As part of the cultural boycott,⁴³ the BDS Movement works to pressure figures in the entertainment, sports and art industries from performing or playing in Israel. They also attempt to block or disrupt events featuring Israeli performers or occasionally Jewish performers that support or have performed in Israel,⁴⁴ The high pressure tactics have, at times, led to significant backlash.⁴⁵

BDS Tactics

The BDS Movement uses a range of tactics to meet its objectives, ranging from high profile public pressure, to private meetings and campaigns. In the last few years, there has been an increased focus on coalition-building. For example, BDS has attempted to link the struggle for civil rights for the African American community⁴⁶, labor, migrant workers, immigrants, water rights and justice, and other issues with solidarity for Palestinians⁴⁷. In limited cases,

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organizations, groups or individuals have signed on to the BDS movement⁴⁸. Overall, BDS has not achieved significant recognition by or credibility with mainstream organizations.

In the past few years, the push for “anti-normalization”⁴⁹ has become more prevalent in the BDS Movement. Anti-normalization activists reject any form of cooperation or interaction with Israel or Israelis, and often include Jewish supporters of Israel (regardless of their views on Israeli government policy).

As part of the anti-normalization effort, supporters of the BDS Movement often aim to shut down or shout down programs featuring an Israeli or pro-Israel speaker or performer. For example, in January 2016, at the *Creating Change* national conference of the LGBTQ Task Force in Chicago, hundreds of BDS supporters protested and ultimately disrupted a program featuring speakers from *A Wider Bridge* (an organization that builds ties between the US and Israeli LGBTQ communities) and Jerusalem Open House (LGBTQ community center in Jerusalem which provides services to Jews and Arabs alike and often faces challenges such as the violent attack at its 2015 Pride parade).⁵⁰ Leaders from Jerusalem Open House were unable to speak and had to leave the building through a back door for their safety.⁵¹ This event led to significant backlash at the discriminatory way the groups were treated.⁵²

BDS is a long term approach, aimed at changing the opinions of the next generation of leaders and gradually weakening support for Israel. Moving beyond the college campus, organizations supporting BDS also produce and promote curriculum and teacher trainings on the Arab-Israeli conflict, heavily weighted toward the Palestinian narrative, in public school classrooms as part of a social-justice oriented pedagogy.⁵³

BDS Rhetoric

The BDS Movement sees Israel and its relationship with the Palestinians as analogous to Apartheid South Africa.⁵⁴ Israel is often described in extremist terms, with allegations of genocide, comparisons to Nazi behavior, ethnic cleansing, and even white supremacy. Criticism is not limited to the State of Israel and its government, but often extends to the Israeli people and Israel supporters.

Some supporters of BDS have gone even further, crossing the line into classic anti-Semitism with conspiracy theories, blaming Israel and



Figure 2: Screen grab from "Join the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement" on YouTube (<https://goo.gl/rqlr24>)

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Israel supporters for many different problems around the world unrelated to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as well as accusations of Zionist/Jewish control of the media, governments, etc.⁵⁵

It is important to note that not all supporters of BDS agree with the movement's views, just as not all supporters of BDS want to see Israel dissolved. However, a number of prominent supporters subscribe to these views and with a few exceptions,⁵⁶ they are usually not disavowed. In the recent wave of terrorist attacks in Israel, some BDS supporters have shown support for "resistance," which has included knife attacks against Israeli civilians, justifying it as an understandable reaction to oppression.⁵⁷

Conclusion

Despite the gains made in the last few years, the BDS Movement could still be considered a fringe movement in the United States. The U.S. government⁵⁸ and the European Union have soundly rejected a boycott of Israel. Numerous states such as South Carolina, Florida, New York and Illinois have passed legislation rejecting BDS and others are looking at similar legislation⁵⁹. Economic ties between the U.S. and Israel as well as between the Bay Area and Israel continue to be robust. University presidents have consistently rejected divestment resolutions passed by student governments. Polls have consistently shown that the American public supports and sympathizes with Israel, which directly contradicts the views of the BDS movement.⁶⁰

Yet, because of increased BDS activism in various communities, the Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) remains highly concerned about the BDS Movement and its long-term effect. Israel JCRC strongly supports a two-state solution—a secure Jewish and democratic State of Israel side by side with an independent Palestinian State—in which the parties peacefully co-exist with fully normalized diplomatic relations and mutual cooperation to promote the economic development and social welfare of their respective citizens.⁶¹ The goals of the BDS Movement are not only incompatible with a two-state solution, but are aimed to undermine the existence of the world's only Jewish State. The increasingly extremist rhetoric of the BDS Movement that sometimes crosses the line into anti-Semitism, together with tactics that attempt to shut down civil discourse, has created a very negative atmosphere in segments of the community and on college campuses. Additionally, it doesn't recognize and even negates the many Israeli groups working for social change and toward making a two-state solution reality. For all of these reasons, the JCRC believes that the BDS Movement must be opposed.

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¹ "...impose a policy of complete and total isolation of Israel as an apartheid state as in the case of South Africa which means the imposition of mandatory and comprehensive sanctions and embargoes, the full cessation of all links (diplomatic, economic, social, aid, military cooperation and training) between all states and Israel." <http://academic.udayton.edu/race/06hrights/WCAR2001/NGOFORUM/Palestinans.htm>

² <http://www.adl.org/assets/pdf/israel-international/sip-2015-backgrounder.pdf>

³ <http://araborganizing.org/about-us/history/>

⁴ <http://bog.wayne.edu/meetings/2003/04-30/board0403-divestiture.pdf>

⁵ <http://pacbi.org/index.php>

⁶ Though this overture was contested and language was changed in 2006, a resolution to divest from three companies, Caterpillar, Hewlett Packard and Motorola Solutions due to their involvement in the West Bank, passed in a narrow vote of 310 to 303 at the church's General Assembly in 2014: <https://www.pcusa.org/news/2014/6/20/slim-margin-assembly-approves-divestment-three-com/>

⁷ <http://bdsmovement.net/call>

⁸ The Council of National and Islamic Forces in Palestine comprised of Hamas, Islamic Jihad, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and others, is listed as the first signatory on the call: http://archive.adl.org/terrorism/symbols/palestinian_national_islamic_front.html

⁹ Language was changed at some point, adding in "occupied in 1967" (referring to the West Bank and Gaza), on the BDS Movement website under the introduction section but not in the original call (<http://bdsmovement.net/bdsintro>). There was disagreement within the movement about the change, and there remains variance among BDS supporting groups as to which version they use.

¹⁰ http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/Arab_boycott.html Note that in 1945, even before the founding of Israel, the fledgling Arab League voted to boycott Jewish and Zionist goods.

¹¹ <https://www.bis.doc.gov/index.php/enforcement/oac>

¹² <http://bdsmovement.net/#sthash.JmpFeeU1.dpuf>

¹³ For example: "I think the end-all of BDS is to weaken Israel, to isolate Israel, and give the global community a role in the liberation of Palestine and support the resistance on the ground in Palestine."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bZMp83syN40&feature=youtu.be&t=1h25m40s>

¹⁴ "...you cannot reconcile the right of return for refugees with a two state solution. That is the big white elephant in the room and people are ignoring it — a return for refugees would end Israel's existence as a Jewish state. The right of return is a basic right that cannot be given away; it's inalienable": <http://electronicintifada.net/content/boycotts-work-interview-omar-barghouti/8263>

¹⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tnpilMYsR0I&feature=youtu.be&t=4m6s>

¹⁶ <https://vimeo.com/75201955> Other examples: <https://electronicintifada.net/content/one-state-declaration/793>,

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2003/12/12/relative-humanity-the-essential-obstacle-to-a-just-peace-in-palestine/>,

<https://youtu.be/5oJRri2tY8?t=62>, <https://youtu.be/xqIH6zTtpUs?t=12>, <http://electronicintifada.net/content/boycotts-work-interview-omar-barghouti/8263>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bZMp83syN40&feature=youtu.be&t=1h25m40s>,

<https://electronicintifada.net/content/boycotts-work-interview-omar-barghouti/8263>

<https://twitter.com/AliAbunimah/status/430888024864342016>, <http://www.jweekly.com/article/full/73265/u.c.-student-workers-debate-unions-bds-proposal/>,

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2013/06/201362583915886263.html>

¹⁷ (<http://bdsmovement.net/bdsintro>).

¹⁸ <http://dissentvoice.org/2014/03/is-the-bds-democratic/> and <http://www.deliberation.info/regarding-the-proposed-al-awda-withdrawal-of-endorsement-from-bds/>

¹⁹ Norman Finkelstein called the BDS Movement a "hypocritical, dishonest cult" that tries to pose as a human rights movement, while in reality their goal is to destroy Israel. "They don't want Israel...They think they're being very clever. They call it their three tiers...We want the end of the occupation, we want the right of return, and we want equal rights for Arabs in Israel. And they think they are very clever, because they know the result of implementing all three is what? What's the result? You know and I know what's the result: there's no Israel." <https://de-de.facebook.com/notes/robert-hand/haaretz-the-boycott-israel-movements-small-victories-are-far-from-sweeping-succe/10150582205434353> and <http://www.thejewishweek.com/news/new-york-news/finkelstein-seen-moderate-far-left-panel>

²⁰ <https://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/boycott-divestment-and-sanctions/jvp-supports-the-bds-movement/>

²¹ <http://mondoweiss.net/2015/10/israel-itself-appropriating>

²² <http://bdsmovement.net/bnc>

²³ <http://www.endtheoccupation.org/>

²⁴ <https://newrepublic.com/article/122257/unpopular-man-norman-finkelstein-comes-out-against-bds-movement>

²⁵ <http://www.whoprofits.org/>

²⁶ <https://ccrijustice.org/home/what-we-do/issues/palestinian-solidarity>

²⁷ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/02/12/hampshire-college-divests_n_166528.html

²⁸ For example, <http://www.stanforddaily.com/2015/04/14/board-of-trustees-decides-not-to-divest-from-companies-in-israel/> and

²⁹ <http://www.timesofisrael.com/uaw-international-union-strikes-down-california-student-israel-boycott/>

³⁰ For example, see these lists <http://www.amchainitiative.org/organizations-universities-condemned-american-studies-associations-academic-boycott-israel/> and http://www.adl.org/israel-international/israel-middle-east/content/backgroundersarticles/american-university-officials-institutions-respond-to-asa-boycott.html?referrer=https://www.google.com/#VnH_vvkrKM8

³¹ <http://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/aar/mare.pdf>

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- ³² <http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/ens/2015/07/02/bishops-overwhelmingly-oppose-divestment-in-israel-palestine/>
- ³³ http://www.ucc.org/news_general_synod_israel_palestine_resolution_06302015
- ³⁴ <http://quakerpiag.blogspot.com/2012/09/quakers-divest-from-hewlett-packard-and.html>
- ³⁵ <http://www.timesofisrael.com/not-recognizing-israel-as-jewish-is-anti-semitic-pope-says/>
- ³⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yN1-OUP62CQ>
- ³⁷ <http://www.timesofisrael.com/berkeley-panel-rejects-israel-divestment-resolution/>
- ³⁸ <http://laborforpalestine.net/>
- ³⁹ <http://www.jweekly.com/article/full/73934/jcrc-slams-new-anti-israel-bus-ad/>
- ⁴⁰ <http://www.jweekly.com/includes/print/75384/article/bds-in-the-boardroom-campus-protests-are-loud-but-corporate-pressure-is-mor/>
- ⁴¹ <http://www.haaretz.com/jewish/news/.premium-1.612127>
- ⁴² <http://www.jweekly.com/article/full/75384/bds-in-the-boardroom-campus-protests-are-loud-but-corporate-pressure-is-mor/>
- ⁴³ <http://www.usacbi.org/> and <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=1047>
- ⁴⁴ <http://www.tabletmag.com/scroll/193013/bds-backfire-yogi-tea-severs-ties-with-spanish-music-festival-that-disinvited-matisyahu>
- ⁴⁵ <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/10/23/cutting-through-the-boycott-divest-sanction-bs-about-israel.html>
- ⁴⁶ <http://www.jta.org/2015/01/19/news-opinion/opinion/op-ed-dont-compare-ferguson-and-palestine#ixzz3Plvn4WVg>
- ⁴⁷ http://blog.adl.org/tags/bds?_ga=1.139875891.1216344036.1450721877
- ⁴⁸ <http://www.blackforpalestine.com/read-the-statement.html>
- ⁴⁹ <http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Success-and-pitfalls-of-Palestinian-anti-normalization-404641>
- ⁵⁰ <http://www.timesofisrael.com/protesters-obstruct-jewish-prayers-at-gay-rights-convention/>
- ⁵¹ <http://www.washingtonblade.com/2016/01/23/protesters-disrupt-reception-with-israeli-activists-at-lgbt-conference/>
- ⁵² For example: <http://www.eqca.org/equality-california-statement-on-a-wider-bridge-events-at-creating-change/>
- ⁵³ For example: <http://fmfp.org/2015/05/workshop-highlight-borders-and-walls-from-the-u.s.mexico-border-to-palestine/>, http://www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/28_04/28_04_shoman.shtml
- ⁵⁴ For example: <http://www.endtheoccupation.org/section.php?id=198>
- ⁵⁵ For example, read the pages of CounterPunch, which many pro-BDS groups link to: <http://www.counterpunch.org/?s=palestine+israel+jews> and If Americans Knew <http://www.ifamericansknew.org/>
- ⁵⁶ Example: <https://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/jewish-voice-for-peace-statement-on-our-relationship-with-alison-weir/>
- ⁵⁷ <http://bdsmovement.net/2015/solidarity-with-the-palestinian-popular-resistance-boycott-israel-now-13313> and <https://www.facebook.com/JewishVoiceforPeace/posts/10154255347394992>
- ⁵⁸ <http://www.timesofisrael.com/obama-signs-anti-bds-bill-into-law/>
- ⁵⁹ <http://www.tabletmag.com/scroll/191679/ny-state-assembly-passes-anti-bds-resolution>
- ⁶⁰ <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/US-Israel/polls.html> and <http://www.people-press.org/files/2014/08/8-28-14-Israel-Palestinians-Release.pdf>
- ⁶¹ https://jcr.org/uploads/11.07_JCRC_CS_Conflict.pdf