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A modern blood libel

Op-ed: BDS is focused on national character assassination that is aimed to lay the groundwork for the annihilation of Israel. It is time that the marketplace of ideas forthrightly reject such discriminatory, racist and despicable ideas.

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The blood libels against Jews have typically focused on some far-fetched accusations that the Jews are to blame for whatever ills inflicted a community. More specifically, the claim was that Jews needed the blood of Christian children to bake matzot for the festival of Passover.

Numerous cases of blood libels were recorded, and not all in Europe. As an extension of the phenomenon, false and incendiary charges against Jews were introduced by the church with political motivations (i.e., the Protocols of the Elders of Zion) and by the Nazi Germany propaganda machine which used the Big Lie technique to propagate charges against Jews which led to the murder of six million Jews in the Holocaust.

What is common to all these blood libels (figurative or symbolic) is that they are based on falsehood. The more far-fetched the falsehood, the more it was accepted by the mob that carried it out and the leadership that disseminated it. What links the Protocols and the Nazi ideology is the universal damage they inflicted.

In the 19th century, the blood libel was “imported” to the Middle East; in 1840 Damascus, Christian anti-Semitism was reinforced by local Muslim anti-Jewish sentiments. The Damascus Affair is important because the falsehoods on which it was based were widely accepted in the European continent which originated it in the first place. Since then, these falsehoods serve as the basis for TV series in Egypt and Syria, usually broadcast during Ramadan, that promote the notion that Jews kill small children to extract their blood for Passover and help engender an age-old stereotypical view of the Jew as evil and conniving.

The establishment of the State of Israel was met with fierce resistance by the surrounding Arab countries which in 1948 tried to obliterate the nascent county by war. That attempt failed, as did ensuing wars, particularly in 1967 and 1973. In addition to wars, the Arab countries—through the Arab League—declared an economic boycott against Israel (which continued the Arab boycott against the pre-1948 Jewish community in Palestine). The 1994 Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf ended its participation in the boycott, and since then the economic boycott no longer has a significant impact on Israel.

With the failure of military offensives against Israel and the failure of economic boycotts, a new form of a boycott re-emerged after the UN World Conference against Racism (Durban, South Africa 2001). The UN conference was hijacked by pro-Palestinian activists who—on the platform of the fight against racism—propagated an effort to Boycott, Divest and Sanction (BDS) Israel.



Joining forces against the BDS is important not only for Israel's sake but for the sake of democracies anywhere in the world (Photo: EPA)

In the same vein as the Big Lie technique, this campaign was based on falsehoods such as that accusing Israel of being an “apartheid state” and a “colonialist entity” that “stole the land from the native inhabitants.” In a sense, the anti-Semitic charges were now channeled into anti-Zionist charges and the individual persecuted Jew into Israel as a persecuted country. Thus far, the impact of the economic boycott and divestment is relatively small, yet the danger of the BDS movement is in spewing vicious lies and falsehoods about Israel in an attempt to erode Israel’s moral foundation.

In today's age of technology, we see more rapid use of social media and soft power by pro-Palestinian groups hijacking the narrative of peace, justice and human rights while in reality they yearn for Israel's destruction.

Moreover, we have now witnessed groups—predominately on the political left—adopting the Palestinian cause as their own under the guise of “intersectionality,” a term coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in the 1980s to highlight the dual oppressions faced by black women—sexism and racism—and the feminist and anti-racism movements that failed to fully represent and advocate for them. Currently, it has become a slogan under which minority groups join to fight what critics see as unrelated battles, but what activists see as iterations of the same struggle for justice.

As it is clearly articulated by the Black-Palestinian solidarity statement, “Palestinian liberation represents an inherent threat to Israeli settler colonialism and apartheid, an apparatus built and sustained on ethnic cleansing, land theft, and the denial of Palestinian humanity and sovereignty. While we acknowledge that the apartheid configuration in Israel/Palestine is unique from the United States (and South Africa), we continue to see connections between the situation of Palestinians and Black people.

“Israel’s widespread use of detention and imprisonment against Palestinians evokes the mass incarceration of Black people in the US, including the political imprisonment of our own revolutionaries. Soldiers, police, and courts justify lethal force against us and our children who pose no imminent threat. And while the US and Israel would continue to oppress us without collaborating with each other, we have witnessed police and soldiers from the two countries train side-by-side.”

All and all, the boycott has limited economic impact. As for the D in divestment, the long-term effect is not measurable as of yet but poses a risk of setting the exact state of mind that allowed the Damascus Affair to be accepted at face value in Europe. Indeed, when an interest group places demands to the Mayor of Atlanta to “divest” the police budget for other priorities, it is fairly clear which

terminology inspired this demand. And that D for divestment is then followed by the B in boycott with the call to stop professional ties between US law enforcement agencies and the Israel Police.

BDS constitutes the modern version of the old blood libel. It is targeting Jews and Israel (even if some vocal Jews are helping this effort). It ignores any transgressions in the Arab and Muslim worlds and other locations where major atrocities take place, and it is focused on national character assassination that is aimed to set the ground for the annihilation of Israel. It is time that the marketplace of ideas forthrightly reject such discriminatory, racist and despicable ideas.

Finally, we can no longer ignore the problem, wish it away, or hide from it. The onslaught is vigorous, well-funded and deadly serious. Therefore, joining forces against the BDS is important not only for Israel's sake but for the sake of democracies anywhere in the world. Legislators, elected officials and civic associations have recently demonstrated the power of public resilience in the face of BDS activities and this way paved the way for an effective strategy. More should join in this effort.

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