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## Turning the tables on BDS

By G. STEINBERG AND J. EDELSTEIN  
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Don't just react; undermine the credibility and influence of groups promoting boycott, divestment and sanctions.

The North American Jewish community has taken an important step to counter the delegitimization campaigns targeting Israel. Directed by the Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA) in partnership with the Jewish Council of Public Affairs (JCPA), the Israel Action Network should be a vital resource to combat these assaults.

To emerge victorious in this political war, the network must be armed with detailed information about the opposition, and implement an effective counterstrategy on this basis. This involves distributing information to college students and active community members, so they can name and shame the groups that lead and fund demonization. NGO Monitor and other groups can provide the Israel Action Network with this information without reinventing this particular wheel.

The challenge is formidable. In 2001 at the UN World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa, more than 1,500 anti-Israel NGOs adopted a plan of action that highlights the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement. In the decade that followed, these groups exploited human rights rhetoric and international legal claims to push this immoral objective.

The Jewish community has been largely playing catch-up ever since. When the NGOs and BDSers invade campuses, Jewish students and local communities scramble to respond. Similarly, when the demonizers publicize calls for boycotts at local food co-ops, the community responds.

While the need to refute their allegations is clear, students and community groups must also adopt a proactive strategy to undermine the credibility and influence of these groups. This strategy will marginalize many of the BDS movement's central actors, and expose the lie that BDS is a grassroots protest against Israeli policy.

WITH LIMITED resources, NGO Monitor has demonstrated that this approach can be very effective. Based on detailed research, the government of Canada cut funding ostensibly provided for human rights and development, but which was actually used for hatred and incitement. Similar discussions are under way in European governments regarding funding for some of the more poisonous NGOs involved in BDS.

And in the Jewish communities, this information has allowed donors to make informed decisions, providing funds for groups that contribute to Israel in a positive way, as distinguished from demonizers and BDS proponents. The new JFNA initiative will provide much-needed resources to expand this process.

For example, the organization known as Electronic Intifada is very active in BDS efforts, routinely abusing terms like "apartheid" and "ethnic cleansing." Nigel Parry, a cofounder of EI, conflates victims of terror with

terror leaders, and justifies Palestinian mortars fired into Israeli settlements by stating: "The dilemma in which the Palestinians find themselves is like that of a man who, falsely imprisoned for most of his life and demonized by society, finds himself in a dark room being raped by a highly decorated prison guard, when... he suddenly notices a rocket launcher lying within reach." Parry also compared Israel's targeted killing of Hamas head Ahmed Yassin to a "bus bombing."

El's other founder, Ali Abunimah, who appears on many campuses to promote BDS, calls for a one-state solution, meaning the elimination of Israel. Abunimah also compares Israel to Nazi Germany, referring to the Israeli press as "Der Sturmer."

Other BDS groups must be exposed for their overtly anti-Semitic language. Leaders of Sabeel, a Palestinian Christian group, employ "Palestinian liberation theology," which identifies Palestinians with Jesus and revives the concept of Jewish deicide for political gains. In an Easter message, Sabeel founder Naim Ateek told followers: "It seems to many of us that Jesus is on the cross again with thousands of crucified Palestinians around him... The Israeli government crucifixion system is operating daily."

This rhetoric, fraught with deep-seated anti-Semitic imagery, is common at Sabeel events in churches throughout North America. This needs to be confronted systematically.

In addition, an expanded framework for combating the BDS movement will allow for the distinction between hard-core anti-Israel campaigners and those who have been persuaded to lend their names to this cause. It is important to develop alliances with the latter group, including labor union members, Protestant churchgoers, students and university professors who will find the hatred that emanates from the demonizers repulsive. If we can convince these individuals to end their passive support for BDS, the NGOs that promote these campaigns will find themselves exposed as the fringe groups they really are.

The committed and organized Jewish community will be a great asset in these efforts. With federations and community relations councils throughout the country, the infrastructure exists to implement this proactive strategy. We need to face our opponents strategically, rather than on an ad hoc reactive basis.

Exposing their abuses and funding sources, and forcing their campaign leaders and participants to respond to us will change the dynamic in this battle.

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