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Palestinian Center for
POLICY and
SURVEY RESEARCH

Changing the Status Quo: What directions for Palestinians?

The Prospect for Palestinian Economic Boycott of Israel: Forms and Difficulties

Raja Khalidi

Comments by:

Dr. Ghassan Khatib

Mr. Fajr Harb

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Commentators:

Dr. Ghassan Khatib, Professor of cultural studies at Birzeit University and vice president of the university. He has served as Minister of Labor and Minister of Planning and as director of the Government Media Center in the Palestinian Authority.

Mr. Fajr Harb, a political activist

Preface:

Given the current stalemate in Palestinian-Israeli relations and the potential for wide-scale escalation in the near future, PSR has conducted a 6-month policy research on new directions for the Palestinians. The research sought to explore Palestinian discourse on the best means to move forward. Five short policy papers, written by senior Palestinian experts and academics, explore various approaches and directions for the PA to take (see list of papers and authors at the end of the report). All these directions are currently part of the Palestinian public and elite discourse. Each paper describes a specific approach, outlining its potential impact on the Palestinians and Israelis and exploring its contribution to a more effective Palestinian strategy to end the occupation. Each approach therefore represents a component in a larger proposed strategy. The five papers were reviewed and discussed by a task force, a core group of 20 made up of the five authors and fifteen reviewers and discussants. The discussion of the papers took place in six closed workshops attended by experts, policy makers, academics and activists. An open conference was organized on 29 February and was devoted to a discussion of all five papers.

This paper, a condensed version of the original Arabic, addresses the approach calling for a boycott of Israel. Two commentaries by two members of the task force are inserted at the end of the paper. The discussion of this approach and paper among the members of the task force was very vibrant and insightful; for that, PSR wishes to express its appreciation for all members of the core group (see list of names and affiliations at the end of the report) for the time and effort they have devoted to this work. However, the discussion among the members of the task force indicated at times serious differences of opinion. In this light, it should be made clear that this report does not necessarily represent the views of every single member of the core expert group. It only represents the analysis and the assessment of its author.

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The Prospect for Palestinian Economic Boycott of Israel: Forms and Difficulties

Raja Khalidi

The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement (BDS), a late-comer to the Palestinian struggle for freedom, has garnered much support and attention in the past few years. Having gained much support and fame within the international pro-Palestinian student solidarity and trade union movements, BDS has shown that it can become an efficient tool in resistance against Israel. The successes of boycott policies in other theatres - especially the struggle against Apartheid in South Africa - have proven that under certain conditions, boycott movements are a very effective tool. In the context of searching for new options to return vigor and effectiveness to the Palestine struggle, and in order to build a new collective culture of resistance, it is prudent to study the possibility of adopting a national Palestinian campaign to boycott Israel and its plausible results, as well as its implications for the immediate and medium time-frames.

Goals, Concepts, and Forms of Boycotting Israel

Given current realities, the objectives of a boycott campaign can be summarized as follows (listed in order of the difficulties associated with their implementation):

1. Isolation and weakening of colonial settlements
2. Complete campaign to boycott any international entity supporting or benefitting from collaborating with the Occupation
3. Boycott of all Israeli products deemed replaceable, or not needed for consumption, thereby inflicting immediate or long-term economic losses through a strategy of an economic war of attrition
4. Economic, legal and administrative separation from Israel with the goal of achieving independence and sovereignty

To succeed, each objective requires its own unique methods of resistance and political alliances:

5. Engage the Palestinian Authority (PA) and its legal, administrative and security apparatus in prohibiting trade with all Israeli illegal settlements
6. Form international solidarity campaigns, with supporters from universities, trade unions and churches, to coax them into severing their relationships with counterpart Israeli institutions, and suspending their investments in Israel

7. Organize local and national demonstrations, with wide ranging media coverage, to call for the boycott of sensitive and strategic Israeli products such as dairy, meat, vegetables, energy, communications and tourism, through the prohibition of their marketing in Palestinian areas and the substitution of these products with alternatives from local or international producers
8. Withdraw Palestinian labor from Israeli markets, which has not happened at either the popular or official levels
9. Establish a solid economic foundation, capable of freeing Palestinians from any economic and commercial interaction with Israel, thereby eventually arriving at complete separation

Expected Impact of Boycott on Israel and the Palestinians: Profit, Loss and Institutional Transformations

During the first year of implementing the 2010 Law, concerned PA departments announced the destruction of settlement products illegally found in Palestinian markets, worth more than \$50 million. The same departments continue to occasionally announce the confiscation of banned products. However, the nature of local markets and their deep level of connection to various channels of Israeli production and marketing make it easy for merchants to circumvent legal and customs' barriers, and to fake the origin of products, especially agricultural goods produced in Israel. Therefore, the strict application of the law requires better institutional processes to manage relations between importers and the PA, and the development of new resources to control the flow of goods in order to achieve better boycott results.

The international BDS movement has significantly increased in importance in the past year, as demonstrated by many statements from Israeli officials admitting that BDS represents a strategic danger to Israel in the economic and political spheres. This is especially true regarding foreign investment in Israel, which has declined lately for various reasons including the efforts of BDS. However, despite the spread of popular boycott campaigns - particularly in Europe - its financial impact has not matched its moral and media successes. The real success of BDS requires its adoption by political parties in power and in opposition, which will transform the activities of BDS into official policies capable of banning commerce with Israel.

Despite its limited successes and the lack of sustainability of popularly-driven boycotts, the invigoration of BDS remains important and achievable without governmental participation.

The possibility of escalating popular boycott campaigns will remain questionable in the absence of a national strategy supported by official, popular and economic forces. It is critical to increase Palestinian popular involvement in limited boycott methods available to them, through pressuring the PA and demanding the application of commercial procedures designed to target Israeli products and services. In addition, the selective and seasonal boycott of Israeli products could protect some local Palestinian production sectors, especially agricultural products, regardless of the "commitments" of the Paris Protocol.

Usually, the PA does not participate in popular boycott campaigns, and typically Israel does not retaliate against the Palestinian local economy. However, any official Palestinian participation in the boycott, whether partial or total, will result in Israeli retaliations. Israel will not react lightly if a partial boycott of Israeli products profiting from the Palestinian market (milk, meat, oil products, cement, fruits and vegetables) is called for, and implemented, by the PA. Hence, any official escalation of boycott must be studied carefully and implemented with precautions to ensure the ability of the Palestinian market to

cope with Israeli retaliations. This must include identifying alternative import sources, along with ensuring the ability of commercial products to flow through entry points that are entirely under Israel's control. The PA must also build local industrial capacities, plan agricultural production and increase investment in these areas in order to encourage the private business sectors.

Scenarios and Strategies: Adopting Boycott Campaigns as Part of Palestinian Resistance

Below, I will consider some plausible implementation scenarios for changing the status quo, through energizing and escalating boycott initiatives against Israel in the coming years. These considerations try to streamline discussions and resolutions at all levels of boycott, while paying special attention to well-defined external factors.

The continuation of the current political, geographic and economic divisions among Palestinians limits the possibility of staging efficient and coordinated boycott campaigns at the popular and political levels. The current situation is made worse by Israel's continuing severe siege of Gaza: Israel exercises total control on the flow of goods through Gaza's entry points, at a time when Gaza's economic capacity is severely paralyzed by the systematic aggression of Israel's armed forces. However this should not stop the PA from pushing for an escalation of the 2010 Law, especially those sections related to the recreation of the Karama Fund and the development of popular and international voluntary solidarity campaigns. The PA can also gradually withdraw Palestinian labor from the settlements and prepare a package of laws designed to protect the national agricultural, industrial and service sectors.

There is little need to expound upon the benefits that can be gained from Palestinian national reconciliation. Firstly, national unity will mitigate the destructive effects of disunity on the Palestinians' national project for liberation and development. Secondly, on the economic front, unity will allow for the rise of new economic opportunities between the West Bank and Gaza and between Gaza and Egypt. Moreover, it will also allow for the strategic planning of Palestinian infrastructure, to include energy, communications, natural resources, transportation and other sectors of vital importance to our national security and economy.

Undoubtedly, twenty years after the signing of the Oslo Accords, Palestinians' approval of the PA, its services, announcements and strategies is not high. There is widespread belief that the Oslo Accords and resulting negotiations have failed as a liberation project, and have instead allowed the colonial project to flourish. The majority of Palestinians are not convinced that the PA's apparatus (excluding finance and security organizations) has lived up to their expectations, and view the PA as a delusionary entity designed to satisfy an elitist class with self-serving positions, and a body that squanders our national resources. Therefore, the creation of a boycott movement with participation from the citizen, the merchant, the industrialist, the clerk, the policeman and the minister, requires the PA and its leadership to change their performance and the cynical perspectives of their citizenry.

Israel has many economic and commercial weapons at its disposal. These include the withholding of taxes collected on behalf of the PA, counter-boycott campaigns and the obstruction of Palestinian commerce across entry points to Palestine. The possible escalation of retaliatory boycott campaigns could also lead to confrontations between the West Bank and Israel and between Gaza and Israel. This is a negative factor that complicates opportunities for planning and executing partial and general boycotts, and disturbs the performance of governmental institutions. Furthermore, economic losses will multiply in light of expected Israeli retaliations.

Proposal for an Inclusive, National “Rolling” Boycott Program of the Israeli Economy

In the event that the strategies outlined above are adopted, an understanding of the roles of various actors must be taken into account in order to plan for a reduction in expected economic losses which is unavoidable in the struggle against occupation. I propose the implementation of the following steps in 2016, in order to launch a boycott program with the participation of various Palestinian actors:

The PLO and the PA:

10. Form an inter-ministerial committee (representing economics, labor, agriculture and finance) entrusted with the implementation of the 2010 Law to its minute details, with strict enforcement of standards related to the source of products generally and settlements products specifically. This committee will be entrusted with the enforcement of strict customs and agricultural controls and procedures. It will also have the responsibility for organizing media campaigns encouraging the population to observe the boycott.
11. Apply the Law prohibiting work in Israeli settlements. This should be accompanied with the implementation of the “Karama Fund” and the creation of local employment alternatives (at least for one year) for every worker who can certify that he/she has stopped working in settlements.
12. Delegate a ministerial committee to create a plan for public and private investment dedicated to producing local products capable of sustaining local markets and hiring Palestinian labor. Compliance with this plan must be made mandatory to all countries aiding the Palestinians and to local investors. The committee must also restructure investment laws to create incentives for development and investment - with the aim of building a vibrant economy less dependent on Israel.
13. Conclude trade agreements with Arab and other friendly countries in order to provide alternatives for mass consumables which are currently imported from Israel (especially oil and building materials).
14. Launch a wide-ranging Palestinian-Arab-Islamic diplomatic campaign at the United Nations to ban trading in settlement products and create adequate monitoring processes to ensure compliance from all participants.
15. Preempt expected Israeli retaliations and escalations by working with international partners to ensure the continuation of Palestinian rights to trade through all borders terminals, and implement the provisions of the trade agreement signed with the World Trade Organization in 2013. Diplomatic initiatives must aim to isolate Israel and ensure the flow of goods from alternative markets.

The National Boycott Committee:

16. Include the National Boycott Committee in international BDS campaigns and expand their remit.
17. Search for new theaters to expand the boycott, especially in countries sympathetic to the Palestinian cause.

18. Expand efforts to build a database on Israeli and international investment in settlements, focusing on the collection of information about companies and international institutions deeply involved in supporting the occupation. The goal should be to make this database a trusted international information source for the BDS movement.
19. Expand national grassroots' partnerships in administering boycott campaigns through convening workshops and seminars for entities other than the National Boycott Committee, such as official institutions and commercial and financial organizations, as well as other societal and economic organizations.

The Private Sector (Institutions and Coordinating Committees):

20. Prepare to satiate national demand for local and international products which are compliant with the standards of PA law and the BDS movement. Planning should include investment in new industries, increased investment in commercial agricultural and in other promising local industries.
21. Prepare to import substitutes for Israeli products which cannot be produced by local industry
22. Prepare to import raw materials and strategic equipment to safeguard against interruptions in local industrial production.
23. Prepare to endure transient economic losses resulting from substituting Israeli imports with regional and international imports.
24. Gradually reduce dependence on Israeli brokers and traders.
25. Launch media campaigns to demonstrate the commitment of the private sector to the boycott movement, through advertising local products and encouraging Palestinian consumers to use only local or BDS-approved products. This will enhance the popularity of the boycott movement and entrench it among the populace as a legitimate and efficient method within the struggle for freedom.

Civil Society Organizations:

Student and women organizations have a high level of competence in field organization and are capable of responding quickly to various national resistance campaigns. Therefore, it is of paramount importance to support these organizations with precise information, plans and media resources, and to give them the freedom that they need to carry out their activities.

The Palestinian trade union movement must perform a prominent role in developing the boycott movement from mere slogans to a working and practicable program. This is especially true given that the working class should be the most interested sector in Palestinian society in establishing a viable industrial base which can employ large numbers of workers. Thus, trade unionists must assume a leading role in decision-making in all boycott development plans.

Comment by Dr. Ghassan Khatib:

The boycott strategy is the most suitable path to pursue in the struggle of Palestinians to achieve their goals, provided that these goals are:

- Ending the occupation of the 1967 territories as a requirement for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state
- The resolution of the Palestinian refugee problem according to UN Resolution 164
- Ending racist practices directed against Palestinians living in Israel

I subscribe to the opinion of a large percentage of Palestinians that we have experimented with the strategy of armed resistance for many decades, and ultimately this strategy has failed. Armed struggle is very costly, and its limited achievements have come at a great cost. Profit and loss calculations make its continuation unfeasible, not only in terms of its heavy human and material cost, but also at the political level. The limited progress achieved by armed struggle had the extra cost of defaming us before the world's public opinion as terrorists. There is no doubt that Israel has shown great ability in confronting our armed struggle; Israel has endured and then defeated it. Moreover, to a large extent, Israel was also able to neutralize and then diminish our "diplomatic attack." Resultantly, is there another resistance method which is harder for Israel to defeat?

Boycott is cheap, internationally acceptable, and does not violate international law. Furthermore, Israel does not have the ability to defeat it, as demonstrated by its apparent worries about boycott. In addition, boycott as a form of resistance is unlikely to become a subject of infighting amongst Palestinians, while it also enables sympathizers to join its ranks and participate in the struggle at the popular, official, governmental and institutional level. Although I agree with the viability of an international boycott movement as a means to confront Israel, I do not agree with this paper's exclusive focus on a Palestinian boycott movement.

The paper's assertions concerning a "call for the boycott of sensitive and strategic Israeli products such as dairy, meat, vegetables, energy, communications and tourism, through the prohibition of their marketing in Palestinian areas and the substitution of these products with alternatives from local or international producers" and the "withdraw Palestinian labor from Israeli markets, which has not happened at either the popular or official levels" are politically sound, but realistically impossible. Moreover, the cost of such a boycott will be prohibitively high for Palestinians, and its effect will be limited for Israel. More importantly, the boycott of such consumer goods will never represent a loss that is large enough to damage the Israeli economy, which largely depends on the export of technological and military products, which are not sold in the Palestinian areas.

Also, I do not agree with emphasizing efforts in order to "establish a solid economic foundation, capable of freeing Palestinians from any economic and commercial interaction with Israel, thereby eventually arriving at complete separation" given the impracticality of this proposition, and its diminished economic importance under the current form of occupation.

Internal Palestinian discussions about implementing the resolutions approved at the latest PLO Central Committee meeting - which was dedicated to defining our relations with Israel and recommended halting security coordination - have resulted in feelings of hesitation by Palestinian officials, due to the belief that halting security coordination will be costlier to us than it will be harmful to Israel. Followers of Israeli affairs can attest to Israel's concern with Palestinians actions in the boycott movement, at the International Court of Justice, at UNESCO or at the Security Council.

My perception is that the boycott movement is feasible provided it is grounded in, and derived from, international law. In other words, boycott must be based on the decisions of the international community

to apply international law and punish violators. In addition, it is important to coordinate boycott activities with international law and its institutions in various international theaters.

The success of this option depends on many requirements. There is a need for a Palestinian attitude that is more sensitive to, and more harmonious with, international law and the international community. There is also a need for integrating popular diplomacy with the official diplomacy of the PLO and the PA, as represented by the boycott movement against Israel, the withdrawal of investments, and the enforcement of penalties. Official diplomacy can employ international legal institutions as additional theaters for the struggle with Israel.

Comment by Fajr Harb:

Through studying this paper and the PA's approach towards economic boycott, one can conclude that the PA is not serious about implementing the program of the boycott movement, even at its lowest requirements, such as boycotting settlement products. This paper emphasizes the 2010 Law legislated by the PA under the leadership of Prime Minister Salam Fayyad. This law prohibits trade in settlement products and calls for the creation of the "Karama" Fund. This paper calls for the application of this law in order to enable the PA to achieve some gains within the framework of the Oslo Accords and the current political situation. However, according to my understanding, this law was enacted in response to political pressure: to appease Palestinian public opinion and to appear to do something in supporting of the international BDS movement. When these conditions changed, this campaign faded and then ceased to exist. Hence, the PA does not appear to be serious in implementing the minimum level of boycott targeting settlement products, let alone the maximum level of boycott targeting the entire Israeli occupation system.

The paper also makes reference to the need to support the building of a self-sufficient Palestinian resistance economy, which will be as important as the action of boycott, and the two paths are mutually complementary. In considering the PA's budget for 2014, we see that the security apparatus is allocated 28% of the budget, while agriculture is allocated less than 1%. Without a doubt, the creation of a successful boycott movement requires supporting the local Palestinian market in both agriculture and industry. The creation of new Palestinian industries; and the support of agriculture; will provide substitutes to Israeli products and create alternative employment opportunities for those working in settlements. In addition, despite the high cost associated with creating new industries and supporting agriculture, these measures will have a positive effect on collective Palestinian morale and self-confidence, while decreasing dependence on occupation. Governmental support for the agricultural sector is necessary for providing a dignified life for people.

Despite the breadth of the paper, it does not give Palestinians living in Israel (lands occupied in 1948) a role in the boycott movement, whether at the popular or official levels. Given that the Palestinians of 1948 are part of the Palestinian people, it should be asked if the weapon of boycott should involve them, or if it is not suitable for them. If so, what role can they play in gaining independence from the Israeli economy, or in providing alternatives to Palestinian markets in the West Bank and Gaza?

We are witnessing the solidification of the boycott movement. This is true at the international level, as seen by the activities of the BDS movement which have become synonymous to the word Israel, and serve as a frame of reference for activists to join the Palestinian cause. The success of the boycott movement should not be measured by numbers only. Although numbers are a good indicator of its effectiveness, as evidenced by the recent withdrawal of the Methodist Church's investments in Israeli banks, its activities should be considered as contributing to a change in Israel's image in the world, and in combating the immunity that Israel has gained over the years. The work of the boycott movement - even

when not practiced directly in Palestine - has a great effect on normalization activities, which has become a negative and much-avoided word, where normalization projects calling for Palestinian-Israeli partnership became are now very rare and not openly practiced.

On the popular level, the last few years have reinvigorated the concept of boycott at the local level and increased its momentum. Every popular uprising and every Israeli war brings people closer to the boycott movement, which prepares the way for the sweeping changes predicted in this study.

What Directions? list of policy papers, authors and commentators

#	Author	Title	Commentators
1	Dr. Sufian Abu Zaida	Peaceful Popular Resistance, is it a Feasible Option?	Qais Abd al-Karim & Mr. Jamal Zakout
2	Mr. Sam Bahour	Asynchronous and Inseparable Struggles for Rights and a Political End-Game	Mr. Mohammad Daraghmeh & Mr. Radi Jarai
3	Dr. Ali Jarbawi	Making Negotiation Viable	Dr. Ayman Daraghmeh & Dr. Azmi Shuaibi
4	Mr. Raja Khalidi	The Prospect for Palestinian Economic Boycott of Israel: Forms and Difficulties	Mr. Fajr Harb & Dr. Ghassan Khatib
5	Mr. Hani al-Masri	Is It Possible to Suspend Security Coordination?	Dr. Naser al-Shaer & Dr. Husam Zomlot

What Directions? members of the task force

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4	Mr. Sam Bahour	AIM
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6	Dr. Ayman Daraghmeh	PLC
7	Mr. Mohammad Daraghmeh	Journalist
8	Mr. Fajr Harb	Activist
9	Mr. Radi Jarai	Al-Quds University
10	Dr. Ali Jarbawi	Birzeit University
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19	Mr. Jamal Zakout	PNC
20	Dr. Husam Zomlot	Fatah

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September 2015-March 2016

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