



PERSPECTIVES

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The Anti-Israel Effort Intensifies in Politics and On Campus

by Alex Joffe

BESA Center Perspectives Paper No. 944, September 11, 2018

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Anti-Semitism continues to be aggressively promoted in the guise of anti-Israelism in two highly influential arenas: politics, particularly in Britain; and on campus. In the US, the BDS movement is doing all it can to ostracize Jewish students.

August's major BDS issue was the continuation of the British Labour Party's anti-Semitism crisis, which began more than two years ago. It was revealed that Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn had [formally endorsed BDS in 2015](#), had [laid a wreath at the graves](#) of the Black September terrorists who orchestrated the 1972 Munich massacre, had met [Hamas leaders](#) in the West Bank during [an undeclared trip in 2010](#), and had [participated in a 2012 conference in Qatar](#) with Hamas members responsible for numerous terrorist murders.

Corbyn's [preposterous excuse](#) that "I was present at that wreath-laying, I don't think I was actually involved in it" was excoriated by the British press, British Jews, and many Labour Party members. His [later comment](#) that "Zionists" do not understand "English irony" compounded the problem.

But these and other outrages were followed by an explosion of anti-Semitic abuse directed at Corbyn's critics, including accusations that false claims of anti-Semitism are being used to smear Corbyn and wreck the party. Corbyn's divisive leadership and the anti-Semitism crisis are among the issues leading some observers to [predict a permanent split](#) in the party.

The sources of Labour's crisis — which originated on college campuses — should be emphasized. Campus politics in Britain have long been incubators for national

politics, mirroring such national trends as “intersectionality” and identity politics in progressive circles.

The connection between BDS and the larger political scene is also being played out in the US. In Michigan’s 13th Congressional district, Rashida Tlaib won the Democratic primary and will run unopposed in November. Tlaib, a state legislator, had previously headlined a Detroit area BDS rally, and has stated in interviews that [she would “absolutely” support](#) cutting aid to Israel.

After Tlaib appeared to [reverse herself](#) and stated that she in fact supports a two-state (rather than a one-state) solution along with military aid to Israel, the pro-BDS site [Electronic Intifada](#) attacked her, deeming her insufficiently supportive of BDS, and criticized her for taking money from the [lobbying arm of J Street](#). While her willingness to pretend that she has a nuanced position on the issue may be a sign of political opportunism, her initial positions clearly reflect her true beliefs. Pressure exerted by the BDS movement also reflects the extent to which extremist anti-Israel pressure, long central to Palestinian politics and the Palestine issue in global Muslim politics, are at work in Muslim-American politics. For its part, J Street withdrew its support for Tlaib.

Minnesota candidate Ilhan Omar, running for the Congressional seat being vacated by the anti-Israel Keith Ellison, stated on social media that the “Israeli apartheid regime” has “hypnotized the world” to ignore its “evil doings.” In a campaign visit to a synagogue she stated, however, that [she does not support the BDS movement](#). It is unclear why this statement should be accepted at face value.

Tlaib and Omar, along with [Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez](#), have been celebrated in progressive and far-left circles in part because of their minority identities — and by anti-Israel activists for their stands against Israel. Both are aspects of identity politics that have spread rapidly from campuses to the broader scene. Tlaib’s and Omar’s anti-Semitism has been noted even by left-wing Jewish commentators. Yet one far-left Jewish writer supports them anyway, and said that to do the opposite [“erodes both the moral soul of our Zionism and our advocacy on the Hill.”](#)

The impact of BDS, first as a wedge and then as part of a larger progressive stance, cannot be understated. Even Democrats such as Cory Booker of New Jersey, previously close to the Jewish community, have seen fit to [pose with BDS representatives](#) as a means of flirting with the position. Democrats Tlaib, Omar, Maria Estrada, Julia Salazar (a New York State Senate nominee [who appears to have lied about being both Jewish and an immigrant](#)), Leslie Cockburn (a nominee in Virginia and co-author of a scathing 1991 book attacking Israel), and [Imtiaz Mohammad](#) (a State Senate candidate in Florida running against an incumbent on the grounds that he supported anti-BDS legislation) fully manifest the growing trend of anti-Israel and [anti-Semitic Congressional candidates](#).

In campus news, as the new semester begins, more Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) chapters have taken to social media and threatened violence against “Zionists.” At Stanford University an SJP member [resigned as a residence hall staff member](#) after his threats came to light. It was then announced that he will be receiving therapy as a result of the trauma he has endured. Other [SJP branches](#) and [BDS leaders](#) have been found to have praised members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). The PFLP connection expanded when a Barnard College group hosted members of the [Palestinian advocacy organization Addameer](#) as part of an “anti-incarceration” panel. Many Addameer staff members are directly linked to the PFLP. [SJP’s national umbrella organization](#) is scheduled to hold its annual convention at UCLA in November.

The growing advocacy of BDS and anti-Zionist activists has contributed to a continued deterioration of conditions for Jewish students. A report from John Jay College noted that BDS leaders actively orchestrated the ostracizing of Jewish students, blacklisting other groups who might co-host events with Jewish organizations and harassing individual Jewish students. Some Jewish students feel pressured to denounce Israel and Jewish organizations in order to participate in campus social life.

A [new report from the AMCHA Initiative](#) discusses these patterns. Among other conclusions, it shows that “nearly all of the Israel-related incidents in 2017 involved behavior intended to suppress pro-Israel expression and/or that specifically targeted pro-Israel individuals or groups for ostracizing or discriminatory behavior intended to exclude them from fully participating in campus life.” While the number of anti-Israel events remained fairly constant, behavior aimed at ostracizing pro-Israel individuals and groups expanded in 2018.

A Hillel International lawsuit against San Francisco State University, which alleges that the university permitted a hostile environment for Jewish students by excluding Hillel and other Jewish groups from campus life, also illustrates the manner in which all Jewish “spaces” are under assault by the BDS movement. A [bizarre amicus brief](#) from “Open Hillel” alleged that since Hillel International [does not represent “all” Jewish students](#) — that is to say anti-Zionist and pro-BDS Jews — the university cannot have created a hostile environment for Jews. Observers note that [this argument inadvertently undermines](#) a broad swath of anti-discrimination law.

The Open Hillel attack complements IfNotNow’s pre-planned ambushes of multiple Birthright groups during the summer, as well as BDS’s continuing efforts to protest Jewish federations and stop [American police forces](#) from conducting training exchanges with Israel. All aspects of both the Jewish relationship with Israel and grassroots American institutional relationships are being systematically assaulted.

Elsewhere in academia, the American Association of University Professors [issued a statement](#) that deplored Israel’s recent refusal to admit BDS leaders who are

professors. The statement rejected boycotts but maintained that they are a legitimate means of protest.

The increasing use of provocations by BDS leaders attempting to enter Israel, and apparent Israeli overreaction to the 2018 regulation giving security officials the ability to bar BDS activists, were also on display in August. IfNotNow co-founder [Simone Zimmerman](#) and left-wing critic [Peter Beinart](#) were questioned upon entry to Israel. The temporary detentions prompted a burst of criticism regarding “illiberal Zionism” – but were also attacked by a large segment of the Israeli conservative establishment, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

This article was [published](#) by Algemeiner on September 3, 2018.

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BESA Center Perspectives Papers are published through the generosity of the Greg Rosshandler Family