

Why I Support the BDS Movement Against Israel

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In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

Smoke and fire from an Israeli strike rise over Gaza City in July 2014. (Hatem Moussa / AP)

The Palestinians are poor. They are powerless. They have no voice or influence in the halls of power. They are demonized. They do not have well-heeled lobbyists doling out campaign contributions and pushing through pro-Palestinian legislation. No presidential candidate is appealing to donors—as [Hillary Clinton did](#) when she sent a letter to [media mogul Haim Saban](#) denouncing critics of Israel—by promising to advance the interests of the Palestinian people. Palestinians, like poor people of color in the United States, are expendable.

Justice for Palestine will never come from the traditional governmental institutions or political parties that administer power. These institutions have surrendered to moneyed interests. Justice will come only from us. And the sole mechanism left to ensure justice for Palestine is the [boycott, divestment and sanctions \(BDS\) movement](#) against Israel. Sanctions brought down the apartheid regime of South Africa. And they are what will bring down the apartheid regime of Israel. BDS is nonviolent. It appeals to conscience. And it works.

All Israeli products including Jaffa citrus fruits, Ahava cosmetics, SodaStream drink machines, Eden Springs bottled water and Israeli wine must be boycotted. We must refuse to do business with Israeli service companies. And we must boycott corporations that do business with Israel, including Caterpillar, HP and Hyundai. We must put pressure on institutions, from churches to universities, to divest from Israeli companies and corporations that have contracts with Israel. The struggle against apartheid in South Africa was long and hard. This struggle will be too.

Gaza, a year after Israel carried out a devastating bombing campaign that lasted almost two months, is in ruins. Most of the water is unsafe to drink. There are power outages for up to 12 hours a day. Forty percent of the 1.8 million inhabitants are unemployed, including 67 percent of the youths—the highest youth unemployment rate in the world. Of the 17,000 homes destroyed by Israel in the siege, not one has been rebuilt. Sixty thousand people remain homeless. Only a quarter of the promised \$3.5 billion in aid from international donors has been delivered—much of it diverted to the Palestinian Authority, the Israeli puppet regime that governs the West Bank. And no one in Washington—Republican or Democrat—will defy the Israel lobby. No one will call for justice or stay the Israeli killing machine. U.S. senators, including Bernie Sanders, at the height of the Israeli bombardment last summer voted unanimously to [defend the Israeli slaughter](#) of a people with no army, navy, air force, mechanized units, artillery or command and control. It was a vote worthy of the old Soviet Union. Every senator held out his or her tin cup to the Israel lobby and chose naked self-interest over justice.

Israel, like the United States, is poisoned by the psychosis of permanent war. It too is governed by a corrupt oligarchic elite for whom war has become a lucrative business. It too has deluded itself into carrying out war crimes and then playing the role of the victim. Israeli systems of education and the press—again mirrored in the United States—have indoctrinated Israelis into believing that they have a right to kill anyone whom the state condemns as a terrorist. And Israel’s most courageous human rights campaigners, intellectuals and journalists are slandered and censored in their own country, just as American critics such as [Norman Finkelstein](#), [Max Blumenthal](#) and [Noam Chomsky](#) are in the United States.

Those who become addicted to the wielding of the instruments of war, blinded by hubris and a lust for power, eventually become war’s victims. This is as true for Israel as for the United States.

Israel’s goal is to make life a living hell for all Palestinians, ethnically cleansing as many as it can and subduing those who remain. The peace process is a sham. It has led to Israel’s seizure of more than half the land on the West Bank, including the aquifers, and the herding of Palestinians into squalid, ringed ghettos or [Bantustans](#) while turning Palestinian land and homes over to Jewish settlers. Israel is expanding settlements, especially in East Jerusalem. Racial laws, once championed by the right-wing demagogue [Meir Kahane](#), openly discriminate against Israeli Arabs and Palestinians. [Ilan Pappé](#) calls the decades-long assault against the Palestinian people “incremental genocide.”

In Gaza, Israel practices an even more extreme form of cruelty. It employs a mathematical formula to limit outside food deliveries to Gaza to keep the caloric levels of the 1.8 million Palestinians just above starvation. This has left 80 percent of the Palestinians in Gaza dependent on Islamic charities and outside aid to survive. And the periodic military assaults on Gaza, euphemistically called “[mowing the lawn](#),” are carried out every few years to ensure that the Palestinians remain broken, terrified and destitute. There have been three Israeli attacks on Gaza since 2008. Each is more violent and indiscriminate than the last. Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman has said that a fourth attack on Gaza is “inevitable.”

During its 51-day siege of Gaza last summer Israel dropped \$370 million in ordinance on concrete hovels and refugee camps that hold the most densely packed population on the planet. Two thousand one hundred four Palestinians were killed. Sixty-nine percent—1,462—were civilians. Four hundred ninety-five were children. Ten thousand were injured. (During the attack six Israeli civilians and 66 soldiers were killed.) Four hundred Palestinian businesses were wiped out. Seventy mosques were destroyed and 130 were damaged. Twenty-four medical facilities were bombed, and 16 ambulances were struck, as was Gaza’s only electrical power plant. Israel tallied it up: 390,000 tank shells, 34,000 artillery shells, 4.8 million bullets. Most of the civilians who died were killed in their homes, many of the victims torn to shreds by [flechette darts](#) sprayed from tanks. Children were burned with white phosphorous or buried with their families under rubble caused by 2,000-pound iron fragmentation bombs. Others died from [dense inert metal explosive, or DIME bombs](#)—experimental weapons that send out extremely small, carcinogenic particles that cut through both soft tissue and bone. The Israel Defense Forces, as [Amira Hass](#) has reported, consider any Palestinian over the age of 12 to be a legitimate military target. Max Blumenthal’s new book, “[The 51 Day War](#),” is a chilling chronicle of savage atrocities carried out by Israel in Gaza last summer. As horrible as the apartheid state in South Africa was, that nation never used its air force and heavy artillery to bomb and shell black townships.

A report by [Action on Armed Violence](#) (AOAV) found Israel [killed and injured more civilians](#) with explosive weapons in 2014 than any other country in the world. Hamas' indiscriminate firing of wildly inaccurate missiles—Finkelstein correctly called them “enhanced fireworks”—into Israel was, as a U.N. report recently charged, a war crime, although the report failed to note that under international law Hamas had a right to use force to defend itself from attack.

The disparity of firepower in the 2014 conflict was vast: Israel dropped 20,000 tons of explosives on Gaza while Hamas used 20 to 40 tons of explosives to retaliate. Israel's wholesale slaughter of civilians is on a scale equaled only by [Islamic State](#) and [Boko Haram](#). Yet Israel, in our world of double standards, is exempted from condemnation in Washington and provided with weapons and billions in U.S. foreign aid to perpetuate the killing. This is not surprising. The United States uses indiscriminate deadly force in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia that outdoes even Israel, leaving behind civilian victims, refugees and destroyed cities and villages in huge numbers.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who during his last election campaign received 90 percent of his money from U.S. oligarchs such as [Sheldon Adelson](#), has internally mounted a campaign of state repression against human rights advocates, journalists and dissidents. He has stoked overt racism toward Palestinians and Arabs and the African migrant workers who live in the slums of Tel Aviv. “Death to Arabs” is a popular chant at Israeli soccer matches. Thugs from right-wing youth groups such as Im Tirtzu routinely beat up dissidents, Palestinians, Israeli Arabs and African immigrants in the streets of Tel Aviv. It is a species of Jewish fascism.

Israel is not an anomaly. It is a window into the dystopian, militarized world that is being prepared for all of us, a world with vast disparities of income and draconian systems of internal security. There will be no freedom for Palestine, or for those locked in our own internal colonies and terrorized by indiscriminate police violence, until we destroy corporate capitalism and the neoliberal ideology that sustains it. There will be no justice for [Michael Brown](#) until there is justice for [Mohammed Abu Khdeir](#). The fight for the Palestinians is our fight. If the Palestinians are not liberated none of us will be liberated. We cannot pick and choose which of the oppressed are convenient or inconvenient to defend. We will stand with all of the oppressed or none of the oppressed. And when we stand with the oppressed we will be treated like the oppressed.

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