

Beware of the Color Orange

The war against the State of Israel never ceases. At one moment in May 2015 it is the attempt of the deputy secretary of Fatah and head of the Palestinian Football Association to get the corrupt FIFA to suspend or expel Israel from international football. At another it is the executive committee of the UK National Union of Students to align itself with the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement (BDS) against Israel.

At yet another, a campaign waged by Saeb Erekat, the Palestinian Authority “negotiator” who never negotiates, helped end the participation of the French firm SAFEGE in a \$31 million Jerusalem cable car project, one that included east Jerusalem. The project was meant to ease traffic congestion in the city, including traffic to holy sites in the Old City and the Mount of Olives. SAFEGE, after a meeting with French foreign and economic ministries, explained its decision was made because of “political concerns.”

In May 2015 Erekat wrote to French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius to demand that the French firm Orange S.A., a multinational telecommunications corporation, cut its ties with the Israel firm Partner Communications Company, cancel its contractual agreement, and end its involvement with Israel because Partner was indirectly supporting Israeli settlement activity. The *NGO Monitor* indicates that Erekat had made his demand after this point of view was made known in 51-page report issued by anti-Israeli French and Palestinians NGOs representatives that asked Orange to disengage from Israel and to denounce the human rights violations by Israel.

On June 3, 2015 in a speech in Cairo, where Orange owns most of the Egyptian Mobinil telecommunications company, Stéphane Richard, the head of Orange, said that he would try to withdraw the Orange brand from Israel. As reported, he would

gladly cut ties “tomorrow” if it wasn’t so financially prohibitive. He wanted his company to distance itself from helping Israel’s “rule over Palestinian territories.” He continued, apparently ignorant of the chaos and the failed states in the area, that he wanted Orange to be one of the trustful partners of all Arab countries.

Orange S.A., formerly France Telecom S.A., is France’s leading telecommunications company, employing 170,000 people, and is France’s 9th largest business in terms of sales. The French State possesses 25.05% of its shares, directly or indirectly. The Israeli Partner firm, that began operating in 1999, is a public company, traded on both the New York and Tel Aviv stock markets, that is a mobile network operator, internet WI-FI and fixed telephony provider. It is now Israel’s second largest network operator.

Partner pays to use the Orange name and operates, with two subsidiaries, in Israel, and in the West Bank and Gaza. It uses the “Orange” brand under license, and in March 2015 signed a new ten-year license.

The reaction of both Israeli and French authorities was swift. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu denounced the despicable statement and asked the French government to repudiate the statement by Richard. For his part, Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius stated that France was firmly opposed to a boycott of Israel. Irrespective of decisions by private organizations about their own commercial strategy, the French government opposed a boycott.

The effect on Richard was immediate, if inconsistent and perhaps insincere. He regretted the confusion he had caused. Though he gave a specious managerial explanation, concern for business interests not politics, for his original remarks, he stated that Orange did not support any form of boycott in Israel, or anywhere else in the world.

However, the rhetoric and obvious desire of Richard was to accept the pro-Palestinian policy for boycott of Israel. Inherent in it is a bigoted bias that once again reveals a double standard towards the state of Israel. This hypocrisy must be pointed out and stressed. For more than a decade pro-Palestinians have organized campaigns in the United States and in European countries to promote boycotts of Israel, in areas of the economy and the academic world.

These campaigns, by student bodies, churches, unions, and leftist political groups, have become a fundamental part of the crusade against the very existence of the State of Israel. All of them are based on a false analogy, that Israel resembles the infamous apartheid regime of South Africa. The objective of the campaigns is not to make fair and legitimate criticisms of Israeli political and social policy. It is to seek the elimination of the State of Israel.

The inherent objective has been illustrated in the UK student movement. In September 2014 the executive committee of the UK National Union of Students (NUS) voted against a resolution proposed by a student of Kurdish descent to condemn the terrorist actions of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (IS) for its record of mass executions, rapes, slavery, and ethnic cleansing. This biased and perplexed student group incoherently explained that such a notion would unfairly demonize all Muslims. It would lead to Islamophobia. One can fairly conclude that the NUS executive looked kindly on the actions of IS, beheadings and all.

On June 2, 2015, the same group, by a vote of 19 to 12, had no difficulty in condemning and unfairly demonizing the population of Israel. Following similar action by American academic groups, the executive committee passed a motion "Solidarity with Palestine: Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions", to affiliate with the BDS movement and to boycott Israel.

Strikingly, it said nothing about the Chinese occupation of Tibet, the Turkish enclave in Cyprus, the Vietnamese in Cambodia, the Moroccans in Western Sahara, the Indonesians in Timor, the Russians in Abkhazia.

It is high time for all well meaning individuals to indicate the bias and hypocrisy of the BDS boycotters whether in academic institutions or in French business boardrooms.

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