

UAE's Normalization of Ties with Israel a Blow to BDS

by Hugh Fitzgerald



The BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) movement keeps trying to damage Israel's economy, but the Start-Up Nation simply goes from strength to strength, registering new advances in high tech (including AI and cybersecurity), medicine, agriculture, solar energy, wastewater management, defense, and a dozen other fields. All the major high tech firms in America now have offices in Israel. Many also have plants in Israel. Israel is a magnet for investors in technology from the U.S., Europe, and China. Israeli start-ups sold to foreign firms bring tens of billions of dollars annually to Israel. BDS has had exactly one "success" in Israel – it managed to pressure the Israeli company Sodastream, which had its manufacturing plant in the West Bank, where it gave work to 500 Palestinians, to move its plant back to Israel. When this

happened, those 500 Palestinians lost their jobs. Quite an achievement for the BDS movement. The story of how Israel has “powered through” the BDS threat, and how the UAE’s normalization of ties with the Jewish state will deal a major blow to the already sputtering BDS movement, is [here](#).

The Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel suffered a major blow this weekend, when the UAE revoked its 1972 decree to boycott the State of Israel. Abu Dhabi’s crown prince, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, effectively tore up the decree as part of the nascent Abraham Accord signed with Israel.

Even though Israel has powered through the Arab boycott – becoming a regional economic superpower – the UAE’s symbolic move is a message in a bottle: we are open to Israel for business. The end of the boycott effectively implies normalization of trade and commerce between the two nations. UAE citizens, in other words, may soon find “Bamba” – an Israeli snack food – in their supermarkets.

This, of course, is an affront to the traditional mandate of most Arab nations since Israel’s inception, if not before. The Khartoum Resolution of 1967 set the stage for a steadfast political and economic boycott of Israel. It was at this summit, following Israel’s shocking victory in the Six-Day War, that the Arab League declared the now infamous “Three Nos”: no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no negotiations with Israel...

The boycott movement re-intensified with the failure of the Oslo Accords and the onset of Palestinian terrorism against the Jewish state.

There has been terrorism against Jews by Palestinian Arabs ever since the state was declared – or rather, since long before the state of Israel was declared. The Algemeiner story ought to have read “and the great increase in Palestinian

terrorism” instead of “and the onset of Palestinian terrorism.” It’s always disturbing when Jewish sites are not careful with how they express themselves.

Terror failed to bring down Israel. The Palestinian leadership turned to promoting an intensive defamation and boycott campaign in an attempt to criminalize Israel, called BDS. The campaign was linked to labeling Israel an “apartheid state,” and it falsely drew parallels with apartheid-era South Africa. Across the West, students on university campuses lobbied for BDS and tried deceiving the international community by calling Israel a racist state.

BDS continually claims Israel is an “apartheid state,” but this claim keeps running up against the facts. There is no apartheid policy in Israel. Arabs sit in the Knesset, where the Arab Joint List, an alliance of several Arab parties, is the third largest group. Arabs serve on Israel’s Supreme Court. Arabs go abroad as senior diplomats for Israel. Arabs study in the same universities, work in the same factories and offices, are treated in the same hospitals, and serve in the same EMT ambulances, and police forces, as Jews. The only difference is that Arabs are not required to serve in the military, but may do so if they wish, and ever more Arabs, especially Bedouins, Christians and Druze, have volunteered. Muslims, too, have been joining the IDF in ever greater numbers, swearing allegiance to Israel and its defense; at their swearing-in they are each handed a rifle and a Koran. None of that sounds like “apartheid” to me.

While the BDS campaign still takes hold on university campuses, inspiring antisemitism and hatred for the Jewish state, the UAE’s peace accord with Israel and its visible establishment of direct ties is going to be a death knell for the movement. Trade and collaboration between Israel and its Arab neighbors is inevitable; it will become pronounced as more countries sign a peace agreement with the Jewish state.

How will the BDS manage to maintain its push for a “Boycott” of Israel when one of the richest Arab states has now thrown open its doors to Israeli goods, everything from fruits and candy bars to medicines, computer software, solar collectors, long-life batteries, lasers, medical equipment, drone technology, waste-water management plants, and much more. Still worse for the BDS Movement, the UAE’s normalization has only whetted appetites elsewhere in the Arab world for a similar normalization of ties with Israel – in Oman, Bahrain, Morocco, Sudan, and eventually, perhaps even in even Saudi Arabia – and the economic benefits it will surely bring.

Far from “divesting” in Israel, Emirati businessmen have been filling the emails of Israeli companies expressing an interest in personally visiting to scout out good investment opportunities. “Have money, will travel” is their enthusiastic message. And the Israelis are waiting for these Emirati investors with open arms.

The enemies of peace will inevitably try harder to defame and marginalize Israel. But their hopes and dreams will be dashed with each El Al plane landing in Abu Dhabi and Emirati jets touching down in Tel Aviv. We have a real chance at peace and friendship. Perhaps the Palestinian Authority can even learn something about peacemaking. Time will tell.

“Sanction”? Why would the Emirates want to “sanction” Israel, just because some scruffy BDSers on Western campuses chant their hatred of the Jewish state? The Emirates want to establish and develop those mutually-beneficial economic ties that some predict will within two years amount to several billion dollars in trade between the UAE and Israel.

Here are some of the economic benefits to both Israel and the UAE from the new ties, detailed in an article in Forbes [here](#).

1. Oil supply for Israel...Oil from the UAE (the national oil company there is named Adnoc) would be a great economic

and strategic opportunity for Israel.

2. Oil sales for the UAE—the UAE can obtain a new oil customer...
3. Emirati students at Israeli universities—it is a good fit, because already more than 15% of students at Israeli universities are Arab...
4. Emirati money in Israeli business ventures—Israel is famous for its startup scene, and wealthy Emiratis could use new places to make investments...
5. Israeli tourism in the UAE—Israelis travel quite a lot. Many travel after their army service. In 2017, nearly half of all Israelis traveled abroad...
6. A new market to sell Israeli talent—Israel is a small country with many educated professionals. The United Arab Emirates has been a destination for foreign talent over the last couple of decades...
7. The first Gulf businesses in a new market—Israel has the largest non-petro economy in the Middle East other than Turkey...

Given those opportunities of benefit to both the UAE (in oil sales, investment opportunities, Israeli universities open to Emirati students, Israeli tourists, new markets for Emirati goods) and Israel (in secure oil purchases, convenient and safe tourism in an Arab land, employment opportunities for Israeli professionals, and a large new market for Israeli goods from high tech to food), no wonder BDS is in a slough of despond.

True, the BDSers can scream all they like on campuses, the only place where they can still rally their venomous troops. And on those campuses they do manage to shout down, or prevent from appearing in the first place, pro-Israel speakers. That is the main BDS victory: its assault on free speech. Nothing to be proud of. But the BDS movement has had no discernible effect on Israel's economy, which continues to flourish amidst a sea of Arab economies in great distress. Their "victories"

do not harm Israel's economy; their attempts to have celebrities, especially singers, cancel their appearances in Israel, have been singularly unsuccessful. And now one of the richest Arab states has formally ended its boycott of Israel; instead of "divestment," it has just begun to invest in the Jewish state, and is not about to sanction itself for doing business in Israel. The BDS movement, foiled yet again, must be very unhappy. Few among us, hearing of its distress, will need to wipe away a ready tear. Many of us – you and I, for example – will derive deep satisfaction from learning of this latest body blow to the thoroughly despicable BDS.

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