

Israeli attempts to sabotage our work and how we can respond

Are we making progress or not?

(notes by Ofer Neiman)

To keep in mind:

- Palestinians bear the brunt of Israeli silencing efforts. Palestinian human rights defenders are abused and detained -
<https://mondoweiss.net/tag/khalida-jarrar/>
<https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/khitam-saafin-sentenced-after-plea-deal>
<https://bdsmovement.net/news/freemahmoud-israeli-occupation-forces-arrest-bds-coordinator-mahmoud-nawajaa-during-night-raid>
- Israel has attempted to label Palestinian NGOs as terrorist group - EU conveys skepticism but some funding has been suspended -
<https://archive.fo/jA0LI>
<https://www.omct.org/en/resources/statements/organisations-urge-the-dutch-government-to-resume-funding-for-palestinian-organisation>

Israel's efforts against activists across the world

Background

- Israel uses different messaging and different tactics vis-a-vis different targets and audiences
- The Israeli government collaborates with local groups (such as Stand With Us) and may hire professionals, including law firms or PR firms, for its advocacy and litigation -
<https://archive.fo/wip/iWQNh>
- The work has been carried out mostly by the Ministry of Foreign affairs and the Ministry of Strategic Affairs
- The key project - "Solomon's sling" aka "concert" seeks to reshape the perception of Israel in digital media spheres. Has not succeeded so far -
<https://archive.fo/wip/DmwBi>
<https://archive.fo/wip/4MNvy>

Soft power

- General theme - presenting Israel as 'cool'
- "Brand Israel" campaign - <https://bdsmovement.net/tags/brand-israel>
- Willingness to settle for "Brand Tel Aviv", where and when Israel seems like a bad brand name, with an emphasis on pinkwashing (LGBTQ) - <https://mondoweiss.net/2011/11/a-documentary-guide-to-brand-israel-and-the-art-of-pinkwashing/>
- The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs sponsors or promotes Israeli writers and artists abroad - <https://embassies.gov.il/singapore/NewsAndEvents/Pages/David-Grossman-in-Singapore.aspx>
- Promoting an "It's complicated" narrative, when defending Israel is hard. The Israeli government may even co-opt Israeli films or artistic works to "prove" Israel is a vibrant democracy.
- The Abraham Accords and the "economic peace" discourse - <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PEA1149-1.html>

Brute force- McCarthyism, libel and slander

Note: The IHRA definition plays a role in all of the following

- Israel fears the BDS campaign and its attempts to promote anti-BDS legislation prove that - <https://mondoweiss.net/2022/04/boycott-is-a-powerful-film-that-needs-to-be-seen/>
- Israel fears the ICC and legal proceedings.
- Attempts to isolate the BDS Movement have not succeeded.
- A current attempt by the Anti Defamation League (ADL) to isolate Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) and others is unlikely to succeed - <https://mondoweiss.net/2022/05/we-will-not-be-silenced-by-adls-bullying-campaign/>
- Israel, via "Stand With Us", works against cultural and academic BDS with a network of global supporters.
- Creative Community for Peace - A front for "Stand With Us" - <https://bdsmovement.net/news/ccfp-front>

Targeting Israeli dissidents

- Right-wing Knesset members are advancing a bill that would prevent universities and other state-funded institutions from flying the Palestinian flag -

- <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/06/palestinian-flag-raises-controversy-israeli-universities>
- The Boycott Law - <https://www.adalah.org/en/law/view/492>
Some politicians have proposed harsher amendments, such as lowering the burden of proof.
- As far as we know, the law has been used only in this case - <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2018/oct/12/israel-fines-new-zealand-teenagers-18000-for-urging-lo-rde-concert-boycott>
- Human rights NGOs forced to declare “foreign government funding” - <https://www.adalah.org/en/law/view/497>
- Personal harassment, targeting on social media, denial of work - varies from one dissident to another - <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/israel-palestine-art-occupation-crackdown-culture>

What we can do

- Should we promote a definition of anti-Palestinian racism? Overall, a general definition of racism is preferable, but Israel’s use of the IHRA definition might require a definition of this sort.
- If a definition of anti-Semitism is required, we can promote The Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism - a sensible alternative to the IHRA - <https://jerusalemdeclaration.org/>
- Prominent human rights groups now refer to Israel’s policies as ‘apartheid’. We should capitalize on that. Israel cannot sideline Amnesty International Human Rights Watch and Btselem.
- Palestinian and Israeli Human rights groups have been engaging the ICC - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IfNYmpl7gwA&t=1379s>
<https://pchrqaza.org/en/palestinian-human-rights-organizations-submit-file-to-the-icc-urge-prosecutor-to-open-cases-from-attack-on-palestinians-in-gaza-in-may-2021/>
<http://itnewsletter.itnewsletter.co.il/sending/webpage.aspx?d=XZrFdobBknWMU2XiTyCIELWvhLXeXqFE&w>

These developments afford us legal as well as political clout. Specifically, it should now be somewhat easier to engage mainstream audiences around a “liberal” human rights message, in addition to or as an alternative to, a “revolutionary” liberation message (for the lack of better terms).

This should also be easier as a result of the much stronger (and justified!) BDS campaign against Russia due to its war of aggression and genocide in Ukraine.

A useful statement connecting the two issues - <https://bdsmovement.net/Hypocrisy>

Additional topics?

- The political system/ structure in Israel.
- Current government is unlikely to survive. Next government is likely to include more blatantly racist politicians.
- Nakba threats
- Disillusionment among hard core supporters of Israel in the UK and US and rifts with the Israeli government -

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/president-condemns-british-jewry-group-for-lambasting-visiting-far-right-mk/>

<https://mondoweiss.net/2022/06/a-prominent-israel-lobbyist-concedes-that-zionism-may-have-failed/?>

- Current issues - lobbying governments and diplomats against specific Israeli crimes, especially the uprooting of Palestinian communities. This has been helpful in the case of Khan Al- Ahmar.
- Specifically on the agenda - the case of Masafer Yatta, South Hebron Hills.
- Western diplomats are alarmed by Israeli efforts to expel Palestinians when this is perceived as a threat to the "Two-state solution" -

<https://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/theresa-may-israel-s-demolition-of-khan-al-ahmar-a-major-blow-for-two-state-solution-1.471135>

- Views on one/two state solutions