

Will boycotting Israeli products bring peace for Palestinians?



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In the wake of the Coke Studio Bangla concert snafu, amid Israel's onslaught on Gaza, the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement has gained much traction in public discourse and awareness. While boycotting companies and institutions complicit in oppression allows consumers to use the power of their pockets and individual responsibility to show solidarity, it is useful to evaluate how effective boycotting can be in upholding the principles of the movement.

According to the Palestinian BDS National Committee, the principles of the movement are ending occupation and colonisation, recognising the fundamental rights of Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to ensure full equality, and respecting the rights of Palestinians to return to their homes. The BDS movement is modelled on and compared to civil rights movements to eliminate apartheid states such as the then

Regardless of the tenacious systems of injustice the BDS movement works against, boycott has historically been a useful tool for advocacy and solidarity. It is the most accessible tool at disposal for international action and enables people to push corporations and governments. It gives individuals the ability to raise public awareness and put one's money where one's mouth is.

racially-segregated South Africa, which did away with the system in the early 90s.

Previously successful movements also include boycotting Japanese silk after Japan invaded China in the 1930s; the Boston Tea Party protests against the British government,



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ultimately leading to the American Revolution and independence of the United States from the British Crown; and non-violent mobilisation such as Gandhi's Salt March. We have evidence that localised and targeted boycotts can galvanise the public into action and propel institutions and governments to change behaviour. However, the backdrop that the BDS movement operates against needs to be examined to understand if it has enough clout to be effective—effectiveness defined by the impact BDS can have on the survivors and victims of the occupation.

BDS is a three-tier movement which involves the individual with purchasing power, institutions which create infrastructure, produce and transfer knowledge and wealth, and governments which are authorised lawmaking and implementing machines. The forms of boycott include those of cultural and academic elements along with economic boycotts, which seem to be more prominent in current public dialogue.

But simply boycotting may not be as effective if divestment and sanctions are missing. There are no conclusive results that show that broad boycotts

the transnational capitalist system can only be directly shaken through major divestments and sanctions. In spite of that, the wave of strong global public opinion in support of justice for Palestinians is possibly why the brief humanitarian pauses are made possible, because leaders need voters to remain in office. But would a localised boycott be strong enough to push an occupying force and its allies to change their direction? Probably not.

The Israeli economy has historically dealt with decades-long boycotts from its Arab neighbours, turning the state into an "economic island." Over time, the economy developed resilience and the state became adept at bypassing boycotts by utilising third-country subsidiaries. Israel is the fourth most successful economy in the world. The state specialises in producing high-end technology products and services which cannot be easily substituted. The US' leading companies such as Google, IBM, and Facebook have research and development cells in Israel. Major universities in the world also have robust research collaborations with Israeli institutions. The advocacy for BDS is further complicated by the

seriously enough to introduce anti-BDS legislation and dedicate a whole ministry to combat the movement. Israel's Ministry of Strategic Affairs was created in 2006, and it has since been campaigning against BDS and going after its activists. The BDS movement has also been compared to boycotts experienced by Jewish residents in Nazi Germany. However, the BDS movement is against a powerful occupying state, not an ethnic or religious group.

The BDS movement also suffers from not having an official position on either a one- or two-state solution, or a peace process, which opens up the movement to different goals and ideas and creates fractures and fringes within the movement. Prof Lawrence Glickman at Cornell University, who studies American consumerism and boycott, points out that localised and targeted boycotts have historically been more successful. So, the broad boycott directives against an economy that is deeply embedded in the works of the world's most dominant economies may not fulfil the goals of the boycott.

The sale of arms is a central foreign policy tool for the US, and Israel receives a qualitative military

Turkish parliament's recent boycott of Coca-Cola is more symbolic and perhaps merely for optics, as beverage production is mainly localised. There was a real potential to put pressure on Israel to rethink its current strategy at the Arab-Islamic countries' summit earlier this month. Oil and gas supply and price setting have acted as deterrence to balance out the US, Israeli, and Arab interests in the past, but those were not the avenues taken this time around.

As the BDS movement continues to operate across the behemoth mesh of differing and opposing national interests of Western, Muslim and Arab states along with those of transnational corporations, it has gained some successes, such as getting some governments to end free trade agreements, forcing companies to withdraw from the occupied territories, and compelling universities to sever institutional affiliations and ties with Israeli institutions.

There is also a larger elephant in the room that the BDS movement needs to address, and that is the reconstruction and rebuilding of Gaza when the current episode of carnage comes to an end. Gaza's

poverty has gone up by 20 percent, with 390,000 jobs lost. The more protracted the violence is, the more the poverty rate is expected to rise, making the resettlement and rebuilding process harder. As tenuous and as unfavourable the arrangement for resettlement is, the international community and the Palestinians would have to be bound by Israel, which will likely dictate the terms of reconstruction and resettlement.

Throughout previous episodes of escalations, Israel has managed reconstruction, such as by vetting materials that go into Gaza—making the process time consuming and expensive. Construction is one of the leading employment sectors for men in Gaza. One of the factors that the movement needs to account for is how boycotts would impact the victims and survivors of the occupation, especially in the absence of viable Palestinian institutions which would secure livelihood and protection for Palestinians.

While the mechanics of involvement of many corporations that are complicit in the occupation are not transparent, some connections are clear: such as the Israeli McDonald's and Burger King donating free meals to the Israeli military, Puma funding the Israeli Football Association, Amazon launching Amazon Web Services (AWS) data centres in the country with an investment of \$7.2 billion—directly supporting the state's data storage and government workload—Starbucks suing its workers' union for advocating for Palestine, Hewlett Packard (HP) providing computers to Israeli military, and Airbnb having listings of settlements on the occupied land.

Regardless of the tenacious systems of injustice the BDS movement works against, boycott has historically been a useful tool for advocacy and solidarity. It is the most accessible tool at disposal for international action and enables people to push corporations and governments. It gives individuals the ability to raise public awareness and put one's money where one's mouth is. Mass boycott is reflective of the strength of public opinion to create political change. The BDS movement has grown stronger with a younger and more educated global population increasingly supporting the Palestinian cause, with similar trends of shifting public opinion in the US as well, as Israel does not have as high favorability as it used to have. Although Israel's major trading partners will likely continue to maintain substantial economic ties, boycott is a personal prerogative of the global citizens, which must be protected.

The growing importance of Bangladesh in the Indo-Pacific



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"Bangladesh is a strategically important country in South Asia and the Indo-Pacific region due to its geographic location connecting South and Southeast Asia." – US.

"Bangladesh is an increasingly important strategic partner for the UK in the Indo-Pacific region and it is a key player in upholding the Rules-Based International System (RBIS)." – UK.

"Bangladesh, located in the Bay of Bengal, is a vital country in geopolitical terms and it needs to utilise its geographical advantage to increase economic opportunities fully." – Japan.

Bangladesh, as the gateway to South and Southeast Asia, remains geographically central in the Bay of Bengal region. And naturally, the location of the country makes it a focal element in the Indo-Pacific strategy of the United States, India, Japan and Australia.

Various initiatives—like the Asia Rebalancing Strategy, Belt and Road Initiative, Free and Open

Indo-Pacific, Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, Trilateral Security Pact, Indo-Pacific Tilt, Security and Growth for All in the Region, and Indo-Pacific Economic Forum for Prosperity—have been adopted by countries to address new security challenges as well as infrastructural, economic and technological developments in the region.

In April 2023, Bangladesh published a peace and development-centric Indo-Pacific Outlook. In the words of State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam, "Our Indo-Pacific Outlook is an attempt to tell the world that the region is for common prosperity, not just for those who live in it, but also for the whole world."

If one analyses Bangladesh's maritime policy over the decades, it promotes rules-based maritime order in the Indo-Pacific region. In its foreign policy and international relations, the country has always advanced a free and open Indo-Pacific. In its Indo-Pacific Outlook,

it considered four principles that include Bangladesh's foreign policy dictum: "friendship to all, malice toward none," respect for national sovereignty and equality of other countries, political independence, and non-interference in domestic affairs of other nations.

These principles signal that Bangladesh would remain adamant about its non-aligned position and

not lean towards any particular country or bloc. The primary emphasis is the need for peace and stability in the region. The country also focuses on military de-escalation while seeking greater cooperation in the region. Strengthening mutual trust and forging cooperation while promoting dialogue and understanding with the aim of ensuring peace, prosperity and

stability is one of the objectives of Bangladesh's Indo-Pacific Outlook. The country's stance on the Indo-Pacific region is different from its Western counterparts. The West has an anti-China dimension in its Indo-Pacific strategy, whereas Bangladesh has taken an all-inclusive outlook. Thus, Bangladesh is focusing on greater cooperation and stability in the region. The country is an

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advocate of a free, open and all-inclusive Indo-Pacific that will bring peace and development to the surrounding nations.

The country also emphasises on the security of the sea-lanes of communication in the Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific region. Sea lanes are utilised to transport around 90 percent of all global shipments. Moreover, the Indian Ocean makes

way for 80 percent of all global maritime oil shipments and one-third of the world's bulk cargo traffic. On the other hand, trans-Pacific routes are the largest shipping zone in terms of load size. Thus, security in the maritime trade routes is a major concern for countries that depend on maritime trade.

Bangladesh calls for strengthening the existing mechanism for ensuring these in the Indo-Pacific marine zone. While formulating the Indo-Pacific Outlook, Bangladesh adopted the need for upholding the exercise of freedom of navigation, overflight, and response to emergencies at sea, and conducting search and rescue operations under the relevant international laws such as UNCLOS 1982. The free flow of cargo through the oceans is a must for the economic development of Bangladesh and other countries. Thus, Bangladesh focuses on a secured sea lane of communication in this region for all.

In addition, the impacts of climate change, ocean acidification, illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, piracy, and human trafficking in the sea remain key challenges for Bangladesh's maritime security. Tackling these issues requires cooperation from other states and non-state actors. The World Bank estimates that Bangladesh suffers \$1 billion in annual losses due to average tropical cyclones. It also speculates that Bangladesh may lose one-third of its

agricultural GDP by 2050, while 13 million people may become internal climate migrants in the country. Meanwhile, ocean acidification and IUU fishing are responsible for marine fisheries depletion, and piracy and human trafficking have become growing concerns. Incidents of piracy have disrupted shipping routes, and a large number of people, mostly women, are trafficked via the Bay of Bengal every year. These issues require concerted efforts to be resolved, as they are difficult to address by a single state or non-state actors. However, Bangladesh supports international and regional actions towards combating transnational and organised crime in the Bay.

The US has recognised the geopolitical importance of Bangladesh by mentioning that the country is a bridge between South Asia and South-east Asia. The UK considers Bangladesh a strategic partner in the Indo-Pacific region and recognises Bangladesh's efforts to uphold the Rules-Based International System. Japan also conveys that Bangladesh is a vital country in terms of geopolitics, and the country needs to utilise its geographical advantage. And so, this recognition of Bangladesh's geopolitical importance by regional and extra-regional powers clearly illustrates the growing importance of Bangladesh in the Indo-Pacific region.