



**Remarks on Panel “Situating Ourselves: Fighting against BDS and for Academic Freedom and Free Speech on Campus Today”**

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The first thing that must be said about this inaugural conference of the Academic Engagement Network is how embarrassing it is for all of us to have had to travel to the nation’s capital to repudiate a movement that is so decidedly and unashamedly anti-democratic, anti-American and illiberal as BDS. “Boycott,” “divest” and “sanction” are not words to be uttered on a university campus. They are the language of moral censure, spoken only in extreme cases of atrocity and moral outrage.

Israel, the only democratic nation in a sea of theocracies, noisy neighbors where Sharia law supersedes the Enlightenment, and where barbarism often serves as best practices, simply does not qualify for such extreme measures.

What in the world are we all doing here? To boycott academics, stifle debate, shout down and defy rational argument, distort ideas, intimidate students, professors and outside speakers, polarize the campus, spread anti-intellectual, ahistorical lies, and to cynically politicize scholarship that in nearly all cases has nothing to do with Middle Eastern politics—and to do so against a country that boasts such robust democratic institutions and civil, political, religious and academic freedoms—is antithetical to everything that a liberal arts education stands for.

Indeed, it contradicts everything that is meant by liberalism itself, which is the commitment to remain open and to remain liberal in one’s views, to be at ease with conflicting ideas, to be respectful of contradictory opinion, to not rush to judgment, and to ultimately render a judgment, unafraid to make fundamental distinctions between right and wrong.

The BDS movement has absolutely nothing in common with those liberal values; indeed, BDS has nothing but contempt for liberals. And yet, it is strangely on college campuses where BDS has received its most dedicated, sympathetic audience.

The fact that BDS is so thoroughly incompatible with academic life makes we wonder whether university professors are in any way equipped to confront the supporters of BDS—on their own terms and in defiance of their twisted rationale—who far better resemble schoolyard bullies than the kind of people who devote themselves to books and ideas. Shouting down and shutting out speakers is not “academic engagement.” The

purveyors of BDS operate in a world of half-truths and false analogies, where nuance and complexity are eschewed in favor of simplicity, distortion and demonization.

And BDS has little regard for the meticulous use of language. Words get tossed around far too casually, in university settings where objective truth is the organizing principle of higher education. On campus, in the usual course of things, falsehoods are supposed to be rebutted instantly by alert academics, always vigilant, never complacent when it comes to truth.

Israel is not an “Apartheid” state, as anyone who lived in South Africa under Apartheid would surely know. The IDF do not harvest the organs of Palestinians; indeed, Israel is a first responder on the global relief scene, bringing aid, not misery. And there has been no “genocide” or “ethnic cleansing” of Palestinians, since the Palestinian population has doubled since the “Occupation.” Just to make sure we are defining our terms properly: genocide contemplates the subtraction of a people, not their multiplication.

The founders of BDS, and those who lead the movement now, care little about a two-state solution, or the working principles of Oslo, or the swapping or sharing of land. This is not a peace-making organization. It is warfare by another name; the blood that is shed is reputational—death by de-legitimization. BDS advocates dream not of a vibrant Hebron but a captured Tel Aviv. This is an uncompromising one-state solution, which can only come about with a final solution of the Jewish state. In replacement of the sole democracy in the region, BDS would prefer yet another Arab society with an atrocious human rights agenda straight from the Muslim Brotherhood playbook. Make no mistake: BDS is a kissing cousin of ISIS, an all too willing bedfellow of barbarians.

Why then, with actual genocides in the Middle East and Africa, and devastating assaults against humanity taking place in authoritarian societies around the world, would professors and students single out Israel, a democratic nation surrounded by despots and mass murderers, to this level of public animus and global damnation? Not a word about Syria, nothing to boycott about Iran.

In Israel, after all, Lady Gaga performs in sleeveless outfits, with Arabs and Jews sitting together in the audience, among un-closeted gays and lesbians. BDS, meanwhile, is fully aligned with those who behead journalists, dismember and stone women, torch homosexuals, kill apostates, rely on honor killings rather than the rule of law. When Lady Gaga is finally invited to headline at theaters in Gaza, Ramallah, Tehran, Damascus, Amman, Cairo, Riyadh, Darfur, then BDS should enjoy free reign to judge the way Israel defends its citizens against terrorism. Until such time, however, let’s at least be honest that the real acronym for BDS is old-fashioned anti-Semitism, made respectable by the lowest impulses of the ivory tower.

Paradoxically, during an era in which college campuses have demonstrated zero tolerance when it comes to ethnic, gender or religious bigotry, BDS is openly, overtly and demonstrably anti-Semitic in word and deed. Apparently there are no trigger warnings or safe spaces for the micro and macro-aggressions perpetrated against pro-Israel students

on campus. This moral hypocrisy alone should render BDS wholly unfit for popular support in such otherwise hermetically sanitized settings. The great sinister achievement of BDS has been to make anti-Semitism respectable and fashionable on campus.

University presidents, and influential alumni, should think long and hard about this.