

To the Boycotting Brits

An open letter to my British friends and colleagues whose union decided to boycott us

by

Dan Ben-David

I am having an increasingly difficult time trying to fit the square peg, called freedom and the right to self-determination, that is so much a part of your civilization and ours, into the round boycott hole recently carved out by the union representing you British scientists. After all, your ethos, like ours, is to check the facts without bias before reaching any conclusions.

Your decision to single out Israel as the world pariah is incomprehensible, not only with respect to the multitude of ruthless dictatorships around the globe that you chose to ignore, but particularly in light of the fact that our two countries have much more in common than you apparently care to admit. To begin with, we both combine a state religion – in your case, the Church of England – with a vibrant democracy. Not one, but three crosses adorn your flag – and who in the world even contemplates questioning the legitimacy of putting the symbol of Christianity on the national flag of your democracy?

After all, you are not alone. Numerous countries in Europe, and elsewhere, put crosses on their flags, while many Muslim countries place Islamic symbols on their flags.

Alas, we are a country with only one-ninth of your population, so we make do with only one Star of David on our flag. In fact, it is the only national flag in the entire world with the symbol of the Jewish religion. But that, of course, is due to the minor detail that we are the only country with a Jewish majority.

Is there any particular reason why what is considered permissible for you is considered questionable when it is done by the Jewish people?

Incidentally, it might be worthwhile to note that while our flag and country are only 59 years old, our Star of David or its namesake goes back millennia. In fact, you may have even heard of that particular David.

He was our king (you are certainly familiar with the concept) in this very same land 3,000 years ago. Having had a king is just one indication that we also had a country here, once upon a time. But that was before your European ancestors – first from Greece, then from Rome, followed by Crusaders from your neighborhood and then by Muslims from ours – took turns invading our land, destroying our home and murdering our people. Once your ancient relatives took care of the only country that the my ancient relatives had, and dispersed us all over the globe, the Jewish people were then treated to dessert: the Inquisition, the pogroms, and the Nazis, all on European soil.

Finally, after 2,000 years, we returned home; thanks in no small part to your Lord Balfour's Declaration and to the nascent United Nations' decision on November 1947, the international community finally consented to letting the Jewish people rebuild their country on a small portion of their ancestral home.

Of course, our neighbors had other thoughts. They rejected the UN resolution to divide Palestine into one Jewish and one Arab country. They attacked us and did what they could to finish what the Nazis began – to the same people who managed to somehow survive the Holocaust.

Despite the British training and arms that many of the Arabs received (you probably recall, for example, Sir John Glubb in Jordan and Spitfires to Egypt), and the simultaneous embargo of arms to Israel (yes, your boycotting us is nothing new), we prevailed and recreated our country .

Our neighbors, different ones in different periods, have been attacking us incessantly since we attained independence in 1948. With some we have made peace (though if you want to get an idea of what is fomenting there for the post-Mubarak period, you might want to open a standard Egyptian school textbook, or turn on Egyptian TV to their mock trials of Israelis – by no less than the so-called Egyptian “elite” comprising academics and lawyers – that ceremoniously end in death sentences, or to the huge docu-drama hit on the Protocols of the Elders of Zion) and with other countries we have tried.

We really blew it when we settled the West Bank and Gaza – our historical claim to the land notwithstanding. It was a big mistake to try and settle civilians in areas that could never become part of a democratic country with a large Jewish majority, an area that our soldiers must unfortunately patrol to this day to keep us safe from those who want us dead.

It took a long time, but as indicated by our complete evacuation of Gaza and the referendum on the West Bank that was made explicit in our recent elections, the majority of Israelis have decided to embrace the concept of two states for the two peoples.

In short, we are no less and no more perfect a people than you. We, like you, have made mistakes and we try to correct them. We certainly do not have more racists than you, nor are we bitten by the colonialist bug any more than countries who send their armadas across the world to defend “their” soil on islands off the Argentinean coast.

During the past few, traumatic, years, the majority of us have finally and fully internalized what constitutes a necessary condition for making peace: real partners must make the distinction between recognizing that the other partner exists versus recognizing that the other partner *has a right* to exist. Without the latter form of recognition, any “peace” agreement is no more than a temporary cease-fire agreement. Israel has finally reached that necessary point in its collective conscious and in its willingness to make concessions to achieve true peace. Unfortunately, our neighbors are still light years and several emancipations away from this. Until then we’ll wait, we’ll encourage, we’ll coax and we’ll turn over every possible stone – but we won’t forsake the lives of our people. We’ve sat defenseless through one holocaust too many.

Sometimes it pays to listen to your enemies. The Nazis did not hide their intentions (and you saw how well making “peace in our time” worked with them). Neither do Hamas, Hizbullah, the Iranians, al-Qaida or the other fundamentalists – even your own home-grown ones.

The real issue that we face is not one of borders – and it never has been. The issue is one of getting permanently deleted from the world's hard drive.

We may be one of the first files in their expunge folder. But do not delude yourselves as to your location on that list. We are where they initially test their techniques and their weapons. However, you always get to witness firsthand the real shows several years later, with compounded interest (remember the plane hijackings?).

Today, their missiles are making hash out of our towns. But their bigger and longer-range missiles are putting your cities in increasingly closer range. Their suicide terrorists began with our children, but have since taken their sound and light shows to the World Trade Center, to your rapid transit, and to Spanish trains. Their arsenal has been conventional – so far. No imagination, just ears and a translator are required to understand the directions in which they plan to expand their armories.

So when our neighbors have this future in mind for us today – and for you tomorrow – what do your representatives choose to do? Whom do they decide to boycott?

What can one people offer to placate another people bent on their total annihilation? You might want to begin thinking about these issues because when a nuclear device goes off in London (not if, but when), you had better have a better backup plan than boycotting the victims.