

Delegitimization as a National Security Threat

• • • *Israel and BDS*

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the securitization of delegitimization as a national security threat in Israel. The article contains three elements. First, theoretically, it analyzes legitimacy as a national security asset and delegitimization as a risk to ontological security. Second, it traces the Israeli response to delegitimization, providing an empirically rich account of this approach. Finally, it seeks to provide an assessment, albeit preliminary, of the effectiveness of the Israeli response. It concludes by discussing policy implications, emphasizing the benefits and counter-productive outcomes of an otherwise successful securitization process. Although Israel has had success curbing delegitimization with regard to political elites at the state level, it continues to lose ground with both the grassroots and Western liberal audiences.

KEYWORDS: BDS, delegitimization, identity, legitimacy, national security, ontological security, securitization

In the summer of 2018, reports emerged about the detention of foreigners attempting to enter Israel. A few high-profile cases caused a backlash. First was the detention and questioning of Peter Beinart, a prominent, liberal Jewish-American journalist, and later was the decision to deny US student Lara Alqasem entry to study at Jerusalem University on the claim that she was a Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement activist. The case of Alqasem sparked outrage even among Israel's staunch supporters (Stephens and Weiss 2018). Eventually, the Israeli Supreme Court reversed



her deportation order, concluding that the state blocked her entry based on her political views rather than her actions (Bob 2018). Both cases received extensive media coverage, especially by Western liberal media, and highlighted a shift in Israeli policy vis-à-vis BDS and anti-Israel operatives.

This article examines that shift in Israel's response to delegitimization and specifically to the BDS movement. It asks two questions. First, does delegitimization pose a security threat to Israel, and, if so, what is the nature of the threat? Second, has Israel securitized delegitimization, and, if so, how has doing so affected its counter-delegitimization response? Israelis view legitimacy as a national security asset, while conversely delegitimization poses a national security threat to ontological security and, as such, has been securitized by the state. Israel has adopted offensive measures to respond to the threat, yet these sometimes generate counter-productive outcomes. Although Israel has had success combating delegitimization with regard to political elites at the state level, it is still losing ground with both the grassroots and Western liberal audiences.

The article makes three contributions to the field. Theoretically, it examines legitimacy as a national security asset and delegitimization as a threat to ontological security. Previous studies on delegitimization have exposed it as anti-Semitic (Fishman 2012; Sheskin and Felson 2016) and tied to Palestinian terror groups (Diker 2015; MSA 2019). Others have observed inconsistent application of its guidelines (Hallward and Shaver 2012) and the gap between its rhetoric of human rights and its practice, which at times discriminates against Israelis and Jews based on their national or religious identity (Peled 2019).

Even those who have identified delegitimization as a national security threat have focused mostly on the possibility of losing American backing and support in the international system. The argument here is different—it uncovers what is meant by treating legitimacy as a national security asset and traces the outcomes of securitizing delegitimization. Moreover, the article offers the richest account to date of the Israeli response to delegitimization. Finally, it provides an assessment, albeit preliminary, of the effectiveness of this response.

The article first reviews securitization theory and its application to the Israeli case. Next, it provides a brief historical account of the delegitimization challenge, followed by a conceptualization of legitimacy as a national security asset. The article finds that while Israel has already engaged in a securitization process of delegitimization and the BDS movement, its results have been mixed. In conclusion, the argument is made that Israel should develop a wider network of support for its approach, incorporating critics of the government and providing grassroots, community-based advocates with support, while operating with more transparency.

Securitization

Securitization refers to the process by which actors construct issues as existential security threats, requiring exceptional actions that break from 'normal politics' or traditional policymaking (Buzan et al. 1998: 23–24).¹ Securitization distinguishes normal day-to-day challenges from existential (often urgent) security threats (ibid.). Policymakers, especially in democracies, find securitization appealing since it stretches the boundaries of normative political action and affords them greater power. Recent scholarship has demonstrated that securitization no longer requires exceptional actions. In fact, routinized, mundane actions falling within existing legal/political structures can be characterized as securitizing acts (Amoore and de Goede 2008; Basaran 2011; Ciută 2010; Floyd 2016; Katz 2006; Olesker 2014a; Roe 2012). A sanctioning audience must accept both the construction of the threat as existential (Buzan et al. 1998: 25–26; Floyd 2016: 688) and the proposed response as necessary (Roe 2008; Salter 2011). However, Rita Floyd (2016) suggests that audience acceptance is not necessary for successful securitization. Two elements are required: first, an observable change in the securitizing agent's behavior following a speech act and, second, the change explained in the context of the identified threat.

For Floyd (2016: 684), new executive powers authorized by new laws are an example of exceptional action, and such actions have occurred in Israel. An existing institution, the Ministry of Strategic Affairs and Public Diplomacy (MSA), received new powers, mandates, and budgets to combat delegitimization, while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) was sidelined. Israel also enacted new laws specifically to combat boycotts. In addition, the state developed new partnerships with private organizations, as well as media and cyber capabilities. These changes indicate a shift in the treatment of delegitimization as a national security threat. The following sections examine this response and its consequences.

The Threat of Delegitimization

Delegitimization is not a new phenomenon, and Israel has been fighting it from its inception. The Arab boycott and UN Resolution 3379 defining Zionism as racism are just two well-known examples of this phenomenon. However, in the early 2000s, a different manifestation of this phenomenon emerged, driven largely by non-state actors—from civil society to international organizations.

Several events coalesced during this time. The Second Intifada erupted, accompanied by violence unprecedented in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The creation of the Palestinian Authority had allowed it to provide a counter-narrative to Israel's. In 2001, at the UN World Conference against Racism in Durban, South Africa, the non-governmental organization (NGO) forum included a declaration calling for the international isolation of Israel as an apartheid state.² User-generated technology allowed individuals and non-state actors, including civil society, to engage in delegitimization activities online. In 2009, the Goldstone Report, issued by the UN fact-finding mission on the Gaza conflict, dealt a heavy blow to Israel's international reputation by accusing it of war crimes.³ In many ways, the early 2000s were a watershed for the new wave of delegitimization acts against the State of Israel.

During this time, however, the Israeli government neglected the delegitimization issue, focusing instead on diplomacy with new potential Arab partners following the Oslo peace process. This allowed activists to gain considerable ground. In 2005, the Boycott National Committee published the call for BDS, signed by 170 Palestinian civil society organizations (BDS 2005). Many BDS proponents consider all of Israel, including its internationally recognized borders, as colonized 'Arab land'. Although BDS leaders carefully avoid endorsing a particular solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, acquiescing to their demands of both ending Israeli "occupation and colonization of all Arab lands" and providing Palestinian refugees "the right to return to their homes and properties" (ibid.) would eradicate the state as a Jewish homeland. These demands fuel fears amounting to an existential threat.

Legitimacy as a National Security Asset

Traditionally, scholars studying legitimacy have defined it as the right to rule, examining the conditions under which a government can be said to exert the necessary power and authority, moral or otherwise, to rule over a given population and territory (Beetham 2013). National security is understood as a concept that deals "with safeguarding a nation's existence and defending its vital interests. Existence is the basic objective of security. It means, quite simply, physical survival; it constitutes an objective, primal value, one that all nations hold in common" (Tal 2000: 3). Under this definition, delegitimization may not be seen as a national security threat since the BDS movement does not threaten the physical survival of the state.

Israeli Brigadier-General Avraham Ayalon provides a broader definition of national security as the "sum total of the reciprocal ties between the means at the state's disposal—and its readiness to employ them—and its immediate and distant environment. These reflect the state's ability to guarantee its preferred interests and promote its national objectives under varying

conditions of uncertainty” (cited in Lissak 1993: 56). Under this definition, the national security doctrine can include legitimacy since it relates to the ability of the state to secure its interest in maintaining a Jewish homeland. Thus, the Israeli national security doctrine can be characterized as a “basic and permanent plan for preparedness, deployment, and war in the defense of the national existence of the state of Israel as the state of the Jewish people” (Tal 2000: 42). And indeed, Tzahi Gavrieli, acting director-general of MSA, defined delegitimization as the “rallying of organizations and ideas around an existing contemporary issue of rejecting the idea of the State of Israel as the national home of the Jewish people” (cited in Blau 2017).

Although it is difficult to argue that the concerted campaign against Israel, as manifested through academic, cultural, and economic boycotts, lawfare, flotillas, demonstrations, and BDS activity, threatens its physical survival, the movement does represent a security threat to the state—a threat to its ontological security. Ontological security refers to the security of the self, that is, the security people feel in being themselves as opposed to merely existing (Giddens 1991; Laing 1969). Individuals achieve ontological security through the building of relationships with others, performed through routinized practices. Ontological security as a basic need “begins with the proposition that actors fear deep uncertainty as an identity threat. Such uncertainty can make it difficult ... to sustain a self-conception” (Mitzen 2006: 345). Scholars of international relations have demonstrated that states, too, engage in ontological security-seeking (Kinnvall 2004; Lupovici 2012; Mitzen 2006; Steele 2008, 2010; Subotić 2016; Zarokol 2010). Conventional threats to national security are understood as threats to existing. Threats to ontological security are threats to being. Recognition plays an important role in this process: states require others’ recognition of their own identity in order to feel a sense of security (Ringmar 2002).

While the Arab boycott was significant in certain periods, it did not threaten Israel’s ontological security since it was led by states whose hostility was a given, and whose recognition did not play a key role in Israel’s identity security. The modern delegitimization movement, on the other hand, presents a new challenge because it is driven by non-state actors operating in what Israel traditionally considered ‘friendly’ spaces—among Western liberal audiences. One may thus see the delegitimization movement as creating national vulnerabilities. Such vulnerabilities arise from the conditions of uncertainty within which the state operates in the international system. The delegitimization movement undermines Israeli ontological security because it rejects the legitimacy of its self-constructed identity as the Jewish homeland.⁴

Although Gavrieli defined the threat as one to Israel’s long-term resilience,⁵ there is ample evidence that key policymakers have constructed it as

a threat to national security. As early as 2007, the Reut Institute (2015), a leading Israeli think tank, defined delegitimization as a “strategic threat with potentially existential implications” (see also Reut Institute 2010). Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu defined the delegitimization movement as a strategic threat to Israel (Thrall 2018). Amos Yadlin, Israel’s former intelligence chief and head of the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) at Tel Aviv University, similarly stated that delegitimization is more of a threat to Israel than war, since the country “faced a ‘strategic threat just as pressing as that posed by rockets and missiles: the threat to our legitimacy in the world and the attempt to turn us into a pariah state’” (Winer 2012).

Yossi Kuperwasser, former head of the Research Division in the IDF Intelligence branch and later director-general of the MSA, who was first tasked with combating the delegitimization phenomenon in 2009,⁶ defined BDS as a “comprehensive political-warfare endeavor to annul Israel’s legitimacy as the Jewish state” and “ultimately eradicate it” (quoted in Diker 2015: 10). This statement perfectly captures the connection between being and existing. The people might exist if Israel is no longer defined as a Jewish homeland, but their being will not continue. Under this construction, national security cannot be devoid of ontological security.

In a threat assessment from May 2017, the MSA identified BDS as a tactical change in the fight against Israel by adding a ‘soft’ element described as “consciousness terror” of a network consisting of multiple dimensions. It represents a significant threat to Israel’s medium- to long-term security by cementing Israel’s image as an apartheid state in public (especially Western) consciousness (MSA 2017). Several prominent Israeli policy analysts have gone further, linking delegitimization and Palestinian violent warfare (Diker 2015; Fishman 2011; Rosen 2018). Gilad Erdan, in his capacity as minister of strategic affairs, stated: “The terrorist organizations and the BDS organizations have never been so close ideologically and with regards to their operational tactics” (Hay 2018).

In other words, securitizing actors have used speech acts to construct delegitimization as a national security threat with ‘existential implications’. This represents the first stage of securitization. A process of fundamental changes in Israeli policymaking followed, representing an observable change in the securitizing agent’s behavior explainable in the context of the identified threat (Floyd 2016: 684).

The Securitization of Delegitimization: An Israeli Response

The Israeli response to modern delegitimization developed relatively slowly, despite its construction as a threat. The initial response led by

the MFA focused on *hasbara*, a Hebrew term referring to propaganda activities used by the state to improve its international image.⁷ The MFA downplayed the significance of the BDS movement, responding to delegitimization activities on a case-by-case basis through public diplomacy,⁸ ‘counter-*hasbara*’, to undermine the message of the boycotters.⁹ This defensive strategy responded to delegitimization behind the scenes, letting the ‘facts speak for themselves’.

Proponents of this approach do not view the movement as a security threat.¹⁰ In this light, some saw Israel’s response as overinflating the threat, with the unintended consequence of making the movement more successful. According to Gideon Meir, the former director-general of public diplomacy: “It is not a strategic threat to Israel, it is nothing ... It is a strategic threat to politicians, it is not a strategic threat to Israel.”¹¹ Nevertheless, by 2009, the government had tasked the small and still insignificant Office of Strategic Affairs, which at the time sat in the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO), to study the phenomenon.

Yehuda Ben Meir and Owen Alterman (2011: 135) of the INSS warned that the response to delegitimization had not been enough, predicting that “the delegitimization threat may become a major issue on Israel’s national security agenda.” Indeed, by 2015 the government realized it required a comprehensive and multifaceted strategy to combat delegitimization. That same year, Sheldon Adelson, an American businessman and donor to pro-Israel causes, sponsored an anti-BDS summit in Las Vegas, where Netanyahu addressed the crowd, decrying delegitimization as an attack on “our right to exist here as a free people, our right to defend ourselves, our right to determine our own future. There is no Jewish future without the Jewish state” (MFA 2015).

The MSA portfolio—its budgets and responsibilities—was widely expanded to include specific delegitimization and BDS response programs. Confusion characterized their rollout. According to the 2016 State Comptroller report, Israeli leadership was failing to combat BDS due, in part, to a lack of an overall strategy, a lack of effective coordination with the IDF, a lack of funding, and poor and incoherent divisions between ministries (Wooltiff 2016). At the time, the comptroller classed delegitimization not as a security threat but rather as a diplomatic challenge requiring appropriate funding and clear objectives.¹²

Nevertheless, the expansion of the MSA and its move out of the PMO, as well as the creation of an independent portfolio, represented an important bureaucratic and tactical shift—a securitization act. The MSA became the central authority charged with developing and delivering the Israeli counter-delegitimization strategy. By 2017, the MFA had been stripped of most of its authority in this realm, causing a rift between the ministries. The MFA

supported a more diplomatic approach based on dialogue and messaging strategies, while the MSA's leaders, according to Blau's (2017) report based on official documents, "see themselves as the heads of a commando unit," its actions marked by secrecy.

Signaling a shift in bureaucratic culture, MSA director-generals were now former high-ranking military officials, not diplomats, and their office was moved from Jerusalem to the Tel Aviv area, the security community's central seat. As the MFA became a secondary actor in Israel's overall strategic response to delegitimization, it closed its BDS office (Horovitz 2018). These actions heralded the shift to policies pursuing a more security-oriented response instead of a purely diplomatic one.

The government's introduction of an amendment to the Freedom of Information Law 5758-1998, exempting the MSA's counter-delegitimization activity, further highlighted this shift in policy. In the explanatory notes supporting the exemption, the ministry described its expansion of activities as four-pronged: (1) warning, (2) deterrence, (3) offense, and (4) public diplomacy.¹³ The goal, according to Sima Vaknin-Gil, then MSA director-general, was to move Israel from a position of defending and responding to attacks to one of initiating offensive attacks (Eichner 2017). Although the exact nature of these activities remains unclear, based on a series of recent interviews with officials, one may draw some initial conclusions as to how such activities are being carried out and how they manifest securitization.

'Warning' includes arming pro-Israel groups with information advocating for Israel. This defensive goal is to make BDS activists "sweat about the survivability of their enterprise" (Weinthal 2017). Such information may aid pro-Israeli groups in damaging the credibility of BDS activists as well as their actions and initiatives.¹⁴ However, Israel has also taken deterrent and offensive actions. Some reports charge Israeli cyber companies with engaging in counter-BDS work, for example, undermining the credibility of BDS activists by highlighting questionable sources of funding and publicizing instances where activists have made extremist or anti-Semitic statements (Horovitz 2018).

A lawsuit cites efforts to collect damaging information about BDS activists undertaken by cyber intelligence companies such as Psy Group, which had strong ties to former Israeli intelligence officers who now operate in the private sector but went out of business in 2018, and Black Cube (ibid.). A former Psy Group employee likened their activity to the war on terrorism (Entous 2019).¹⁵ Other offensive strategies include a recent MSA (2019) report linking terror operatives to civil society organizations involved in the delegitimization movement, which has contributed to the decision of some European governments to block funding sources to these organizations.¹⁶

The fourth aspect of Israel's new counter-BDS response includes public diplomacy, or *hasbara*, which is designed "to counter 'the industry of lies that is affecting the consciousness' of the international public" (Weinthal 2017). This requires cooperating with the MFA to combine "the public diplomacy capacity of the Foreign Ministry with the research and operation capacity of the Ministry of Strategic Affairs" (ibid.). Not limited to pro-Israeli propaganda in the traditional sense, the ministry is adopting a more sophisticated method of embedding government messages in public discourse, both in Israel and abroad, using third parties. For example, a recent report revealed that the MSA paid for coverage in multiple media outlets, including Israeli television shows and leading Hebrew and English news sites (BZ 2017). These outlets do not always clarify their government connection. The campaign's goal is to recruit pro-Israeli civilians and organizations to the counter-BDS campaign (ibid.). Because the media is often a key securitizing actor, this cooperation contributes to securitization (Croft 2012).

Other activities include the development of web-based applications recruiting civilians to take part in the pro-Israel social media campaign. Act.IL—a free social networking mobile application "where all pro-Israeli advocates, communities, and organizations meet to work together to fight back against the demonization and delegitimization of the Jewish state"—was promoted, in part, through news features purchased by the MSA. The government established 4IL.org, featuring well-produced entertaining videos¹⁷ asking viewers to join the fight against BDS by using the Act.IL app. Originally, the website and its promotional videos did not always disclose the Israeli government connection, using the .org address rather than .gov, although this ambiguity is less prevalent in 2019.

Funds were also allocated to the Research Division in the IDF Intelligence branch to research the delegitimization phenomenon within the activities of the military.¹⁸ In 2018, the MSA announced an award of NIS 128 million¹⁹ to Kela Shlomo (Solomon's Sling), a not-for-profit headed by Kuperwasser, the former MSA director-general. In a lawsuit filing from 2018, Kela Shlomo's lawyers argued that the MSA had delegated some activities to the organization, and it appears that the MSA continues to exercise oversight over it. As of the signing of Kela Shlomo's government contract in May 2018, it can use project funds only to combat delegitimization.²⁰ In 2019, Kela Shlomo changed its name to Concert in an attempt to distance itself from its previous identity, but it still serves as a GONGO (government organized non-governmental organization), working directly with the MSA.²¹ According to the MSA, Kela Shlomo fulfilled a technical role in the government's counter-BDS campaign,²² but as a private organization, it has more flexibility in its operations abroad, and it can more easily avoid Knesset oversight.

Israel was particularly effective at lobbying foreign governments to legislate anti-BDS laws. For example, in the United States, 26 states have passed such laws.²³ More recently, the German Parliament passed a motion condemning BDS as “anti-Semitic,” amid calls to cut funding to all organizations that support boycotting Israel (Landau 2019a). Despite this, the German government remains divided on whether to adopt the resolution (Landau 2019c).

The securitization process also employed domestic legislation. In 2017, the Knesset passed Amendment No. 27 to the Entry into Israel Law (No. 5712-1952). The amendment prohibits entry and/or residence in Israel to foreigners who “knowingly published a public call to engage in a boycott against the State of Israel as defined in the Law for Prevention of Damage to the State of Israel Through Boycott—2011 (‘the boycott law’), or has made a commitment to participate in such a boycott.”²⁴ Under this law, the government denied entry to Lara Alqasem, causing an uproar and generating widespread criticism of how the MSA and, in particular, Erdan, had fumbled. The government also used the law to deny the entry into Israel of Jewish members of an interfaith delegation that actively supports the BDS movement (JTA 2017). The law likely served as the basis for the detention of Peter Beinart (2012), who supports the boycotting of settlements, although the government later claimed his detention was a mistake. Even sympathetic organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) have come out against the boycott law, calling it an “unnecessary impingement of Israelis’ basic democratic right to freedom of speech” (Shamir 2011).

In the Knesset, MK Yael German from the centrist Yesh Atid party noted the problematic nature of Amendment No. 27 in that it uses boycotts (of people seeking entry into the country) as a means of combating boycotts. This provides ammunition for pro-BDS activists to portray the state as a place that stifles freedom of expression (Knesset Protocol 2017).

American academics warned that the law would have a counter-productive effect of pushing liberals into the BDS camp because those who support boycotting settlement-made products may find themselves banned from entering the country under the law—despite their opposition to any boycott of Israel itself (Krupkin 2017). Indeed, the editors of this journal have highlighted the law’s threat to academic freedoms (*Israel Studies Review* 2018: v). Another drawback is that the law may bar people who are not themselves engaged in boycott activities but who are members of groups that support the boycott of Israel or the settlements. MK Amsalem (Likud) dismissed such concerns: “There should be no problem regarding most private individuals—most likely no one knows what they said. There are people—celebrities—people who are loud and

very active. These are the people we want to prevent [from entering]" (Knesset Protocol 2017: 17).

However, the cases of Lara Alqasem and others detained or denied entry demonstrate that these concerns were well founded. Security officials at Ben-Gurion Airport reportedly used the Canary Mission website to identify Alqasem as a BDS activist because she once had been the head of her local chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine at the University of Florida (Landau 2018). Canary Mission, known to identify and blacklist anti-Israel activists, has been the subject of great controversy and backlash from such Jewish-American groups as Hillel, which has stated that the site undermines its own pro-Israel work (Nathan-Kazis 2018). The case highlights how Israeli policy against BDS can go too far, potentially alienating the very audience Israel seeks to win over—liberal audiences in the West, including Jews. The amendment caters to local audiences, undermining Israel's democratic norms and hindering its ability to respond effectively to delegitimization (Hatuel-Radshitzky et al. 2018).

Conclusions and Outcomes

Since becoming operational in 2005, BDS has been ineffective in isolating Israel economically or politically. While world public opinion of Israel remains low, it has remained consistent since 2005 (BBC World Service 2017; see also Olesker 2018). Nevertheless, one may ask why the movement has been characterized as posing a national—even existential—security threat.

To construct the delegitimization movement as posing a national security threat to Israel first requires an understanding of legitimacy as a national security asset. Once legitimacy is understood in these terms, delegitimization can be seen as posing an ontological threat by undermining the international legitimacy for Israel's existence as a Jewish state.

Scholars have long disagreed about the normative nature of securitization, that is, whether securitization is by definition negative (Aradau 2004). For example, Floyd (2011) argues for a morally justified securitization when the issue of security is morally legitimate, and when the response is appropriate relative to the threat presented. Securitization itself must not necessarily equate with the neglect of democratic practices and oversight. As Paul Roe (2012: 260) notes: "Extraordinary politics (in the form of the expedition of legislation) does not mean an abandonment of legislative mechanisms: while the legislative process is surely accelerated, a degree of scrutiny and oversight nevertheless remains." Indeed, in Israel, the securitization process was not necessarily fast-tracked and received some criticism—from both within and outside of government—for the pace of

response (Ben Meir and Alterman 2011).²⁵ Although it introduced a law to exempt the MSA from parliamentary oversight in 2016, the law had not passed beyond its first reading in over two years. The challenge, however, remains in the intrinsic tension between democratic norms and securitization, which affords the executive extraordinary power,²⁶ and Israel has not always achieved the right balance at the junction of this tension.

The delegitimization movement has added a strategic complication. When calculating its actions, Israel must now seriously take into consideration the effects of its policies on its international reputation in ways that are more significant than prior to BDS. In that regard, the BDS movement has had some successes. But in Israel the securitization of delegitimization has had positive effects in clarifying bureaucratic roles between the various agencies engaging with counter-delegitimization activities. The MSA, as a leading agency, is better able to streamline the policy while engaging the various relevant actors across the executive and internationally.²⁷

Success is also evident at the state level. Not only has BDS achieved limited economic and diplomatic effects, but Israel has been able to extract anti-BDS commitments from several important Western countries. Exposing the funding links between civil society organizations and violent groups has resulted in some Western governments closing those funding avenues. The ability of the government to equip pro-Israeli actors, on campuses and in civil society, with relevant information to counter-BDS activities has also been successful.

However, delegitimization has still realized important discursive advances, particularly in liberal, Western spaces, where it is able to increasingly normalize discourse that sees Israel as an apartheid state, and where the real battleground (especially in the US) over Israel's legitimacy arises. In a survey from 2013, 46 percent of American-Jewish millennials defined themselves as liberals, and only 23 percent as conservatives (Pew Research Center 2013). According to a recent poll, a third of American students and 40 percent of British students view BDS as justified (Globes 2016). Moreover, among younger Americans, sympathy for the Palestinians grew from 9 percent in 2006 to 27 percent in 2016, and only 43 percent of American millennials show sympathy for Israel, compared with 61 percent of baby boomers (Pew Research Center 2016). Thus, American millennials are more likely to be critical of Israel, including Jewish millennials who remain attached to the Israeli state but engage with it more critically (Waxman 2018). Of great significance, Israel has become a wedge issue for American Jews where it once had served as a unifying force (Reut Institute 2018; Waxman 2016).

Judging by the US's 2018 mid-term election results, opinion polls, and demographic trends, future American leaders are less likely to be

as sympathetic to Israel as previous administrations have been. In other words, America's continued, unquestioning support for Israel is not inevitable, despite close relations with the current Trump administration.²⁸ American political elites will likely follow the trends demonstrated by younger Jewish Americans: continued engagement with Israel, albeit under much more critical terms (Waxman 2018). However, liberal spaces in the United States threaten to become hostile to Israel. The case of Representative Ilhan Omar and the divisions within the Democratic Party on the issue of Israel serves as a case in point. Israel can and should defend its positions in these progressive and liberal spaces. But it would be better equipped to do so if it genuinely moves to reignite the peace process while avoiding illiberal measures that undermine its democratic character,²⁹ such as the amendment to the entry law and the use of websites like Canary Mission that alienate mainstream American Jewry, many of whom view the website as a "McCarthyite blacklist" (Nathan-Kazis 2018).

Israel must recruit epistemic authorities—key thinkers who can influence the decision-making process of individuals and shape the debate around the state.³⁰ As Kobi Michael (2007) notes, epistemic authorities are important in the context of legitimacy, especially in cases with diverging positions and sources of information, since the authorities can affect public opinion by exposing the audience to information and blocking them from seeking alternative accounts. This mode of influencing the decision-making process of individuals becomes particularly important in societies facing social and security-related crises (ibid.: 429).

Such influencers as Nathan Thrall, Peter Beinart, the editors of the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, and politicians Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer serve as important epistemic authorities. One should not ignore the discursive impact of the delegitimization movement while taking care to avoid the pitfalls of Israel's previous securitization practices—the abandonment of democratic norms for the sake of the national security of the Jewish majority (Abulof 2014; Lupovici 2014; Olesker 2014a, 2014b), which can alienate the epistemic authorities who are shaping the debate over Israel.

Private-public partnerships can be effective at countering delegitimization, especially when other civil society organizations lead the anti-BDS work. For example, the recruitment of leftist public officials and activists in campaigns targeting Western audiences might be an effective strategy. However, these government-funded actions by private actors pose a high risk for abuse when private actors are used in an attempt to operate with little oversight. Campaigns that vilify BDS activists, such as a recent one led by Avri Gilad,³¹ seem actually targeted at an Israeli audience, which needs little convincing of the perils of BDS. Although a bill exempting the

MSA from the freedom of information law has only passed its first reading and is not in effect, the ministry leaves repeated requests for information unanswered (BZ 2017), appearing to act as though the exemption is already in effect.

Moving forward, the Israeli government should adopt a big-tent approach, mirroring the strategy of BDS itself (Reut Institute 2011). It should establish a network, working with other organizations and not alienating anyone—including leftist activists who are critical of the government’s policies but who do not question Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish democratic state. Calling on critics of the government to undermine BDS campaigns would achieve a stronger impact. Providing grassroots, community-based advocates with information from behind the scenes may be effective but should be transparent, even when done through NGOs or GONGOs. The militarization of counter-BDS campaigns poses dangers by creating real and imagined enemies, including liberal Zionists abroad. Such actions could and do alienate the very populations Israel must recruit in the fight against its delegitimization.

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NOTES

1. Securitization was first theoretically conceptualized as 'speech acts' that 'do something'. Securitizing actions are no longer limited to speech alone. Non-verbal acts such as silence, photographs, images, movies, and even riots can also securitize (Hansen 2011; Wilkinson 2007; Williams 2003).
2. See Article 425, NGO Forum Declaration at the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, Durban, 3 September 2001, at <https://www.i-p-o.org/racism-ngo-decl.htm>.
3. Two years later, Goldstone (2011) retracted some of his findings: "If I had known then what I know now, the Goldstone Report would have been a different document."
4. According to the January 2014 Peace Index, 77 percent of Jewish Israelis stated that the Palestinian recognition of Israel as a Jewish homeland was important as part of a negotiated peace process, and 41 percent stated that this is important because it would provide a recognition of Zionism's basic principle of a Jewish homeland (see Israel Democracy Institute 2014). In addition, 29 percent stated that such recognition will allow Israel to confront future pressures to transform into a "state for all its citizens" (ibid.). These explanations relate to the preservation of the 'self' in the Jewish identity of the state.
5. Interview with Gavrieli, 3 June 2019.
6. Kuperwasser was not the only government official looking at the delegitimization issue at this time. Others in the MFA and the Justice Ministry were also beginning to examine the phenomenon as a growing challenge to the state. Interview with Kuperwasser, 31 March 2019.
7. For the historical roots of Jewish and Israeli propaganda, see Schleifer (2003).
8. Interview with Gideon Meir, 20 August 2018.
9. Interview with Yigal Palmor, former spokesperson and head of the MFA's Press Bureau, 1 April 2019.
10. According to Gideon Meir, former director-general for public diplomacy, Israel should employ public diplomacy as a more passive response to BDS. "If you want to fight BDS, fight it quietly. The MFA is doing it very well," he argued. The need is for better public relations, which should be the job of the MFA, not MSA. Interview with Gideon Meir, 20 August 2018.
11. Interview with Gideon Meir, 20 August 2018.
12. State Comptroller Annual Report 66 for 2015 and Fiscal Year 2014, "The Diplomatic-Communicative Struggle against the Boycott Movement and Anti-Semitism Abroad" [in Hebrew], 861-883. See http://www.mevaker.gov.il/he/Reports/Report_537/f781fec8-7a1d-43ea-a1ce-973f81659882/218-maavak.pdf.
13. See Amendment 16 to the Freedom of Information Law (Exemption for the Office of Strategic Affairs), 2017 [in Hebrew], https://fs.knesset.gov.il/20/law/20_Is1_388427.pdf. The amendment passed during the first round of voting on 10 July 2017.
14. A study of North American NGOs shows that their strategies to fight BDS include the use of such information, although it remains unclear whether the

- organizations examined in the study received their information directly from the Israeli government (Cohen and Avraham 2018).
15. According to Entous's (2019) report, Psy Group designed a messaging campaign to convince Americans of the connection between BDS activists and terrorism, with the idea that "name-and-shame tactics" would silence the activists.
 16. Interview with Gavrieli, 3 June 2019.
 17. See, for example, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=3&v=HxKrn8Aqa0A.
 18. Interview with Palmor, 1 April 2019.
 19. Government Decision No. 3299, 28 December 2017.
 20. Court documents [in Hebrew] can be found at <https://www.the7eye.org.il/311668>.
 21. Aside from Kuperwasser, members of Solomon's Sling include Dore Gold, former director-general of the MFA; Ron Prosor, former ambassador to the United Nations and United Kingdom; Amos Yadlin, former IDF military intelligence chief; Miri Eisin, an ex-senior officer in IDF Intelligence; and Yaakov Amidror, the former head of the Research Division in IDF Intelligence and later national security adviser to Netanyahu.
 22. The MSA's response to the Supreme Court [in Hebrew] can be found at <https://docs.google.com/viewerng/viewer?url=https://cdn.the7eye.org.il/uploads/2018/12/msa3428-18.pdf&hl=iw>.
 23. Similar federal legislation failed in the US Senate in January 2019 (Tibon 2019), but a resolution opposing BDS easily passed in the House in July 2019 (Marcos 2019).
 24. An unofficial translation of the law can be found at <http://www.alhaq.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/P-20-1906.pdf>.
 25. Interview with Kuperwasser, 31 March 2019.
 26. Another normative dilemma is how to write and speak about securitization without contributing to it (Huysmans 2002). The goal here is not to contribute to the securitization of delegitimization. That process has already occurred. But the counter-productive outcomes of this otherwise successful procedure should not be ignored.
 27. In June 2019, the MSA hosted over 350 participants in two conferences on delegitimization, anti-Semitism, and BDS (see Rudee 2019).
 28. In 2018, two newly elected representatives, Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar, openly supported BDS (*Ha'aretz* 2018). The government attempted to bar their entrance into Israel in August 2019, but reversed its order with regard to Tlaib on "humanitarian grounds" after widespread backlash (Landau 2019b).
 29. Israel was downgraded by the 2018 V-Dem democracy ranking project from being a liberal to an electoral democracy (V-DEM Institute 2018).
 30. For an effective summary of the literature on epistemic authority, see Michael (2007: 427–430), the first to use the term in the context of delegitimization. Interview with Kuperwasser, 31 March 2019. In an interview on 1 April 2019, Palmor also noted the importance of discourse influencers.

31. A campaign on YouTube [in Hebrew] can be viewed at <https://youtu.be/vgblimHENCc>.

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