

# Like Romans

Winning the War Against the BDS Propaganda  
Campaign Against Israel

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# 1 | War Makes Things Clearer

Complex and contradictory language surrounds our conversations regarding the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) “movement” and how to stop it.

“De-legitimziation,” “anti-Semitism,” “hypocrisy,” and “misguided” are all words used repeatedly by BDS critics, just as “human rights,” “international law” and “free speech” are phrases we can count on hearing from proponents of boycott and divestment activity.

Having dealt with BDS campaigns targeting Israel since 2004 when the “movement” (simply called “divestment” back then) hit my hometown of [Somerville, MA](#), I’d like to propose a different vocabulary – one derived from warfare – that can help us better understand what we’re dealing with when we’re battling BDS, and how to most effectively win those battles.

All but the most ardent foes of the Jewish state would agree that Israel has been a nation at war since before its birth with the years 1948, 1956, 1967 and 1973 marking specific hot clashes between conventional armies, with other forms of warfare (pogroms, terror, economic blockade) beginning years before the state was founded and continuing ever since.

Propaganda has played a role in warfare since conflict moved beyond grunting pre-humans throwing rocks at one another. And the military purposes of campaigns like BDS are the same as

we've seen in other propaganda efforts mounted throughout recorded history, namely:

- Maximizing the military options of your allies while minimizing those of your adversary
- Making your opponent seem so vile that any action taken against it is justified.

There is always a lot of teeth-gnashing regarding the hypocrisy of Israel's critics who remain silent while Hamas rearms and digs terror tunnels in preparation for their next promised conflict, yet roar to life the minute the rulers of Gaza trigger that fight and Israel is forced to shoot back. But when we accuse such "End-the-War" marchers of hypocrisy, we are implicitly accepting their self-characterization as "peace activists," a noble profession that – by calling them "hypocrites" – we accuse them of betraying.

But if you assume that those "Peace Marches" are actually designed to limit the military options of one side in the conflict (by raising the political price of Israel taking decisive military action), then you will realize participants in those marches are actually *sincerely* fulfilling their military function.

The fact that they try to disguise their military role behind a vocabulary of peace, justice, and human rights is certainly worthy of attack, since they are no more "peace-makers" than would be a crate of hand grenades. But shaking one's fist at Israel's opponents for using these sorts of tactics makes as much sense as criticizing an enemy's cavalry for using horses, or damning the other side's tank brigade for not firing on their own troops.

While the world has undergone stupendous technological change over the centuries, the fundamentals of warfare – especially the human nature that drives and propels it – remain stunningly constant.

Warfare (vs. other forms of violence) is structured with overall goals leading to a choice of strategies which spells out required tactics. The fact that many generals have lost wars where connections between goals, strategy and tactics were unclear simply illustrates the universal applicability of this framework to determine success or failure in battle.

War is also always fought between one side and an opponent. Either side might consist of multiple parts, each with their own goals (and thus their own preferred strategies and tactics). But an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of two opposing sides is the starting point for the kind of analysis that should precede any engagement.

Conflicts also have to take place somewhere, which is why victory tends to go to the side that best understands the terrain of battle, whether that terrain be physical, political or psychological.

Those uncomfortable with the use of words such as “enemy” and “conflict” are free to treat my use of this language as a metaphor to help make that which might seem confusing clearer. For nothing forces one to embrace concrete reality vs. murky abstraction better than seeing the world through the lens of war.

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## 2 | Understanding the Enemy

Of all human endeavors, war is least forgiving of wishful thinking and ambiguity. Which is why it is vital to judge an opponent not by what they say but what they do.

This can be tricky in the case of a propaganda campaign like BDS where words are the weapons being deployed, as well as the tools used by the enemy to convince others (and often themselves) that their actions are just and justified. But if you look at how and when those words are deployed, a pattern emerges that can be viewed as a pattern of activity.

For instance:

- When there is not a shooting war going on, BDS advocates run Israel Apartheid Week events and other similar programs designed to paint Israel as so hideous that any action taken against it should be considered moral.
- During “quiet” periods when groups like Hamas and Hezbollah are readying for the next war (by collecting weapons, building rockets or digging terror tunnels), these “peace advocates” say and do nothing to limit that war preparation.
- Once a shooting war breaks out, they take to the streets condemning Israel’s counterattack and demanding a

ceasefire as soon as the aggression of Israel's enemies start bearing a price.

Taken together, these actions demonstrate not just a political movement playing a military role (by justifying attacks against Israel and then trying to limit the Jewish state's military options once those attacks begin) but a foe with clear-cut and militant goals: to see Israel destroyed or weakened to the point where someone else can handle the trigger-pulling.

As in any area of life, having clear goals is a force multiplier since, only by knowing where you are going can you make a plan to get there. And, in the case of war, "getting there" involves selecting strategies and tactics that will help you achieve well-understood goals.

With regard to strategy, anti-Israel advocates themselves have spelled theirs out pretty clearly by labeling their project the "Apartheid Strategy," one which involves "branding" Israel as the successor to Apartheid South Africa through endless accusations of racism and human rights crimes, with the implication that what befell the white regime in Pretoria (dismantling) should be applied to the Jewish state.

With goals and strategy spelled out, we finally arrive at BDS which is revealed as simply a tactic in service to the Apartheid Strategy, designed to achieve the "movement's" militant goals. Given that the fall of Apartheid was preceded by well-known institutions (churches, universities, governments) boycotting, divesting from and sanctioning Apartheid South Africa, the theory behind the BDS tactic is that if those same organizations can be recruited to target Israel with similar economic punishment, this will demonstrate to the public the accuracy of the boycotter's accusations.

There is a lot more to be said regarding the effectiveness of BDS and other tactics, as well our opponent's overall strategy and

goals. With that knowledge in place, we can then use what we know to plan effective counter-tactics, above and beyond “naming and shaming” Israel’s enemies by pointing out their true militant nature.

Before doing so, however, we need to understand our goals, our strategies and our tactics as well as we now understand our opponent’s. In other words, before going into battle it’s best to answer the question: Who are we?

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## 3 | Who Are We?

As tough as it is during any conflict to understand clearly the goals, strategy and tactics of an opponent, it is much harder to perform a similar analysis of one's own side.

Hard-headed understanding of your own strengths and weaknesses is difficult enough for military planners, which is why so many wars are fought by those who don't know what their goals are, much less how to accomplish them. Given that "our side" in the BDS wars is led by men and women steeped in the language of community-building and cooperation, it is any wonder, then, why our response to BDS provocations seems so conflicted and confused?

The irony is that the Jewish community – as well as allies with whom we battle BDS and other propaganda campaigns – agree on goals which unite all pro-Israel activists from the meekest to the most aggressive.

And what are those goals? Simply put, we all desire for the Jewish state to live in peace and "normalcy," a right automatically afforded to all other peoples in all other states in the world. In addition, we would like this normalcy to extend to Jews living outside of Israel, ending the historic "de-normal" status of the Jewish people as objects of hatred and violence.

One person might decide such goals are totally within reach, while another declare them to be utterly impossible. Further

analysis might compare how much Jews can do to accomplish these goals themselves versus how much is beyond our control. But if you asked the most aggressive pro-Israel militant if an Israel truly at peace and a Jewish people truly safe would satisfy them, they are just as likely to say “Yes” as would the most conflict-averse Jewish communal leader.

While there remains a lot to say about our shared (if often unstated) common goals, for purposes of this analysis the most important thing to understand about them is that they are *not militant*. Unlike our opponents in the BDS wars who ultimately seek a defeat of their enemies leading to “Palestine from the river to the sea,” we do not seek destruction of anyone (Palestinian, Arab or Muslim) since our goal is to live in peace, which would translate to living in peace alongside other peoples, not to see those other peoples defeated or destroyed.

This can help explain why desires (and even attempts) to turn the tables on our enemies and subject Israel’s foes to the same type of propaganda assault they use against the Jewish state never seem to work. Often, such failure is blamed on cowardice or self-delusion on the part Jewish leaders and activists without the stomach for conflict. But given the analysis you’ve read about so far regarding the nature of both sides of the BDS battle lines, why should anyone expect success trying to adopt tactics designed to accomplish someone else’s militant goals in order to accomplish our non-militant ones?

If we were truly committed to seeing our enemies denigrated and destroyed, then “turning the tables” would have to go beyond a Twitter hashtag or midnight postering campaign. It would require us to dedicate 100% of our effort year after year after year to making our opponents seem horrifying and worthy of destruction. It would require us to ignore facts and reason in order to further a propaganda message, no matter what the cost. And it would require us to drag friends and neutral third parties into the conflict in order to get condemnations of our enemy to come out of other

people's mouths. Does this sound like a set of tactics someone with non-militant goals could possibly sustain long enough for them to be effective?

At this point, supporters of Israel might despair that all our efforts to fight against BDS are doomed, given the power and focus militant goals give an adversary. But fear not! For having goals (even non-militant ones) is the most important element in any endeavor, military or otherwise. And while the strategies and tactics we can choose to accomplish our goals are different than those used by our militant opponents, they are no less effective at countering or even defeating an adversary.

Before getting to what those strategies and tactics might be, however, we need to briefly turn away from ourselves and our opponents and begin to perform some realistic analyses of the battlefields on which the BDS wars are being fought.

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## 4 | The Field(s) of Battle

Given public fascination with epic battles such as Canne, Austerlitz, and Stalingrad where generals tested their strategies and soldiers their courage in the heat of massive clashes of arms, it's surprising how few wars were ever settled through such decisive engagements. In fact, with the exception of Gulf Wars I and II, I can't think of any of the dozens of wars that have gone on in my adult life ending (or even featuring) such mighty and decisive *mêlées*.

There is a tendency to chalk this up to an erosion in the ethos of war, with "honorable" head-to-head clashes between trained armies being replaced by small-scale unconventional battles and skirmishes, often directed specifically at non-combatants. But war has always been about experimentation and going with what works, which translates to tailoring strategies to battlefields that don't necessarily resemble flat plains big enough to hold ranks of infantry and columns of tanks.

To cite a well-known example, the generals leading the North Vietnamese army during the Vietnam War understood that they could never best the US military in head-to-head battle, and so they chose a different type of battlefield: US public opinion. With a deep understanding of American democracy and the increasing power of televised images to define the news, these generals chose strategies and tactics that made no sense if their goal was to defeat

the US Army militarily. But those maneuvers were perfectly logical (even brilliant) with regard to accomplishing their actual goal: turning US opinion against the war by convincing the public it could never be won.

The war against Israel has featured conventional battles between organized armies (notably in 1948, 1956, 1967 and 1973). But between those named wars, as well as the years since the '73 Yom Kippur war with Egypt and Syria, Israel's enemies have chosen unconventional strategies and tactics designed for unconventional battlefields.

The choice to deliberately (and primarily) target civilians, a tactic usually referred to as "terrorism," is often described as "mindless," "cowardly" or "evil." But these terms ignore the strategic nature of choosing a battlefield, such as the shopping mall or public bus, where Israel's superior military seems to have no effective counter-measure.

The choice of a terror strategy might be in error or counterproductive, given that Israel can and has struck back at the sources of terror (whether in Jenin or Gaza). But this is where another battlefield: world opinion, requires both sides in the conflict to make a parallel set of strategic and tactical choices.

For Israel's enemies, the goal is to ensure maximum flexibility of unconventional armies to carry on terror campaigns uninhibited. This requires them to neutralize Israel's military superiority by making it very difficult for Israeli leaders to choose or sustain a military response. Thus the criticality of propaganda campaigns like BDS which do nothing to prevent groups like Hamas from starting wars (despite claims that we all treat the boycotters as "peace activists"), but take to the streets in huge numbers the minute Israel shoots back.

As mentioned earlier, war is all about experimenting with different things and then doubling down on what seems to be successful. For instance, the "Peace March" tactic was first rolled

out during Israel's 2006 clash with Hezbollah in Lebanon and turned out to be so effective at limiting Israel's military choices that it's been repeated during the Gaza shooting wars in 2008, 2012 and 2014. In fact, with each conflict the stakes have gotten higher – to the point where Israel must now take into account the fact that their military choices might impact the safety of Jews living in Europe or elsewhere in the Diaspora.

Before and after (and in-between) live wars, these propaganda campaigners spend their time preparing the ground for the next clash (possibly the final one), by doing everything in their power to create an image of the Jewish state so odious that its destruction will be considered a moral good. This strategy has involved decades-long campaigning to infiltrate and take over the machinery created to fight for human rights around the world, turning the very organizations that are supposed to keep the peace (the UN, human-rights NGOs and the like) into weapons of war, indeed weaponizing the very language of human rights itself.

Recent decisions by the Israeli government to take the fight against “de-legitimization” seriously reflect an understanding that the battlefield has shifted from the land, sea and air (i.e., the places military planners spend most of their time thinking about) to places where words are spoken vs. shots fired.

This puts Israel ahead of other nations (including our own) that have yet to recognize the true nature of the enemy or the war(s) being fought. But it still leaves open the most important question: what to do next?

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## 5 | Siege Warfare

In almost any discussion of how to deal with BDS, a subject that inevitably comes up is offense vs. defense.

“Why are we always on the defensive?” “We can’t win if we just play defense!” “It’s time to go on the attack!” are just some of the ways the same argument is brought up again and again.

Given that most BDS battles require our side to turn back or reverse boycott or divestment votes (i.e., play defense) that the other side has initiated (offensively), the frustration behind the offense vs. defense dynamic is understandable.

At the same time, the terms “offense” and “defense” only describe tactics, and tactics must be dictated by strategy which, in turn, is supposed to support specific goals. And if your ultimate goals are militant – such as destroying the Jewish state or weakening it to the point where it becomes more vulnerable to destruction – then it is easier to devise strategies to achieve these destructive ends (such as the “Apartheid strategy” designed to weaken support for Israel with its crucial US ally via a campaign of de-legitimization) which require offensive tactics such as BDS to implement.

But if your ultimate goals are NOT destructive (which ours are not), then it becomes more difficult to build or sustain a strategy designed around perpetual attack since it would require this perpetual attack to be directed at those with whom we ultimately

want to live at peace. This – not cowardice or lack of nerve – is why aggressive tactics used by our side turn out to be impossible to sustain long enough to be effective.

While such offense vs. defense vocabulary might sound military, it actually ignores the fact that prior to the age of air power the vocabulary of battle was as much about the garrison and the siege as it was about the clash of armies in the field engaged in offensive vs. defensive tactics.

To take one [historic example](#), when the Byzantine army attempted to win back the Italian peninsula from the Ostragoths who had captured it after the fall of the Western Roman Empire, the Byzantines managed to lay siege to several major cities, capturing some and garrisoning them in the process. These Byzantine-garrisoned cities later came under siege from Ostragothic forces attempting to win them back.

In this example, where the same army may be laying siege to one city, while defending against another siege at a different city a few miles up the road, which side is on the offense and which is playing defense? In a war that involves recapturing territory that may have been lost recently in a previous war, even being an invader does not necessarily put an army in the attacker vs. defender role.

I mention this because the metaphor we should all be using to describe Israel's situation (and by extension the situation of its supporters abroad) is that of the siege.

It was no accident that when the Irish novelist and diplomat Conor Cruise O'Brien wrote his history of Israel, he chose as its title [The Siege](#). For, as this remarkable man of letters recognized, Israel's national doctrine is based on fending off an attack from any possible combination of hostile forces that surround it. In other words, they are defending their city (really their nation) against someone else's attack, which according to the arguments mentioned at the top of this piece, would put them in the category of playing perpetual defense.

Yet no one would describe the IDF, which maintains the siege walls, as lacking courage for not going on the attack more often. In fact, one of the most frequent reasons for a besieged city being conquered was military leaders inside the city getting restless for a pitched battle and leaving the safety of their walls to engage the enemy in the field unnecessarily.

Unnecessary because, historically speaking, the siege is just as hard (sometimes harder) on the besieger than it is on the besieged. While having your city surrounded by soldiers firing arrows and building battering rams and catapults is no picnic, it's also not much fun building those siege engines while defenders in the city shower you with rocks, hot oil, dung and missiles. Besieging armies must also survive in camps and forage for food further and further from home base the longer the siege goes on, while defenders can live in relative comfort and safety within their walls, presuming they have enough supplies to outlast the army at the gates.

Again, Middle East history bears out this siege parallel. For after 68 years, Israel behind its walls is more prosperous than ever, enjoying close to seven decades of constitutional government. But during that same period, those who have maintained their siege against the Jewish state have watched their societies come apart at the seams with oligarchs and kings giving way to military dictatorships which are now fighting to the death against religious fanatics, all the while sinking further and further into poverty and despair (despite God's having planted half the world's oil reserves under their feet).

Instability within the anti-Israel community abroad is another example where organizations dedicated to laying siege to Israel by proxy are perpetually falling apart while organizations dedicated to defending the Jewish state go on and on (occasionally becoming sclerotic in the process – the topic for another time).

As we consider our options for dealing with the BDS propaganda war, keep in mind that fighting siege warfare does not simply involve cowering behind walls hoping your enemy will go away. Clashes at the walls are always part of the picture, as are skirmishes and even (ideally well-thought-out) battles that involve leaving the city to engage the enemy.

But we should never lose site of the fact that the metaphor that describes our condition is not the standing army with its offensive and defensive strategies, but the siege which has its own logic, and its own legacy of strategy and tactics that can lead to victory.

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## 6 | Fighting a Siege War

Once you start thinking about the war Israel and its supporters find themselves in as a drawn-out siege, rather than a series of pitched engagements, a number of seemingly inexplicable phenomena become understandable.

Why didn't the Arab states (with a few important exceptions) make their peace with Israel after losing one war after another? How can Palestinians pass their misery onto their grandchildren and great-grandchildren when options for a peaceful future – including a state of their own – have been at hand for decades? Why would anti-Israel propagandists bring their BDS proposals to the same organizations year after year after year, regardless of how many times they are told “no?”

Such choices only make sense once you see them not as discrete conflicts but as individual battles in a single war – a siege war – waged by an enemy sure that time is on its side.

At a certain level, behaving in such a way is rational. After all, Israel is a small country surrounded by dozens of large, powerful and wealthy rival states. Those that support the Jewish state (notably the Jewish people) are not without resources and alliances, but nothing like the resources and alliance network enjoyed by her foes. There are not, for example, 50 Jewish states taking control of the UN and other bodies in order to turn them into weapons of aggression against their enemies.

With those kinds of resources to draw upon, a siege can go on indefinitely, especially since Israel's disinterest in completely destroying foes with whom they ultimately want to live in peace means those foes do not risk destruction if they lose one or more battles.

History also plays a role in this dynamic, since there is ample precedent for winning a war by simply outlasting your rivals. For instance, the reason the Crusades loom so large in Arab myth-making is not because they represent Christendom's invasion of Muslim lands (Christian and Muslim empires were grabbing each other's territory all the time before and after the Crusades, after all), but because it is perceived as a siege that Muslims eventually won after dedicating two centuries to dislodging their Christian rivals.

But history also includes ample precedent of the besieger losing a war, or getting so drained by maintaining their siege that they become vulnerable to external enemies or internal instability. In one sense, today's chaos of the Middle East can be seen as a besieging army succumbing to its own internal contradictions while the victim of the siege (Israel) goes from strength to strength.

There are a number of variables that can change this equation, of course. Some combination of missiles and terror might finally pierce Israel's defensive walls, for example, or an Iranian atomic bomb might make those walls irrelevant. But given that our side controls so few of these variables, it is in our interest to help Israel maintain and strengthen itself against all possible attackers while those besiegers deal with dynamics of their own making.

In the Middle East itself, those destructive dynamics derive from toxic brew of radical politics, religious fanaticism and European-style totalitarianism that is at the heart of every civil war breaking out across the region.

You can find similar divisions and conflicts within anti-Israel organizations working abroad where surrogates for different

warring parties within the Middle East struggle for control of these groups, creating inherent instability.

For example, when divestment petitions first started appearing in colleges and universities in the early 2000s, this form of anti-Israel activism was driven by an organization called the [Palestinian Solidarity Movement \(PSM\)](#), a group similar to today's Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) that is causing so much trouble on today's college campuses.

As PSM achieved prominence through the headlines it generated and perceived momentum, activists with competing radical agendas began to join with the goal of taking over the group and turning it towards their own ends. These attempts at infiltration became so numerous and time-consuming that PSM finally shut its doors, rather than devote the majority of its energy fighting off hostile takeover attempts.

This kind of instability is inherent in anti-Israel politics where groups tend to form, fall apart and then reform every few years under new names and leaders, but largely with the same foot soldiers. If leadership within normal political organizations flows to those who are the most dedicated and assertive, within the radical world of anti-Israel activism fanaticism and aggression are the tickets to power. And, as history has shown, there is always someone more fanatical, ready to turn their aggression on allies in order to bend an organization to their will.

This instability offers an opening to those of us dealing with the propaganda weapon in the besieger's arsenal. For while both Israel and its supporters want to ultimately see the Jewish state living in peace with stable and successful neighbors, none of us has any stake in living at peace with propaganda organizations like SJP and its ilk. No one misses (or even remembers) PSM, after all, and if other anti-Israel groups similarly fall to pieces due to their own unstable nature, so much the better.

In fact, it is in our interest to exploit the weaknesses inherent in local anti-Israel projects like BDS since, unlike influencing what goes on in the General Assembly of the United Nations, on-the-ground activists can have an impact and *have succeeded* in turning back BDS again and again. And whenever a BDS project goes up in flames, this helps to delegitimize the entire effort to delegitimize the Jewish state.

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## 7 | The Odds

If you've gotten this far, you're likely wondering when discussion will turn to "doing something," rather than just pondering our situation vis-à-vis how to win the war against BDS and similar anti-Israel propaganda projects.

While questions regarding "getting on with it" are understandable, they miss the point that in the case of warfare, planning is a form of action. The old trope that "no war plan ever survived first contact with the enemy" is not an invitation to eschew planning altogether and just let armies go at each other and hope for the best. Rather, it implies that an appropriate plan takes into account uncertainty, with victory often going to the general with the foresight to build flexibility and branching alternatives into their original plans.

So before moving onto tactics (i.e., specific actions), it's worth engaging with a little more planning activity, starting with an analysis of the odds we (by which I mean Israel and its supporters) face.

Looking at the broader global war against the Jewish state, Israel is a nation of 8 million with the ability to put 3 million trained military personnel into the field, with time an important variable given that it takes a certain amount of it to get an army made up primarily of reservists ready for battle.

A majority of countries that make up the Arab League are in a formal declared state of war against Israel and, taken together, these states have a combined population of close to 350 million and combined armies of over a hundred million soldiers. This number does not include irregular forces like the terrorist armies of Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza. If we also want to take economics into consideration, Israel's economy (with a GDP of approximately \$300 billion) is one twentieth the size of the economies of her combined enemies.

At first glance, this would seem like overwhelming odds which would make Israel's survival the result of miraculous action. Assuming Israel's military leaders don't have miracles built into their war plans, however, there must be something else that evens (if not tips to Israel's advantage) such a lopsided playing field.

The most obvious earthly factor has to do with which side goes into battle under unified command. Despite Israel's strong relationship with the United States, that alliance is based on the US providing military and political support, not putting American generals and soldiers into the field on the side of their Israeli ally. This means that when Israel has fought wars against other states or irregular armies, the country's army was operating under a single chain of command going up the ranks from foot soldiers to the military and political leadership.

In contrast, Israel's enemies have always fought as *alliances*, whether the formal military alliance of front-line Arab states that took part in wars of '48, '67 and '73, or the informal political-military alliances behind irregular armies like Hezbollah. And, as Napoleon discovered time and time again, the joint decision-making inherent in a military alliance frequently robs allied armies of their ability to act flexibly or respond quickly to take the initiative, making them vulnerable to nimbler opponents under more unified command.

Keep in mind that Napoleon's enemies at least had a common goal of stopping his conquest of Europe, which meant the French

Emperor had to exploit subtle divisions in each of his “united” enemy’s political and military situations and leadership. In contrast, Israel’s “allied” enemies have been at each other’s throats for the better part of a century, with cultural antagonisms rooted in religious sectarianism and tribal conflict going back far longer. This has only enhanced the ability of Israel’s small but united force to defeat the far larger but disunited forces arrayed against her time and time again.

The fact that Israel (in contrast to her enemies) does not harbor genocidal aims offers another ironic military advantage to the Jewish state. For soldiers who know they have a safe escape route back to home base (whether in Cairo, Damascus or Amman) are much more likely to retreat when confronted with the horrors of the battlefield. In contrast, an army (like Israel’s) that knows defeat is likely to lead to liquidation of themselves, their families, and their homeland is far more motivated to fight to the end.

Moving onto the propaganda battlefield, the Arab states arrayed against Israel are allied with a further two-dozen non-Arab Islamic states that have inherited the “automatic majority” of Non-Aligned Movement fashioned by the Soviet Union during the Cold War. This is what contributes to the enemy’s overwhelming advantage within institutions such as the United Nations where the one Jewish state lacks the numbers needed to take the propaganda fight to the enemy.

Given these odds, Israel and her friends have wisely chosen to avoid direct confrontation and instead turned to their US ally to veto any anti-Israel initiative taken at the UN that might have binding legal authority, thus neutering the enemy’s advantage in this important theatre. Such a strategy represents a classic *flanking maneuver* that resists the temptation to directly attack where the enemy is strongest in favor of clever tactics that make an opponent’s numerical superiority irrelevant.

Our side has yet to gain similar footing in the fight against BDS for reasons having to do with our numerical superiority and lack of unified command, at least in the US – the subject we shall turn to next.

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## 8 | Playing to Our Strengths

In reviewing the strengths and weaknesses of the opposing sides in the war against Israel, including the BDS propaganda component of that war, it turns out that – at least in the US – the odds seem to favor Israel and its supporters.

This conclusion is largely based on numbers. For there are approximately six million Jews in the US, and while attitudinal survey data can be interpreted in different ways, it's safe to say that a large majority of the Jewish American population supports or strongly supports Israel and the US-Israel relationship.

If polls aren't your thing, keep in mind that the existence and continuation of dozens of large Jewish communal organizations, many with strengthening the Jewish state and US-Israeli ties as part or all of their missions, is testament to the degree of support Israel maintains with a large proportion of the Jewish American community.

Among the public at large, support for Israel versus her foes also tends to run between 3:1 and 4:1 in most survey data, reflecting the kind of common-sense wisdom that makes it easy for politicians across the political spectrum to show friendship vs. hostility towards the Jewish state. Finally, given Israel's leadership in important areas like high-technology, environmental science and bio-tech, new ties are being forged within business and

academic communities at an accelerating pace for reasons having nothing to do with politics.

Given these assets, why might we feel so helpless when it comes to fighting against what seems like a BDS onslaught?

Part of this has to do with the fact that BDS draws from resources abroad where the numbers, wealth and power of Israel's opponents far outweigh those of her allies. But another, domestic explanation has to do with the issue of unified command (or lack thereof) described in the last chapter.

In instances where one of the dozens of aforementioned Jewish organizations is given the role of coordinating an important relationship or managing a difficult issue, such as AIPAC which has taken the lead in maintaining support for Israel within the US Congress, things have gone quite well (providing a counterweight to hostility that tends to emerge from the Executive branch). People sometimes complain that AIPAC doesn't use its influence to take on other matters such as the fight against BDS on college campuses, but that just demonstrates the discipline the group is able to maintain when prioritizing their all-important central mission.

In contrast, when it comes to fighting BDS, no single organization has been handed (or earned for themselves) that portfolio, which means responsibility for dealing the problem tends to fall to different individuals and organizations, often working together in coalition. Such coalitions can be extremely effective, even powerful, but they tend to not be nimble given the need to get many groups with differing opinions and agendas on the same page before plans can be agreed upon and then executed.

Israel's domestic foes have even bigger problems forming coalitions, given that they represent the same kind of unstable alliances one finds among Israel's nation-state enemies. But the guerrilla tactics that define BDS, which leverage contemporary distributed/network politics, tends to minimize these disadvantages, at least during any one BDS battle where the enemy

is able to put aside differences to achieve a specific, time-bound end, such as winning a divestment vote in a Student Senate, or launching a boycott campaign at a local food coop.

Lack of unified command on our side means the response to one of these guerrilla-style campaigns can be delayed as pro-Israel individuals and organizations struggle to figure out what to do and determine who should take point. This delay is compounded further since people on the ground (such as pro-Israel college students or food coop members) are often inexperienced and struggle to determine what to do or whom to turn to, or have to navigate offers of help from people and groups they might know little to nothing about.

The recent string of anti-BDS votes within state governments (best described as the success of BDS movement in getting sanctions enacted – against them!) represents the community’s success in outflanking our opponents by fighting where we are strong and the opposition weak. Even so, it would be nice to couple this momentum with success on other battlefields, especially college campuses where anti-Israel groups and sentiments seem to dominate.

To devise tactics that can confound and defeat our rivals, however, we must first fully understand the weapons the forces of BDS bring to the battlefield.

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## 9 | The BDS Playbook

Since this essay is focused on how to fight the BDS propaganda element of the wider war against the Jewish state, it's time to take a closer look at the specific weapons and techniques used by the enemy in order to more effectively counter (and counter-attack) them.

As you read these over, never lose sight of the fact that BDS is a tactic in service of a wider strategic aim: the boycotters' self-named "Apartheid Strategy" designed to brand Israel as the inheritor of the legacy of South Africa's racist and now-defunct Apartheid system in order to make the Jewish state's demise (their ultimate goal) seem like an act of virtue.

With that fact top of mind, here is the BDS playbook:

1. Since the "Israel = Apartheid" message would have no impact if it were issued by organizations already known for their anti-Israel stance, it is vital that condemnations of the Jewish state be presented as beliefs of large, well-known and respected institutions. This is why BDS targets established civic groups such as colleges and universities, Mainline Protestant churches, municipalities, food cooperatives and similar organizations. In fact, leveraging the brand of well-known institutions is so vital to the BDS project that the boycotters frequently resort to [fraud](#) in

order to get their words to come out of someone else's mouth.

2. Institutions targeted by the BDSers are almost exclusively politically progressive in nature. Partly, this is due to progressive institutions like the Mainline churches being vulnerable to appeals made in terms of human rights and social justice, especially if the knowledge of members listening to such appeals is limited with regard to Middle East realities. But this phenomenon also reflects an important secondary goal of the anti-Israel movement: to colonize the Left end of the political spectrum by condemning any divergence from their anti-Israel agenda as heresy which will get you branded as a PEP ([Progressive in Everything but Palestine](#)).
3. Ends always justify means when it comes to the BDSers getting a major institution on their side, with those means including use of truncated, distorted or outright false information while shutting down member access to alternative points of view. Such a “by-any-means-necessary” approach also includes moral blackmail, stacking decision-making bodies with BDS supporters, colluding behind-closed doors to get boycott and divestment measures passed before anyone knows they are even being discussed, or (when all else fails) fraudulently claiming support when none exists.
4. During debate, the pro-BDS side relies almost entirely on emotional arguments. While such arguments occasionally ape the form of reasoned debate, the bulk of any BDS presentation consists of gruesome and context-free images (usually of dead children), claims that those bodies are the result of Israel and Israel alone, and demands that anyone who does not do what the boycotters say has the blood of

those children on their hands. Such arguments, targeted at the gut rather than the head or heart, are designed to shut down thinking and give decision-makers within targeted organizations the impression that giving in to boycott and divestment demands is their only moral choice.

5. Despite how much BDS advocates' arguments count on other people empathetic reaction to human suffering, the boycotters themselves possess no such empathy. This is why it is so easy for them to ignore or slough off demands that they respond to images or descriptions of suffering Israelis, or Palestinians and other Arabs whose suffering cannot be laid at the foot of the Jewish state. There is a clinical term for an individual whose lack of empathy for others makes them particularly effective at emotional manipulation: *sociopath*. And it is vital to understand how much the manipulative power of BDS rests on their representing that rare and dangerous phenomenon: the sociopathic political movement.
6. This lack of genuine sympathy with others makes it easy for the boycotters to bring their BDS resolutions before organizations again and again and again, no matter how many times they are told no and no matter what harm they cause others by dragging the Middle East conflict into other people's civic life. This is because, for the boycotters, targeted civic groups are not entities made up of real people with their own challenges and needs. Rather, such groups exist for the sole purpose of passing their anti-Israel resolutions.
7. Such relentlessness is also stoked by the fact that the BDS crowd considers it a victory if they can subject a group like a university Student Senate to hours and hours of anti-Israel invective, hoping that – even if they lose the vote – their

steady drip of bile will eventually convince the public that Israel must be a pretty horrible place if people are saying so many horrible things about it.

An agenda built around poisoning the minds of the public is one of the reasons BDS advocates can claim that even if they lose a battle (like a student government vote) they are still winning a longer war, an argument our side often accepts (for better or worse).

But also remember that a political movement must be able to demonstrate actual success, something that's been in short supply if you consider how Israel's economy has [boomed](#) during the same decade and a half the boycotters have worked tirelessly to bring it to its knees. Such an empty record makes BDS reliant on creating the image (or, more accurately, the illusion) of momentum, and a political project that relies on fantasy is always going to be vulnerable to those who choose strategies and tactics based on reality.

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## 10 | Emotion

Military histories, movies and documentaries tend to focus on tangible elements of warfare: planes and missiles, columns of tanks, masses of soldiers, and their complex deployment and interaction on the battlefield. But all of this hardware tends to distract from a less visible but vital reality: that wars are usually won or lost based not on numbers or weaponry, but on human emotion.

Soldiers overcoming fear in order to fight bravely is an obvious example of the role emotion plays at ground level. Similarly, good generals need to set aside desires and fears in order to make plans based on an objective evaluation of their own strengths and weaknesses, as well as those of their enemies. Poor generals, in contrast, fall prey to anger in defeat or hubris in victory, causing them to make mistakes that can lead to vulnerability and – usually – disaster.

Great generals not only control their own emotions, but can effectively manipulate the emotions of their opponents. Ulysses S. Grant, for example, understood which of the generals who opposed him (many of whom he knew from military school) were timid or rash and incorporated that knowledge into his battle plans. Similarly, Napoleon was intimate with the psychological makeup of those leading the alliance against him and was able to play off their arrogance and rivalries to his advantage.

The sociopathic nature of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement described in the last chapter means that the human beings who participate in that project are similarly vulnerable to excess that can work to our advantage.

For example, what could have possibly possessed members of Students for Justice in Palestine at [UC Davis](#) to break into chants of “Allahu Akbar” and claim that “ Hamas and Sharia law have taken over US Davis!” after winning a pro-BDS student government vote that long eluded them? Likely, it was the emotional rush of elation that often accompanies victory which, in this case, led some members to drop their masks, turning a story that should have been about victory into one about the fanaticism and excess of BDS supporters on college campuses.

Certain tactics we’ll be exploring will allow us to take advantage of this understanding of the opposition’s emotional makeup. As important as it is to understand how emotion drives our enemies, however, it is even more important to see how it drives our own choices.

Hearing the latest lies and calumnies thrown at the Jewish state, seeing “Apartheid Walls” on a campus quad, or getting patted down at fake checkpoints naturally raises emotional hackles among Israel’s supporters on college campuses, just as hearing stories of such activity generates anger and disgust from Israel’s friends everywhere else. A natural tendency when feeling such anger is to lash out, or issue dire warnings about what this kind of hatred portends.

Such emotional responses are both natural and understandable. But absent rational and strategic analysis, the actions we take in response to provocation can do more harm than good.

For instance, years ago, a fervent and committed Italian friend of Israel’s wrote [this story](#) warning Israel’s supporters to wake up to the threat BDS posed to the Jewish state. His appeal was passionate, sincere and full of examples that demonstrated progress

the BDS movement was making while the rest of us (allegedly) slept — thus the need for his dire *Cri-de-Coeur*.

Unfortunately, his source of examples of BDS momentum were taken directly from BDS press releases, which led to [this rejoinder](#) that highlighted how most if not all the “victories” he listed were either inaccurate, outdated or false. By the time that response was posted, however, his original piece was shared more than 1,000 times (vs. the 100 or so shares of the corrective response).

It stands to reason that the 1000+ people interested in spreading the original story of triumph but uninterested in the correction were BDS supporters eager to let the world know about their staggering momentum (certified by a friend of Israel, no less). So, looking at results rather than motives, it seems as though a strong opponent of BDS, riding his own emotions, provided valuable ammunition to the enemy by feeding a BDS PR machine eager to reinforce a storyline of its own success.

Emotion is similarly at play whenever we try to “turn the tables” on our enemies by trying to utilize their tactics against them, by running events designed to highlight the human rights catastrophe that is the Arab world, for example. “Naming and shaming” is another popular tactic often invoked by Israel’s supporters as a means to “bring the battle to the enemy.”

Now there is nothing wrong with either of these approaches *per se*. But it is worth determining whether a tactic is being used to push towards a strategic goal vs. getting something off our chest. “Naming and shaming,” for example, has been extremely effective at [exposing funding sources](#) for anti-Israel groups, which furthers the strategic goal of making it difficult for our enemies to receive needed funds. But a [different campaign](#) to name and shame individuals has led to division among anti-BDS ranks, which might or might not be worth it depending on the strategy behind such a campaign.

There is a simple test we can use to determine if our choice of tactics is based on emotion (such as anger or the need to “do something,” regardless of its effectiveness) vs. strategy which strengthens our side and weakens the other. Specifically, if we can articulate the goals our tactics are meant to achieve and can provide a plausible mechanism whereby those tactics will lead to the results we desire, then we are acting strategically.

In contrast, if our explanation for what we’re doing seems contrived, or includes implausible steps required to lead to effective action, then perhaps we are thinking with our heart (or gut) vs. our heads, potentially making mistakes that will weaken our forces while strengthening our opponents.

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# 11 | Foundations for Victory

Approaching the fight against BDS with a military mindset requires (1) letting goals drive our choices of strategy and tactics; (2) starting from an honest evaluation of our own strength and that of our enemies; and (3) letting this honest and objective understanding, rather than emotion, drive our decision-making.

With those principles defining “True North,” we can start to make choices that stand the best chance of defeating those who are using the propaganda tactics of BDS to try to bring an end to the Jewish state.

Given that BDS is just a tactic in service of the broader “Apartheid Strategy” (i.e., a strategy designed to brand Israel as the inheritor of the mantle of Apartheid South Africa), with Israel’s defeat as the ultimate end point, reason dictates that any steps we take to prevent that ultimate end point from being reached would constitute a setback for practitioners of BDS.

Remember that a siege war, like the one Israel has had forced on it since birth, can only end when the besieged city’s walls are breached, or one side outlasts the other. Israel’s military has primary responsibility for preventing breaches, although those efforts are enhanced by keeping the US-Israel alliance strong and building supportive relationships between the IDF and the Diaspora.

Assuming those walls stay intact, Israel's foes are counting on winning a long game during which terror, economic blockade, and propaganda will cause their opponent's will to collapse. But remember that we too are playing a long game, hoping that time will sap the strength of the besiegers or cause the internal contradictions associated with their alliance structure to implode. And if you look at the relative strength of the Jewish state (measured in military and economic terms) vs. the chaos consuming her enemies, it might just be that time is indeed on our side versus our opponents.

These observations translate into the fact that anything done to strengthen Israel militarily, economically and diplomatically represents a victory over the forces of BDS, even if those things aren't directly related to defeating a specific BDS-inspired campaign. So supporting groups like AIPAC (whose mission is to build strong pro-Israel ties with US political leaders) or even encouraging investment in Israeli startups can be seen as ways of taking the fight to the enemy.

If you doubt this connection, ask yourself what would strengthen Israel more: seeing the 15-25 BDS resolutions likely to come before student governments next year defeated, or the Jewish state becoming an energy exporter? Obviously, it's the latter, which means that as important as it is to fight those student resolutions and other BDS activity with all the strength and creativity we can muster, we should never lose sight of the fact that our long-term goals are to see the enemy's long-term goals become impossible to reach.

With regard to taking on BDS directly, most of the tactics that will be covered in the rest of this essay take into account the likelihood that our forces will be outnumbered during school government battles or other BDS campaigns. Such tactics build on the historic fact that smaller armies have defeated larger ones for centuries, with victory tending to go to those who fight smartest.

Even if relative size need not be decisive, however, I'm not aware of any instances where an army of any size was defeated by nothing.

This would indicate that we make it a strategic priority to have forces on the ground, no matter how few in number, in any location where we suspect BDS will become an issue. While establishing a pro-Israel presence on all of America's 4000 colleges and universities is unrealistic, having boots on the ground at the 100 or so schools with active SJP chapters is much more manageable, and is indeed a priority for many pro-Israel organizations with active student programs.

Now having a presence is not the same as having adequate forces to win every battle. Schools are volatile places where talented activists (on both sides) go on exchange programs or graduate, requiring constant effort to replenish ranks. And even at schools with robust pro-Israel organizations, victory is far from guaranteed. But a nucleus of supporters gives our side something to build off of once trouble arises, which again points to the efficacy of having even one trained (or even just aware) person in every potential trouble-spot.

The job of never going into battle with nothing is made more difficult by the finite size of our ranks, and the fact that the forces of BDS are constantly looking for new institutions into which they can drag their campaigns based partially on where pro-Israel sentiments are non-existent. For example, food co-ops and [community radio stations](#) became BDS battlefields during the last 5-6 years, and these new battlefields required our side to scramble to create from scratch a counterforce ready to take on those pushing coops and radio stations to join in boycott campaigns.

This scrambling ultimately led to success (boycotts are all but dead in the [co-op movement](#), for example). But the experience of having to mobilize to fight on unexpected battlefields should cause

us to prioritize how to best put people into the field rapidly, before dwelling on what they should do when they get there.

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## 12 | Surprise

While war is unforgiving to the rash and the timid, nothing is more lethal to an army than being predictable. For if the enemy knows exactly where you'll be, when you'll be there, what you'll have, and what you'll do, it becomes child's play either to avoid you if you're strong, or decimate you if you're weak.

As mentioned previously, one of the perpetual debates we have when discussing how to fight against BDS is “going on the offense” vs. “playing defense.” That analysis highlighted that these terms might not mean the same thing in a siege war versus a direct clash, but for now it's worth noting how the tactics most often used by advocates of both offensive and defensive strategies suffer from the same fault: predictability.

Attend an “Israel-Apartheid Week” panel discussion or Student Senate divestment debate to watch our side make the same points that have been made at BDS-related debates countless times for years, or read those same points printed out on familiar-sounding 8.5” x 11” photocopied handouts.

You can decide if arguments about Israel's legal rights, Israeli victims of terror, the fate of women and homosexuals in the Arab world, the Jewish state's contribution to medicine and environmental technology, or how you'll have to give up your cell phone if you want to truly boycott Israel are offensive or defensive

in nature. But it's likely that each of these arguments, whether spoken at the mike or printed on the page, will sound awfully familiar.

So familiar, in fact, that our opponents have a ready store of responses to neutralize such attacks, from ignoring them, to telling us “thanks for the desalination tech, but give us our freedom,” to accusing Israel and its supporters of “pinkwashing,” and so on.

Every good general knows that a head-on clash with an enemy in a fortified position is suicidal, which is why it is best to attack an opponent on his vulnerable flank or – better still – surprise them from the rear. So, are there any examples of situations in which we avoided a frontal collision with our enemies in favor of tactics that caught the foe off-guard?

In the Spring semester of 2016, the Students Supporting Israel (SSI) chapter at Columbia decided to meet the annual Apartheid Week challenge not with fliers and shouts, but with a 12-foot high [inflatable Pinocchio](#) pitched just yards from the boycotter's lie-strewn “Apartheid Wall.” Since no one expected an inflatable Pinocchio to suddenly appear, that left the boycotters sputtering and running to “daddy” (i.e., the school administration) to have the offending puppet taken down.

In a perfect world, the folks who came up with this brilliant idea would have determined in advance how to keep Pinocchio flying as long as the wall was standing. But such logistics (a subject for an upcoming chapter) should not distract us from the key point that an advantage in battle goes to those who can best pull off a surprise.

That inflatable prop was provided to a local student group by [Artists for Israel \(A4I\)](#), an organization that embodies the principle of always going where the enemy is not. For even as many friends of Israel work themselves into a lather when Roger Waters says something mean about the Jewish state during his 104<sup>th</sup> birthday concert, A4I is building bridges between Israel and

tattoo and graffiti artists one-third to one-quarter the age of the Pink Floyd singer, part of a generation whose response to the aging rocker's bigoted provocations is simply, "Who's Roger Waters?"

If you don't think we can win this war one tattoo artist or rap singer at a time, our side's recent success getting state governments, and even the federal government, to pass anti-BDS legislation represents an older generation's ability to win battles by fighting where our side is strong and the enemy is weak, in this case state houses or the US Congress. Regardless of where you stand on this particular tactic, the key takeaway is that we have options beyond ones that have become so routine that they have become useless.

One last example of how our side wins by not playing the role assigned to us comes from Oxford University where, during an umpteenth Oxford Union debate over the Middle East, students were asked to argue over the question of whether "[Israel is a rogue state.](#)"

The Oxford Debates were long-ago hijacked by anti-Israel activists committed to legitimizing questions regarding Israel's right to exist. During such events, everyone lines up along predictable patterns, makes familiar arguments, a vote takes place, and no one remembers the results. In this case, however, American student Gabriel Latner (arguing in support of the assertion that Israel *is* a rogue state) brilliantly redefined "rogue" so that it represented an accurate illustration of why Israel is unique among the nations due to its humanitarianism, compassion and positive human-rights record (vs. the non-rogue conventional and ruthless nations that surround her).

Needless to say, Israel's critics cried foul when faced with a lose-lose choice of either voting down their accusation or voting in favor of Latner's brilliant redefinition. But in this case there was no cheating involved since the Oxford Union is meant to challenge people to address a particular issue given the full range of rhetoric tools at the disposal of supporters and opponents of a question.

And unlike the many now-forgotten debates over Israel's perfidy (debates designed to package the same dreary propaganda message in the garb of Oxford robes), this story has lived on to become the stuff of legend, simply because one bold individual decided to surprise the world by not doing exactly what was expected of him.

It might be tempting to say that this simply represents a bit of wordplay that has no meaning in the "real world." But keep in mind that propaganda campaigns like BDS and efforts made to fight them are all about words and nothing else. Which is why we shall next turn to the subject of language.

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## 13 | The War of Words

If you don't think words play much of a role in a shooting war, contrast the range of options open to Israel's military the next time Hamas missiles fly if an Israeli counter-attack is cast as "defense against aggressors" vs. "a disproportionate response."

It has been more than a century since persuasive speech (traditionally referred to as *rhetoric*) stopped being a cornerstone subject studied by all educated people. This explains why elections are more about manipulating the public than convincing it, as well as why so few young people know how to respond effectively when proponents of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel utilize their war-words strategy on campuses and beyond.

One article can't do much to close the rhetoric gap between the manipulators and their intended victims. But a few key points regarding language and war might help move us in the right direction.

For starters, all attempts to use language to get someone to believe and do something can be categorized based on three [Modes of Persuasion](#). The first two are logic and emotion (traditionally referred to as *logos* and *pathos*). The third mode is *ethos*, a term that defies easy translation into English but refers to the vital ability to connect to an audience by addressing their needs and

concerns or otherwise letting them know you either care about them or are one of them.

Israel and its supporters tend to favor logical or logos-based appeals, best exemplified by the 1,000-word editorial (or, even worse, this 17,000 word essay). *Hasbarah*, the term Israelis traditionally use to describe their political diplomacy strategy, translates to “explanation,” and for whatever cultural reasons, our side tends to like to explain our positions in great detail through carefully constructed logos-based arguments that try to build valid conclusions on well-supported premises.

In contrast, arguments presented by anti-Israel propagandists tend to rely almost entirely on emotion (pathos), typified by the photo of the blood-drenched dead baby (a shocking image presented as a ghastly rejoinder to any argument about any subject). While BDSers might occasionally mimic the form of reasoned discourse, once they run into counter-arguments they cannot answer it doesn’t take long for the room to be filled with words and images targeted not at the head, or even the heart, but the gut.

Interestingly, the more an argument relies solely on logos or pathos the less effective it is at convincing others. Long logical arguments can be tiring to read or listen to, even when they’re not boring, which they often are to those not already invested in them. But purely emotional arguments can leave an audience feeling manipulated, even when they aren’t built on lies. In both cases, such lopsided arguments ignore the needs of an audience, specifically their need to not be lectured to or jerked around.

This gets us back to ethos, and one way to make an effective connection to those whom one is trying to reach is to carefully balance sound logic and honest emotion in a story that presents your case in concrete human terms.

For example, which of these two statements packs more of a rhetorical punch?

- Within days of a devastating earthquake striking Haiti, Israel had flown 220 doctors and set up a state-of-the-art mobile field hospital, providing rescue and health services to thousands of people;

or:

- Six year old Jessica Hartelin had good reason to believe her life was over after days buried under rubble caused by Haiti's recent earthquake. But she didn't count on courageous local residents pulling her to safety, or on the skill and dedication of Israeli doctors who had set up the only mobile field hospital in the country in order to give local Haitians like Jessica the chance at life.

In the first statement, Israel helps thousands while in the second it helps only one, and yet the personalization of the story gives the second statement far more rhetorical power which is reinforced, not diminished, by the fact that credit for her rescue is given to both Israel and Jessica's Haitian neighbors.

This comparison emphasizes the importance of using compelling narratives when presenting a case. Such use of narrative is imperative, given that our opponents are trying to use the human brain's tendency to gravitate towards stories (rather than lists of facts) by telling and retelling their tale of "Apartheid Israel," hoping that this fiction lodges permanently in the public's brain, impervious to our non-fictional rebuttals.

Speaking of fiction vs. non-fiction (or, more specifically, falsehood vs. truth) one last crucial rhetorical lesson has to do with the difference between being honest and being fair.

In a propaganda war, it is vital that our side sticks to telling the truth since (a) getting caught in a lie destroys a speaker's ethos quotient, and (b) just maintaining a lie-based narrative creates

tremendous cognitive burden on the liar. But beyond these utilitarian concerns, honesty is a personal virtue that every individual has an obligation to uphold (easy to do in our case, since the truth is on our side).

Fairness, in contrast, is *transactional*, in that we are under no obligation to treat an opponent fairly who is not playing fairly with us. For example, that fact that BDS proponents intentionally avoid any and all points made by our side means that they are not entitled to demand we respond to each and every accusation they hurl at the Jewish state – no matter how much they scream in our faces that we must.

Similarly, while it might seem unfair to wrap the excesses of the most violent and irresponsible chapters of Students for Justice in Palestine around the neck of that tiny chapter at your own school consisting of just a few soft-spoken undergraduates, such a line of attack is perfectly reasonable – indeed required – until the “movement” that group represents earns the right to be treated fairly by those under assault by the BDS project as a whole.

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## 14 | Forging Alliances

In warfare, few things represent a double-edge sword more than an alliance (except, perhaps, an actual double-edged sword).

On the positive side, if you want to double the size of your army without having to recruit, train or equip a single soldier, all you need to do is sign an alliance deal with someone with an equally large military force and voila! Instant scale!

But if the soldiers in that army you just allied with carry different weapons, fire different caliber ammunition, or speak a different language than the fighters in your ranks, suddenly this alliance comes at a cost in terms of logistics you didn't have to previously bear. Even without those organizational challenges, if your allies fight using unfamiliar tactics, or are led by people whose goals overlap but are not identical to your own, suddenly ensuring everyone in that alliance fights in common cause becomes a job you didn't have to do when you fought alone.

Alliances travel under different names in different areas of human endeavor. Businesspeople forge partnership while political actors put together coalitions. But the nature, including the positives and negatives of establishing and maintaining alliances, remain the same regardless of what they are called.

The virtue of alliances, or coalitions, in democratic politics is obvious given that victory tends to go to those who can muster the most votes. This is why we often bemoan the fact that our

opponents in the BDS propaganda wars seem to be more effective than we are in building bridges to other campus groups, especially minority groups who come out to support divestment initiatives pitched by organizations like Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP).

But to understand why this might be a misguided concern, you have to get past the numbers and look into the nature of the groups that are forming coalitions against Israel on campus.

For the most part, these groups are united by something other than Middle East politics, namely a radical agenda to control campus discourse. And within these coalitions, power flows to those who can demonstrate the highest levels of radicalism and most ruthlessly make demands on others. This is why you are likely to see feminist and gay-rights groups join BDS-endorsing coalitions while no one within those coalitions will even bring up the plight of women or gays in the Middle East, lest they be driven from the fold under a cloud of being right-wing [pinkwashers](#).

Such coalitions, while potent, are also unstable, prone to excess and vulnerable to (accurate) charges that they do not represent those in whose name they claim to speak, which explains why so many similar “movements” from years past are now forgotten. Pro-Israel students courting entrance into such organizations also face the more immediate problem that the price of admission is likely to include giving up decision-making authority to the larger group, all in the name of unreciprocated consensus politics (given that BDS supporters will continue to do as they please, even as they veto their opponents’ efforts to fight against them).

Winston Churchill, while no military genius, was probably the most gifted strategist of alliance formation in history. Similarly, Eisenhower’s greatest gift was not in battle tactics but in keeping the disparate elements of the unlikely alliance Churchill helped create shooting Nazis – rather than each other – until World War II was won.

While long-lasting alliances require enormous political skill and patience to pull off and sustain, there are simpler strategies appropriate for environments where turnover is high and political experience limited, such as college campuses, food cooperatives and other entities that tend to get targeted by BDS.

Such environments require pro-Israel activists to operate with a two-tier alliance structure. The first tier, which we can call an *Alliance of Affinity*, involves Jewish and pro-Israel groups working with as many organizations as possible that are not actively hostile to their interests. These can be political organizations, ethnic and religious communities, or groups focusing on issues like social justice, entrepreneurship or the environment.

Within such an Alliance of Affinity, Jewish students can fight for common causes while working to educate members on issues important to us. But such an alliance should not be counted on, and cannot be part of the decision-making process, when it comes time to deal with a specific controversy such as divestment vote within student government.

For those decisions must fall to a smaller *Alliance of Action* made up only of those united around a common goal, whether that be countering an enemy's move, or initiating our own moves against them. Such an alliance might form around an existing nucleus, such as a pro-Israel Hillel or active pro-Israel organization on campus, or come into being ad hoc. But wherever it originates, within this Alliance of Action there can be debate over tactics, but no doubts that a threat is real and no urging that the best course consists of everyone keeping their heads down.

This dual alliance structure provides solutions to many problems we often see on places like college campuses.

For example, at many schools Alliances of Action are already in place and centered on a campus Hillel with strong, pro-Israel leadership. But when strong adult leadership is lacking (or counter-productive), students generally have to acquiesce to established Jewish community leaders or try to shame

those leaders into doing things they'd rather not do (and thus will not do).

The two-tier alliance structure provides a better alternative: including anyone not ready to push necessary, immediate work forward into the Alliance of Affinity where they can be politely and respectfully cultivated, even as they are kept separated from the decision-making that needs to take place within the Alliance of Action.

Alliances of Action can be thought of as the equivalent of the focused project-based team that large organizations put together when they actually want to get something done. In general, size can limit the effectiveness of such teams, so bigger should not necessarily be considered better. And if surprise is going to be part of your tactical toolkit, fewer mouths mean fewer secrets potentially reaching a foe.

Alliance formation, which requires managing the needs of complex human beings, is the most difficult component of political action which is why people – especially young people – need to be exceptionally patient with themselves and everyone else since no decisions are ever going to make everyone happy. That said, many friendships (and even marriages) have emerged from the feelings of camaraderie generated by being members of an effective alliance.

Also keep in mind that an Alliance of Action does not need to become a permanent institution with its own name, admission policies and rules of engagement. Rather, it just needs to be ready to pull together and stay in existence long enough to do the work required to win.

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## 15 | Operational Art

General Norman Schwarzkopf, at the end of the 1991 Gulf War, summed up Saddam Hussein's military prowess by pointing out, "He is neither a strategist, *nor is he schooled in the operational art*, nor is he a tactician, nor is he a general, nor is he a soldier." [emphasis added]

While the world focused on a scoffing harrumph that preceded Schwarzkopf's list of his opponent's shortcomings, the inclusion of "operational art" in the list highlights that within the highest echelons of military planning, mastery of operational detail often plays a bigger role than even factors like bravery or skill-at-arms in determining who wins and who loses.

For purposes of this discussion, operational art can be thought of as the combination of planning and logistics, and the best military plans are not static — that is, they do not assume a single sequence of moves both sides will make. Rather, they are dynamic, including multiple branches that take into account different choices an enemy *might* make. And the best plans include enough flexibility to allow a general to pivot if (or, more often, when) a foe does something unexpected.

Logistics involve making sure soldiers, weapons, equipment and supplies will be available for any of the alternatives that are part of a plan, as well as maintaining the rapid transportation needed if

none of those alternatives comes to pass and personnel and gear are needed elsewhere.

Fortunately, fighting against the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement does not require the same level of operational artistry as does organizing one giant army to kick another giant army out of Kuwait. But the multi-branch planning and pre-positioning of material before the battle associated with “operational art” does have an analog in propaganda warfare.

By way of illustration, one of the best counter-attacks of the now predictable Israel-Apartheid Weeks took place at Columbia University this Spring when a group of pro-Israel students erected a 12-foot-high inflatable Pinocchio right next to the BDS-ers “Apartheid Wall,” causing the boycotters to fly into a panic and run to the administration to get the “threatening” puppet pulled down.

As mentioned previously, this was a brilliant use of surprise that pushed the enemy off-balance. And now that Columbia’s experience has taught us what that enemy will do in response (i.e., demand administrative action to get an opposing display removed), there are different combinations of planning and logistics that can be done to take advantage of likely repeats of this scenario. For instance:

- A pro-Israel campus group can research the official steps needed to set up their counter-display and, if appropriate, start the process of obtaining appropriate permissions. This will obviously eliminate the element of surprise we saw at Columbia, but it also gives our side the chance to mirror the exact same steps the boycotters have taken to set up their displays, restricting the choices of the powers-that-be to permitting or rejecting both displays (either of which is a victory for our side).

- If our side chooses to repeat a surprise display, having an attorney and reporters (or, better yet, several of each) ready to challenge any attempt to take down Pinocchio (or whatever else we come up with) can tie up decision-makers long enough to ensure no action is taken until “Apartheid Week” is over. This tactic takes advantage of the generally timid nature of administrators who will do whatever they can to avoid either a lawsuit or bad press.
- When Pinocchio came down at Columbia, the students behind that political action immediately began a “#FreePinocchio” campaign on Twitter that had some impact on campus discourse over the issue. So imagine what can happen if other groups prepare a full-on campaign along these lines in advance, papering campus with fliers, running articles and letters in the newspaper, and making sure the only subject under discussion during “Israel Apartheid Week” is how thin-skinned censors of the BDS “movement” ran to daddy to stop other people from exposing their lies.

Each of these sets of tactics reflects different elements of war fighting discussed in this essay, such as knowing the landscape of battle (which includes a predictable enemy and feckless administrators) and using compelling narratives (such as the story of BDS censorship and cowardice) to control debate.

Notice also that with two of the options listed above (#1 and #3), reusing the Pinocchio display is actually *not* the main campaign but rather a *feint* which disguises the real goal of preventing an “Apartheid Wall” from being permitted (tactic #1) or triggering a “Free Pinocchio” communication strategy that leaves the boycotters defending themselves during a week when they’d rather act as accusers (tactic #3).

These examples are not meant as specific recommendations for action, much less checklists for future activism. Rather, they

should serve to illustrate the kind of creative, multi-faceted tactics we could be deploying against our foes, rather than simply reacting to their provocations, often emotionally, and then fighting over whether such unplanned and ineffective responses represented “playing defense” vs. “going on the offensive,” a topic we can now return to with our military mindset to guide us.

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# 16 | Offense vs. Defense

## Revisited

As previously mentioned, one of the longest-running and least productive conversations we have as a pro-Israel community is over the efficacy of positive campaigning vs. “going on the offensive.”

Both sides in these debates actually begin from perfectly reasonable foundations. For example, advocates for positive campaigning (sometimes referred to as “Israel 21c campaigns,” named after a [website](#) that “goes beyond the conflict” by presenting inspiring news from the Jewish state in areas such as technology, medicine and the environment) point out that these sorts of stories “move the needle” with regard to the opinions of crucial “undecideds,” such as students who have no stake in either side of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

By “move the needle,” they usually mean that hard data – often in the form of survey- or focus-group-based research – provide scientific evidence supporting the argument that negative messages (such as those playing up faults in Palestinian and Arab society) turn off undecideds while positive, 21c-style messaging (especially stories that highlighting Israel’s desire for peace) moves opinion in the right direction.

“So what!” claim advocates of “going on the attack” (or words to that effect). Our enemy is on the assault, always attacking, constantly smearing the Jewish state using a social-justice vocabulary that easily negates 21c-style rhetoric. When fighting such an opponent, stories of Israeli drip-irrigation don’t cut it. And pretending otherwise, they sometimes argue, is just another example of the Jewish community (especially its leaders) burying their heads in the sand to resist unpleasant reality and avoid doing what has to be done.

If that critique of positive campaigning stings, it’s because some of it is probably ringing true. Rhetoric-wise, the vocabulary used to describe Israeli contributions to the environment and technology can’t compete against a campaign built around far more powerful words like “freedom” and “justice.” And while data generated from test-marketing might tell us something about immediate reactions to this or that message, it doesn’t provide answers to more important questions, such as whether a steady drip of anti-Israel venom poisons the body politic over the long term (even if this or that anti-Israel campaign turns off audiences).

On the other hand, while advocates for an attack-based strategy have a template to work from (turning the tables on Israel’s foes by telling the truth about them as forcefully as they lie about Israel), it’s not entirely clear our side can (or should) replicate the enemy’s tactics. Do we really want to start shouting their speakers off the stage, for example, or dragging civil society groups into the Middle East conflict by insisting they have no moral choice but to denounce our opponents?

The only thing that could motivate us to not just start but build and sustain such a negative campaign for the years (possibly decades) needed to make it effective would be sincerely held militant goals. In other words, just as the BDSers are ultimately motivated by a desire to see the Jewish state destroyed, we would have to harbor comparable goals in order to gin up the kind of raw

energy needed to keep a truly effective negative campaign going long enough to bite.

The problem is that we as a community do not harbor militant goals. In fact, I doubt even the most aggressive pro-Israel campaigner would claim their ultimate desire is to see Palestinians, the Arab world, or Islam destroyed. Absent such goals, however, it's not clear how "going on the attack" can scale past the occasional hit and run, a tactic often used not to harm the enemy but to demonstrate to fellow Jews that we're able to throw a punch.

The reason the two choices we seem to be stuck fighting over aren't satisfying is that they are largely based on the needs – especially the emotional needs – of the activist, rather than being built into a strategy that thinks first about the nature of the battlefield. Going on the offensive, even in small ways, frees us from feelings of helplessness as the BDSers launch their next lying assault on everything we hold dear. Similarly, it is much easier to get groups like college students comfortable with telling tales of microchips or holding hummus parties than asking them to deal with the ugly reality of the Middle East and campus hostility to Jews and Israel.

As mentioned at the end of Chapter 10, a good test of whether a tactic is strategic vs. emotional is asking an advocate of that tactic to explain how it fits into a series of steps required to meet a clearly stated strategic goal. If those steps seem implausible or contrived, or are unmoored from ultimate goals (making them ends in themselves), then it's likely that the tactic represents an emotional vs. a strategic response.

Perhaps it's possible that a series of aggressive anti-Palestinian campaigns will put our enemies on the defensive and shame our allies into uniting around a strategy based on escalating such campaigning for years or decades. But isn't it just as likely (possibly more so) that such tactics will stain our reputation, help our enemies justify their own escalation, and divide rather than unite the pro-Israel community? Similarly, it might be that with

enough technology fairs and hummus cook-offs we can overwhelm the “Israel=Apartheid” messaging of our adversaries. As we’ve already seen on college campuses, however, it’s child’s play for our foes to undercut all our positive campaigning with the simple message of “thanks for the cell phone and pita bread, but I’d prefer my freedom.”

Fortunately, the military mindset this essay is meant to engender provides options for getting beyond frustrating and seemingly fruitless debates over defense vs. offense, options which leave plenty of room for both positive (and effective) messaging and harsh (and, again, effective) attacks. And it is to that approach we shall turn to next.

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## 17 | Strategic Choices

While those fortunate enough to have served in the armed forces will have had first-hand experience viewing problems through a military lens, the military mindset is a useful tool available to anyone dealing with conflict, especially quasi-military conflicts like the propaganda war waged against Israel and its supporters.

Absent such a lens, it is easy to look at specific instances of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign (or other anti-Israel attacks) as isolated problems, often leading to ad hoc (frequently emotional) responses of varying levels of effectiveness. But once you realize that BDS is simply a tactic to further the propagandists' broader "Apartheid Strategy," all in the service of the ultimate goal of seeing the Jewish state destroyed, it becomes clear that anything done to thwart that ultimate goal is part of the war against BDS.

This means all efforts to strengthen the Jewish state militarily, economically and diplomatically should be seen as vital components of our response to the BDS threat. Israelis themselves obviously have front-line duties in all of these areas, but diaspora Jews and other Israel supporters have ample options for supporting them either directly or indirectly (through investment or continued support for a strong US-Israel alliance, for example).

Moving down the line, the most immediate direct military threat posed by anti-Israel propagandists is the role they play whenever a

shooting war begins between Israel and Hamas in the South or Hezbollah in the North. Nothing demonstrates the true nature of BDS more than their indifference to (if not outright support for) the arming of those militant groups during the periods between shooting wars (including now), coupled with the explosive protests they instigate the moment Israel shoots back.

It's easy to become frustrated – if not enraged – by the boycotter's hypocrisy, especially when it is presented in the language of peace, justice and progress. But getting past this understandable emotional response allows us to see they are simply playing the role propagandists have always played in war: maximizing the options of their allies while minimizing those of their enemies.

Neutralizing this threat means planning in advance to counter the most violent aspects of it by, for example, working with law enforcement to protect Jewish institutions from harm in the event of violent protests, such as those that broke out in France during the last Gaza war. In addition to fulfilling the community's responsibility to safeguarding fellow Jews, publicizing the need to do so can help us counter the boycotters' self-declared image as "peace activists."

That image can be further eroded in advance (i.e., now) through communications that stress the contrast between the boycotters' current indifference to Hamas war preparation vs. their claimed anti-war credentials once shooting goes in two directions. Portraying BDS as a weapon system comparable to a piece of artillery or a crate of hand grenades, in addition to being a novel line of attack that generates vivid imagery, also helps to undermine their own self-characterization as non-violent peace activists carrying on the legacy of Gandhi and Martin Luther King.

This is an example of a storyline that can serve as an element of our own counter-propaganda campaign, one that leverages previously described tools of rhetoric that have

demonstrated their effectiveness for centuries. And even if it's close to impossible to get the entire Jewish community onto the same page vis-à-vis messaging, at the very least we can all be using these tools to make our chosen messaging resonate with the audiences we are trying to reach.

With regard to fighting against specific BDS tactics, the core commandment of "Know your enemy" is particularly simple, since the forces of BDS are extremely predictable. They *will* target progressive institutions and try to get them to pass some kind of boycott or divestment resolution (no matter how trivial) which can then be passed off as representing the view of every man, woman and child in the organization. They *will* use any means necessary to accomplish this goal (from backroom deals to moral blackmail) with their entire campaign couched in a progressive vocabulary.

On campuses, they will try to ram more divestment resolutions through student government, if only to give themselves the opportunity to rail against the Jewish state before a captive audience for hours on end. And outside such official venues, we can expect the same speakers, the same movies, the same Apartheid Walls and hummus boycotts, the same shout-downs of Israelis and harassment of pro-Israel students that have become part BDS's familiar repertoire over the last decade.

Knowing this, we can set about making sure our side has forces on the ground ready to counter such threats. In a perfect world, these forces would outnumber and overwhelm the enemy. Given that this best-case scenario will be rare, however, history fortunately demonstrates that smaller forces can defeat larger ones (with the important caveat that you can't win a battle with a force of zero).

If we make the conservative assumption that most of the BDS fights we'll experience will be against forces as large or larger than our own, we need to make sure our troops are trained to do more than just respond knowledgeably to the Israel haters' lies and accusations. While knowledge of Jewish and Middle East history is

vital, we need to make sure they are also trained in alliance formation, political rhetoric and all the other methods of strategic thinking you have read about throughout this essay.

Given that BDS most resembles an ongoing set of skirmishes, rather than a full-scale set-piece battle, our tactics should be based on surprise and maneuver, utilizing feints and multi-layered tactics that can catch our enemy off guard and take advantage of their weaknesses, such as predictability, fanaticism, institutional instability and a tendency to overreach.

You will notice that this list does not include a recommended theme or overarching narrative around which all our campaigning should be based. Such powerful themes exist, and in the next chapter I'd like to introduce one of the best, as well as explain why counting on such a theme to win the day for us might not be our best strategic move.

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## 18 | Telling Our Story

Anyone involved with organized pro-Israel politics has likely gotten caught up in heated discussions over how to set a narrative and get activists to stick with it during the course of a campaign. Themes, messaging calendars, and lists of talking points are several of the devices that have been proposed, and sometimes implemented, to get our side to settle on and consistently tell the same story.

This desire to control a narrative is the perfectly reasonable response to the fact that our opponents, while devious and deceitful, are also quite disciplined with regard to staying on message. The false or truncated information they produce might vary from campaign to campaign, and their message might be fine-tuned to play on the vulnerabilities of a particular audience. But their central “Israel = Apartheid” message stays consistent, speaker after speaker, article after article, event after event.

For a variety of institutional and cultural reasons, our side struggles to maintain similar message discipline. The organizational structure of the Jewish community leads many independent groups to create their own strategies — including messaging strategies — which they prefer to convince other groups to use, rather than abandon their own creations to pick up someone else’s theme.

Culturally, while anthropology is beyond the scope of this essay, one need only watch a campus Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) debate, at which people line up to give one-minute comments at the microphone, to see the difference between our side and the enemy's. As just mentioned, the BDSers will never stray from message, repeating and reinforcing one another's points *ad nauseam*. In contrast, each pro-Israel student seems to feel the need to come up with a totally original formulation, or at least say something that's not been said by a previous speaker.

This long lead-in is meant to serve as notice that while the narrative suggested below can solve a number of the political and rhetorical problems with which our side struggles, there is no expectation that we are lost unless everyone adopts it moving forward.

To demonstrate the effectiveness of borrowing vs. creating from scratch, the core of this story derives from the work of the remarkable and prophetic [Ruth Wisse](#). Any additions are meant to highlight how this story can be deployed in the context of fighting the BDS propaganda wars.

Getting started (finally):

What event represents the nadir of the 20th century (if not all of human history)? Obviously, the Holocaust – the attempted murder of an entire people that gave rise to the term “genocide.”

And what represents the most glorious achievement of that same century? The ability of the remnant of that nearly murdered people to return to their homeland, create, defend and build their state, and ingather the exiles. In a word: “Zionism.”

Far from representing egotistical chauvinism, the stunning success of the Jewish state since its founding does not say anything special about the Jewish people. For any people ready to make the kind of self-sacrifice made by the Jews can achieve (and have achieved) the same results. In fact, if a people that recently lost a

third of their members can accomplish what Israel has accomplished, then anyone can do it.

This story (which can obviously be embellished and built upon) has a number of rhetorical strengths.

To begin with, it's a positive message. But unlike positive messaging built around Israel's gifts to the world in the realm of technology, medicine and cuisine, this story does not harken back to a diaspora weakness where Jews had to prove their worth to host societies. Rather, it harkens backwards and forwards to the most powerful story in Jewish history: the one we tell each year at Passover.

In addition to holding the Jewish people together for millennia, the Passover narrative of freedom and redemption has inspired the greatest human rights achievements in history, including the abolition of slavery, the Civil Rights movement and decolonialization (spearheaded, it should be noted, by Zionism). So while opponents of Israel can easily parry positive messages regarding Israeli drip irrigation and microchips by invoking words like "freedom" and "justice," highlighting Israel's creation as the modern-day retelling of history's most powerful tale of redemption allow us to take full possession of those powerful words.

Speaking of Israel's enemies, the narrative formulation noted above also provides a way to hit back at them without being perceived as "going negative." For by expressing humility and casting Israel's success as something any other people can achieve, we can present the most caustic critiques in the form of an outstretched hand. For instance:

*You don't have to raise another generation to hate Jews through lies and propaganda. No child should be brought up celebrating the stabber and bomber [hold up photo – briefly]. Israel demonstrates what you can achieve if you commit to building your own society vs. tearing down someone else's. You have the choice:*

*you can bequeath the people of the Middle East that future, or a future of ISIS, Hamas and endless suffering.*

Without question, the boycotters will squeal like stuck pigs at the mere mention of Zionism as synonymous with freedom, justice and liberation for all, versus their preferred characterization of racism and Apartheid. But given that they'll squeal equally loudly at any story we tell, why not tell the most powerful story imaginable, one which has a response to every negative counter-attack? For example:

*We understand that BDS talking points require you to mention racism and Apartheid in every sentence. And we are not going to respond by pointing out the racism, the sexism, the homophobia and other forms of Apartheid that riddle every region of the Middle East outside of Israel. Instead, we just want to offer the Jewish redemption story, the same story that ended slavery, inspired Martin Luther King, and created the state of Israel, which can be your story once lies, propaganda and war give way to commitment to build a better future.*

As noted earlier, there is no expectation that this become the standardized narrative strategy for everyone fighting the BDS propaganda wars. But just as some foundational knowledge of persuasive technique can make any message more powerful, hopefully this message can inspire others to craft their next speech, letter to the editor or editorial more strategically.

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## 19 | Closing Thoughts

This essay was written in hope that a different perspective – a military perspective – might help a Jewish community united around the defeat of BDS break out of some of the ruts we often get stuck in to achieve this worthy goal. So, in closing, I'd like to offer a few additional thoughts to those pondering whether what you have read represents a useful approach.

First, a mantra that can help us navigate the battle we are in and the battles to come should be: [Don't Panic, Don't be Complacent](#).

When I first used that phrase, it was in response to reasonable concerns that years of writing [fact](#) and [fiction](#) that depicted BDS as a loser (captured today in the Internet meme #BDSFail) might be downplaying a genuine threat, potentially causing us to drop our guard (thus the “Don't be Complacent” part).

Around that same time, a story I wrote that generated the most hostility among allies was [this one](#) which attempted to quantify the failure of BDS by showing the explosive growth of the Israeli economy and exports, as well as a surge of support for the Jewish state in the US, during the first decade of BDS activism. The anger such a story generated seemed to be coming from people who felt that with the Middle East exploding, campuses ablaze, and violent anti-Semitism breaking out across the world, we need to fight rather than spend time dwelling on graphs that seemed to be saying everything was OK.

Such sentiments, while understandable, tend to well up from emotion – including the very reasonable emotions of anger over BDS lies and calumnies and fear over violent and unpredictable global events. But, as you read in Chapter 10, emotion is a terrible place to start when deciding how to fight a war. For victory in war tends to go to those with the firmest grasp of objective reality (including the genuine strengths and weaknesses of both our enemies and ourselves), especially those who can keep their cool when making strategic decisions. Thus the advice: “Don’t Panic.”

Additional thoughtful criticism from friends in our mutual fight against BDS focused on use of the siege metaphor you read about in earlier chapters, with critics equating being besieged with being perpetually on the defensive. This highlights a second closing point: that military history can help us get past some of the heated, and ultimately sterile, arguments that tend suck up a lot of our energy.

Ongoing fights over “playing defense” vs. “going on the offensive” are perfect examples of arguments that can be answered by looking at wars past. I previously used one story of late Roman warfare (the Byzantine campaign to reclaim the Italian peninsula from Ostragoth conquerors), but every war fought by Rome and other armies of antiquity involved besieging some cities and fighting off besiegers in others (frequently simultaneously) as part of wider campaigns to achieve broader strategic goals.

These examples provide different categories for thinking about the same phenomenon. For if being besieged is not a pathetic form of “playing defense,” but a conventional military situation that warrants specific strategic and tactics to win, we can move from thought to effective action, rather than getting bogged down arguing over definitions of “offense” and “defense” more relevant to the pitched battle than the siege.

To see this same dynamic playing out today, one need only look at that nation we are all supposed to be fighting for: Israel. For the

IDF is not an army of conquest, but rather a military force trained to defend the nation from generations of besiegers. Strategies chosen to protect the land have involved keeping enemies out, but also taking the fight to foes and eliminating threats before they emerge, a set of varied and creative defensive and offensive tactics that have always been part of siege warfare.

I suspect few reading this would condemn the IDF as being stuck in a defensive crouch for not initiating battles beyond Israel's borders more often. Rather, Israel's Defense Forces are taking advantage of the military mindset you've been reading about in order to make realistic choices based on an objective assessment of both sides in a fight, as well the landscape on which the war is being fought.

Our own fight against the enemy's BDS propaganda arm, while far less dangerous than what the IDF faces, is no less important than wars being waged and battles being fought on the kinetic battlefield. So if we're looking at models for how to think about engaging in that war strategically, rather than emotionally, the IDF – one of the most successful militaries in human history – provides the perfect template.

Having just made mention of Rome and Jerusalem, the third and final point I'd like to close with is why we need to overcome general Jewish squeamishness with regard to embracing the vocabulary and mindset of warfare.

As Ruth Wisse points in in her book *Jews and Power*, devastating military defeats at the hands of Babylon and Rome followed by the miraculous survival of the Jewish people during millennia of military powerlessness has created in us an ambivalence regarding the efficacy of military strength, versus other virtues like piety, wisdom and ability to accommodate as a minority culture.

In general, caution regarding military (or any violent) solutions to human problems is a sign of societal strength and health. One need only witness what has befallen Israel's enemies, who have

been too eager to make violence a first choice, to see the cost of eagerness versus reticence vis-à-vis war. But there is one time when trying to avoid thinking like a warrior is unhealthy: when someone is waging war against you.

Through no choice of our own, we find ourselves on the battlefield against soldiers in the propaganda arm of a shooting war who travel under the name of BDS. It's unfortunate, but now that history has assigned us the task of fighting such an enemy, it behooves us to stop thinking like Jews and start thinking like Romans.