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The Arab Boycott of Israel Does it give any clues to Arab intentions?

In the current peace negotiations between the Arab states and Israel there is much pressure on Israel to make "accommodations for peace." No such gestures are ever being requested from the Arabs. One very important matter, the Arab boycott of Israel, is never even being discussed.

What are the facts?

The Background of the Boycott. The Arab states try to make the world believe that their hostility toward Israel is based on Israel's "occupation" of "Arab lands", which came under Israeli administration as a result of the 1967 Six-Day War. But the Arab boycott of Israel goes back even further—to 1946, two years before the state of Israel even existed.

How the Boycott works. The boycott works on several levels. The primary boycott prohibits Arab people and Arab states to do any business—with and in Israel. The

secondary boycott attempts to prevent businesses anywhere in the world from any economic activity with Israel and threatening them with economic retaliation if they do not conform. It is a very potent weapon, since most countries and most businesses are well aware that the large Arab market and its enormous oil wealth make it most unattractive to get into the bad graces of the Arabs. Little consideration is given to the fact that the boycott is a gross violation of international law. The U.S. is the one shining exception to the almost universal acceptance of this economic blackmail. There is also the tertiary boycott that punishes firms that deal with blacklisted businesses. And perhaps the most damaging aspect is the so-called "voluntary boy-

cott", by which companies, and in some cases entire countries, refrain pre-emptively from doing business with Israel in order to avoid retaliation by the Arabs.

The boycott also applies to international shipping, aviation and tourism: Most ships and airplanes calling on Israel are barred from Arab ports; airplanes enroute to and from Israel cannot overfly Arab countries. Israelis or any travelers with Israeli visas in their passports may not enter most Arab countries.

The Arab Boycott Office maintains a

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blacklist, which at last count included over 6,300 entries in 96 countries. In the United States

alone, over 12,000 firms each year receive requests from Arab firms for boycott compliance. In Europe and Asia, where, in contrast to the United States, boycott compliance is usually legal, the numbers are probably much higher.

The Cost of the Boycott to Israel. The primary damage of the boycott to the Israeli economy is that it prevents or considerably hampers investments in the country. That loss is estimated to be on the order of \$500 to \$600 million per year. The loss of potential trade with the Arab countries alone is on the order of over \$500 million per year. Because of the boycott, Israel's commercial exports are at least 10% less than they would otherwise be—a loss of about \$1.2 billion per year!

The Arab boycott is undisguised economic warfare against Israel. The boycott is totally unrelated to any territorial dispute the Arabs may have with Israel, since the boycott started over twenty years before any such territories came under Israeli administration. Its purpose is the strangulation of Israel—to achieve by economic means what the Arabs, despite many tries, have been unable to achieve by military means. But the greatest losers of the boycott may well be the Arabs themselves. Blinded by their hatred of Israel they have prevented the Middle East from becoming an area of growth and prosperity exceeding even the Asian Pacific Rim countries. Rescinding the almost 50-year old boycott would be an encouraging signal to the world and to the Israeli public. Their not bringing even such a gesture does give a clue that the intentions of the Arabs are not peaceful and that Israel is justified in proceeding with greatest caution in any peace negotiations.

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