

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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**REP. STEPHEN F. LYNCH**

Ranking Member

Subcommittee on National Security

*"Impact of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Movement"*

July 28, 2015 at 2pm in 2154 RHOB

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to thank you for holding this hearing to examine the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Movement – also known as B.D.S. I'd also like to welcome today's witnesses and thank you for helping this Subcommittee with its work.

It is the foreign policy of the United States Government to oppose boycotts against the State of Israel. Israel is our strongest regional ally and the economic isolation of Israeli goods and services will only frustrate our efforts aimed at achieving a lasting peace in the Middle East.

The United States has consistently opposed the boycott of Israel declared by the Arab League in 1948. Most recently, Congress passed and President Obama signed an omnibus appropriations bill in December of 2014 that included language opposing the Arab League boycott as an impediment to peace in the region and called for its immediate termination.

As with the Arab League boycott, the United States Government opposes the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Movement that commenced in 2005 under the organization of Palestinian civil society groups. As recently stated by State Department spokesperson John Kirby, the United States has *"strongly opposed boycotts, divestment campaigns, and sanctions targeting the State of Israel, and will continue to do so."*

Some members of Congress have questioned the Administration's willingness to enforce an anti-boycott provision included in the fast-track trade bill passed last month. The provision seeks to discourage foreign partners from implementing economic sanctions against the State of Israel and also makes reference to *"Israeli-controlled territories."* In response to this language, the State Department has reiterated strong U.S. opposition to boycotts against Israel while also reaffirming similarly longstanding U.S. policy on Israeli settlement activity. As noted by the State Department, *"every U.S. Administration since 1967 – Republicans and Democrats alike – has opposed Israeli settlement activity beyond 1967 lines... This Administration is no different, and our policy remains firm and unchanged."*

Contrary to the criticism that has been voiced by some of my colleagues, I believe that the Administration has been very clear in consistently applying the longstanding policy of the United States to oppose boycotts against the State of Israel. I would also note that the bipartisan sponsors of the anti-boycott language included in the trade bill – Senator Cardin and Senator Portman – have been equally clear in stating that they never intended their amendment to legislate on settlements or contravene U.S. policy on the settlements. Rather, the language seeks to further discourage boycotts against Israel in accordance with long-standing policy.

I am aware that the B.D.S. Movement has had some impact. The bipartisan Congressional Research Service notes that divestment from Israel and boycotts of Israeli products and services have occurred to a certain extent. Mr. Birnbaum will be testifying today on the economic impact of boycotts against his company, SodaStream, an Israeli manufacturer that had a manufacturing facility in the West Bank.

In December of 2013, the National Council of the American Studies Association, a nationwide academic organization, voted to boycott Israeli academic institutions.

In recognition of the value of academic freedom and cooperation to foster peace in the Middle East, 134 members of Congress from both parties, including myself, sent a letter to the association in strong opposition to their decision. .

Mr. Chairman, I look forward to discussing these and other issues relating to the B.D.S. Movement and I yield the balance of my time.

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