Roger Waters In His Own Words

Roger Waters, the co-founder and lead singer of Pink Floyd, has become increasingly involved in anti-Israel activism as a leading supporter of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement. Waters will embark on North American tour starting in July 2020, with appearances at major arenas across the U.S. and Canada.

In a 2011 op-ed, Waters announced he was joining the BDS movement and encouraged other artists to refuse to perform in Israel. In recent years, he has issued numerous public calls on fellow artists to boycott Israel along with statements making harsh allegations against Israel and the “Israel lobby,” some bordering on anti-Semitism. Waters is considered a leading and influential voice within the BDS movement.

Below are select statements and positions Waters has taken in support of BDS and against Israel:

- In May 2019, Waters appeared to compare Israelis to aliens in a rant about Israel hosting the 2019 Eurovision contest.
- In an April 2019 op-ed regarding Madonna’s performance in the Israel-hosted Eurovision contest, Waters wrote:
  - “To perform in Israel is a lucrative gig but to do so serves to normalise the occupation, the apartheid, the ethnic cleansing, the incarceration of children, the slaughter of unarmed protesters ... all that bad stuff.”
In a September 2018 interview with a German publication, Waters argued that there is a conspiracy to block criticism of Israel in the mainstream US news media, stating:

- “At any rate, in the USA, the press is controlled by corporations. Journalists there who deviate from the narrative that "Israel is just defending itself" can encounter difficulty. Regarding Israel, the mainstream media are still biased. I get my news these days from blogs, some of which are written by people who used to work for mainstream periodicals and lost their jobs because they criticised Israel.”

In a bizarre display in August 2018, Waters projected the phrase “resist Israeli anti-Semitism” during a concert in Poland.

In a July 2017 online interview with BDS movement founder Omar Barghouti, Waters made a number of anti-Israel and pro-BDS statements, including:

- “I’m not sure that there any much harsher regimes around the world than this [Israel], actually, if you look at it.”

- In reference to a question about how Israel uses Hasbara (translation: “explaining” as in public diplomacy) to reject being labeled an Apartheid state: “The thing about propaganda – again, it’s not hard to go back to Goebbels or the 1930s. You understand the tactic is to tell the big lie as often as possible over and over and over and over again. And people believe it.”

- “Boycott is a very specific strategy and tactic that you can use as a tool of protest in very certain specific situations. It’s a realistic tactic to affect the government and the people of Israel.”

- “I think that artists who say that they can somehow improve the situation by going and playing in Israel and having conversations with Israeli artists are wrong. I’ll tell you why I think they’re wrong, and that is because there are many, many Israeli Jews who are part of the BDS movement ... and any of those people will say, 'No, I don’t want to sit
around a campfire with you, what I want you to do is not cross the picket line.”

- During an appearance in October 2016 at the Desert Trip festival, Waters urged people to support the BDS movement, adding that he was sending his love to California university students “who are standing up for their brothers and sisters in Palestine and supporting the BDS movement...”

- In 2016, Water’s narrated a documentary titled: The Occupation of the American Mind – a film about “Israel’s public relations war in the US.” The film claims to examine the reasons why Americans see Israel as the victim, despite “war crimes and illegal occupation” committed by Israel. Waters’ states the following: “Defending a country like Israel by operating for collective murder and the genocide of occupied people is not defense. Slaughter of people contained in a prison surrounded by borders guns tanks airplanes is not defense. Palestinians are stateless people. We believe Palestinians should have the right to defense themselves.”

- In October 2015, Waters accused musician Jon Bon Jovi, who had recently performed a concert in Israel, of standing “shoulder to shoulder” with “the settler who burned the baby”, a reference to the extremist Israeli Jews responsible for the Duma firebombing of a Palestinian family that killed a toddler and members of his family.

- In December 2013, he gave an interview to CounterPunch.org where he accused the “extraordinary powerful” American “Jewish lobby” in the music industry of silencing critics of Israel.

- In March 2013, Waters was interviewed on The Electronic Intifada. In the interview, Waters accused Israel of maintaining an apartheid state and claimed that he has asked other musicians to not play concerts in Israel. He also stated that he played a role in convincing Stevie Wonder to not play a concert at a fundraiser for the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and alleged that the U.S. media takes instructions from somewhere to “not report these things
to the American public.” An article about the interview with Waters was published in Rolling Stone.

- In February 2013, Waters wrote a solidarity statement to the Brooklyn College chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine. He alleged that the students were facing censorship efforts and that they “have come under attack from powerful political and media forces for trying to shed light on the predicament of the good peoples of Palestine and Israel.”

- Waters spoke in the United Nations on November 29, 2012 to mark International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Waters accused Israel of “international crimes,” such as “apartheid” and “ethnic cleansing” and also alleged that Israel's treatment of the Palestinian people is similar to the Nazi treatment of citizens in France, Holland, Poland, or Czechoslovakia during World War II. Waters said, “History tells us that the invasion and occupation of a land and the subjugation of its people almost always creates a resistance. Ask the French or the Dutch or the Poles or the Czechs, the list goes on. This crisis in Gaza is a crisis rooted in occupation.”

- In July 2012, Waters wrote an op-ed in The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette to coincide with the Presbyterian General Assembly conference. The op-ed was written to support a divestment resolution that was being voted on during the conference. Waters described Israel as guilty of “apartheid” and spoke out in support of “wide-ranging” Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaigns against Israel. He also alleged that “Israel lobby groups in the United States and elsewhere” have tried to “intimidate and vilify” him because of his efforts.

- For a period of time in 2010, Waters' shows featured video of an array of symbols that placed the Jewish Star of David next to dollar signs. Waters defended himself, writing on his website that “there are no hidden meanings in the order or juxtaposition of these symbols.” However, by an October 6, 2010 show in New York City, the video no longer showed the two symbols next to each other.