

Not Allowed to Win: Lebanon's Sporting Boycott of Israel

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Since 1955, Lebanon has had a policy of boycotting Israel in international sporting tournaments. While this policy can be credited with expelling Israel from pan-Asian sporting events in the 1970s, this article argues the main victims of Lebanon's boycott have been Lebanese athletes and Lebanon itself. While some countries such as Iran have followed the Lebanese example, countries like Qatar and the United Arab Emirates have developed a more pragmatic approach.

At the 2016 Summer Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, conflict between Lebanon and Israel became visible to a global audience: Lebanese athletes refused to share a bus with the Israeli team to the opening ceremony. Both teams were taken to the ceremony separately.¹ Four years earlier at the 2012 Summer Olympic Games in London, a similar incident occurred: Caren Chammas, participating for Lebanon in judo, refused to train alongside the five Israeli judo athletes (four men and one woman), demanding that a curtain screen be erected so that the athletes would not have to see each other. The London 2012 organizing committee officials complied with Lebanon's request and split the training gym in two.² Without the judo practice and bus incidents, the participation of Israel and Lebanon would have gone unnoticed at the London and Rio Olympics. While neither country won a single medal at the 2012 London games, Israel won two bronze medals in 2016, placing 77th in the medal ranking.³

These two incidents shed light on Lebanon's sporting boycott of Israel. Since World War II, such boycotts have been a popular tool of state intervention in sports, "used as a vehicle for registering disapproval of a state." According to Barrie Houlihan, sporting boycotts have provided

an opportunity for a large number of states to send diplomatic signals to each other on a very public stage. States used the episode to demonstrate independence and/

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1. "Rio 2016 Olympics: Lebanese Athletes Refuse to Travel with Israel Team," *BBC*, August 6, 2016, <https://bbc.in/2aSgzbn>.

2. Justin Cohen, "World Cup 2022: Concern Over Qatar's Position on Israel," *Jewish News* (UK), June 14, 2014, <https://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/concerns-qatars-lack-clarity-israel/>; Jacquelin Magnay, "London 2012 Olympics: Lebanon Judo Team Refuse to Train alongside Israel," *The Telegraph* (UK), July 27, 2012, www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/olympics/judo/9433680/London-2012-Olympics-Lebanon-judo-team-refuse-to-train-alongside-Israel.html.

3. BBC, "Olympics, Rio 2016: Medal Table," <https://bbc.in/2b0s2u7> (updated August 22, 2016).

or solidarity, to build stronger links with particular states or groups of states or to loosen ties with particular power blocs, and to demonstrate commitment to causes.⁴

Examples include the boycott of the 1976 Summer Olympics in Montreal by African countries due to the International Olympic Committee's refusal to ban New Zealand after its rugby team toured apartheid South Africa in 1976; the boycott of the 1980 Summer Olympics in Moscow by the United States and most of its allies in protest of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan; and the boycott of the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles by the Soviet Union and many of its allies "to retaliate for the damage done in 1980."⁵ For Allen Guttman, the "failure of the African boycott in 1976 had demonstrated that an Olympic boycott is an ineffectual tool to work political change, but it was attractively available and relatively inexpensive in political and economic terms."⁶

However, since the end of the Cold War, no countries have engaged in full Olympic boycotts. In fact, the two most recent Olympic Games both set records of participating countries with 88 participating at the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia, and 205 at the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio. Lebanon, however, has maintained a six-decade-long sporting boycott of Israel. What makes this boycott unique is not that it dates back to 1955, but, unlike previous Olympic boycotts, Lebanon continues to participate in the games while refusing to directly compete with Israel.

Lebanon's boycott of Israel is one of the last sporting boycotts in the global world of sports. This article asks what are the reasons for and consequences of this boycott? Apart from a review of the academic literature and press coverage of Lebanese sports as well as Lebanese-Israeli relations, this work is based on eight in-depth interviews conducted in Beirut in September/October 2015. The objective was to not limit the analysis to one group of people but to speak with different stakeholders, including athletes, sports administrators, academics, and journalists. Interviews were held with two former Lebanese Olympians (one man and one woman, both in track and field), the chair of the Lebanese Olympic Committee, the head of Lebanon's delegation to the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio,⁷ the Lebanese member of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the head of the Lebanese Gymnastics Federation, a senior editor of the London-based pan-Arab newspaper *Al Hayat* who also serves as media officer of the Lebanese Football Association, and a professor from Lebanon's Notre Dame University–Louaize who specializes in sports management. Stakeholders discussed their opinions toward and experiences with Lebanon's sporting boycott of Israel. Each was asked a series of open-ended questions, allowing for fluid interactions and for respondents to provide multifaceted answers.⁸

4. Barrie Houlihan, "Politics and Sport," in *Handbook of Sports Studies*, eds. Jay Coakley and Eric Dunning (London: Sage, 2008), p. 219.

5. Allen Guttman, *The Olympics: A History of the Modern Games*, second edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), p. 159.

6. Guttman, *The Olympics*, p. 150.

7. The person interviewed was the head of Lebanon's delegation leading up to the games, but, due to a personal injury, he could not attend the Olympics in Rio. A replacement was therefore appointed to chair the Lebanese delegation.

8. For more on the research approach, see "Introduction to Research," University of Surrey website, <http://libweb.surrey.ac.uk/library/skills/Introduction%20to%20Research%20and%20Managing%20Information%20Leicester/index.htm> (last updated October 3, 2012).

POLITICAL BACKGROUND OF LEBANON'S SPORTING BOYCOTT OF ISRAEL

Four years after the first Arab-Israeli war of 1948, which ended only in a series of armistices,⁹ Lebanon and Israel both participated in the 1952 Volleyball Men's World Championship in Moscow. As the result of a draw, the tournament placed Lebanon and Israel in the same group despite the fact that the two countries were still nominally in a state of war. The match between the two national teams took place on August 19, 1952, and Israel won 3–0. However, both Israel and Lebanon failed to qualify for the next stage of the tournament. Therefore, in the matches for places 7–11, Lebanon and Israel played against each other again. This time, on August 22, 1952, Lebanon won 3–2 in a close game, winning the fifth set 16–14. Out of the 11 teams in the tournament, Lebanon ended in 9th place, while Israel finished in 10th.¹⁰

More than six decades after Israel and Lebanon faced off at the Men's Volleyball World Championship, the Lebanese team was not even willing to share a bus with its Israeli counterpart at the 2016 Summer Olympics. What led to such a deterioration of the relations between both countries? In 1955, Lebanese Parliament passed Decree Number 10228 for the Establishment of a Temporary Department in the Ministry of the National Economy, the Office of Boycotting Israel. While Lebanon's criminal code forbade any interaction with citizens of enemy states dating back to the country's independence in 1943, the law of 1955 specified Israel in particular as such a state. According to this law, which is still valid today, Lebanese citizens can neither marry nor do business with Israelis, cannot buy Israeli products or publications, and cannot even have a conversation with an Israeli nor become friends with one over the Internet. However, Lebanese scholars and journalists are allowed to publish in the same publications as Israelis, provided the publication is not Israeli. Lebanese citizens can participate in the same conferences, festivals, and sporting events as long as no direct communication with Israelis takes place.¹¹

The 1955 boycott law developed in the context of the decision made four years earlier by the Arab League, of which Lebanon is a founding member, to boycott Israel. According to a paper by Martin Weiss, the Arab League boycott focuses on economic sanctions and consists of three tiers. The primary boycott prohibits citizens of an Arab League member from buying from, selling to, or entering into a business contract with either the Israeli government or an Israeli citizen. The secondary boycott extends the primary boycott to any entity worldwide that does business in Israel. A blacklist of global firms that engage in business with Israel is maintained by the Central Boycott

9. Hilal Khashan, "The Evolution of Israeli-Lebanese Relations: From Implicit Peace to Explicit Conflict," *Israel Affairs*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (2009), p. 332.

10. Fédération Internationale de Volleyball, "Men's World Championship 1952," www.fivb.org/EN/Volleyball/Competitions/WorldChampionships/2014/Men/pastresults.asp?year=1952 (accessed November 21, 2015).

11. "The Rules of Lebanese-Israeli Engagement," *NOW* (Lebanon), September 18, 2011, https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/reportsfeatures/the_rules_of_lebanese-israeli_engagement_. For full Arabic text of the legislation, see Lebanese University, Legal Information Center, إحدات قسم موقت في ملك وزارة الاقتصاد الوطني [Establishment of a Temporary Department in the Ministry of the National Economy (The Office of Boycotting Israel)], Decree No. 10228, September 13, 1955, www.legallaw.ul.edu.lb/LawView.aspx?opt=view&LawID=188420.

Office and disseminated to Arab League members. The tertiary boycott prohibits an Arab League member and its nationals from doing business with any company that deals with companies blacklisted by the Arab League.¹²

OTHER COUNTRIES' EXPERIENCE BOYCOTTING ISRAEL

In June 2015, a leaked Israeli government report estimated that boycotts potentially cost Israel's economy \$1.4 billion a year.¹³ While international boycotts have caused and continue to cause some damage to Israel, they have not led to the economic collapse of the state as initially intended by the Arab boycott. Donald Losman's 1972 analysis of the Arab boycott of Israel still applies today:

Despite the boycott's effectiveness (in terms of imparting significant economic damage), it has been almost totally without political success. The aim of destroying Israel via economic sanctions has not worked. Israel's growth has been remarkable — due to a combination of many factors — despite the boycott. In its absence, the development possibilities would be even greater.¹⁴

There are different reasons why the boycott has not been more effective. One is the tremendous help Israel receives from the US. According to Israeli journalist Moti Bassok,

The United States of America is Israel's big brother and really loves us. Israel does not have and apparently will not have another friend like it. According to a recent Congress report, Israel is the country that has received more cumulative American aid than any other country since the end of World War II. Since it began in 1962, American military aid to Israel has amounted to nearly \$100 billion. For the past decades the United States has been regularly transferring aid of about \$3 billion annually.¹⁵

In addition to US aid and investments by diaspora Jews (particularly from the US), from 1953 to 1965, the Israeli economy benefitted from reparation payments for Nazi crimes, which were based on the Luxembourg Agreement of 1952 between Israel and West Germany. Historian Yeshayahu Jelinek concluded that the agreement “contributed to economic development, defense and immigrant absorption.”¹⁶ Interestingly, cash payments were only a minor part of the bilateral agreement. Israel needed raw materials to promote production. Therefore, about 80% of the reparations were handed over in the form of shipments of all kinds of capital goods.

12. Martin A. Weiss, “Arab League Boycott of Israel,” Congressional Research Service, Report No. RL33961 (August 25, 2017).

13. John Reed, “Israel: A New Kind of War,” *Financial Times* (UK), June 12, 2015, <https://on.ft.com/2tNIAte>.

14. Donald L. Losman, “The Arab Boycott of Israel,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Apr. 1972), p. 122.

15. Moti Bassok, “U.S. Military Aid to Israel Exceeds \$100 Billion,” *Haaretz*, August 18, 2014, www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.611001.

16. Yeshayahu A. Jelinek, “Implementing the Luxembourg Agreement: The Purchasing Mission and the Israeli Economy,” *Journal of Israeli History*, Vol. 18, No. 2–3 (1997), p. 209.

Apart from the boycott being neutralized through US help, German reparation payments, and diaspora investments, a main explanation for the limited success of the Arab boycott of Israel is its uneven enforcement. While maintaining a strong symbolic importance, the boycott is, according to Weiss, only “sporadically applied and ambiguously enforced,” and “enforcement of the secondary and tertiary boycotts has decreased over time.” Weiss concluded, “The boycott may not currently have an extensive effect on the Israeli economy.”¹⁷ For Losman, the Arab “boycott operations are characterized by a high degree of arbitrariness and unpredictability.”¹⁸ He referred to evidence of some direct exchanges between Israel and its Arab neighbors via smuggling and false invoicing, concluding that the application also varies because the enforcement seems to depend on “how badly certain products or services are needed by the Arab country in question.”¹⁹

The boycott regulations are not binding on member states of the Arab League. While the Arab League’s boycott of Israel served as a model for some national regulations such as Lebanon’s 1955 boycott law, other Arab League countries “publicly support the boycott while continuing to quietly trade with Israel.”²⁰ Egypt and Jordan signed peace treaties with Israel in 1979 and 1994, respectively. Meanwhile, Qatar established trade relations with Israel in 1996 and engages in direct contact with officials of the Jewish state, including Israeli leaders visiting Qatar, and vice versa.²¹ In 1994, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) announced that its six member states (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates) would only enforce the primary boycott. Mauritania never applied the boycott and established diplomatic relations with Israel in 1999. Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia do not enforce the boycott.²² However, when a government does not enforce the boycott, or even when a state has a peace treaty with Israel, this does not mean that there are normal relations with the Jewish state. Egypt is one such example where widespread criticism of Israel is prevalent despite the existence of a peace treaty. *Al-Ahram*, a state-run newspaper in Egypt and considered among the most prestigious in the Arab world, decided to ban interviewing Israelis in 2009 and to not participate in events that Israelis take part in.²³

For decades, boycotting Israel was mainly a concern at the regional and continental level. However, recently boycotting Israel has become a more global issue, linked partly to growing disillusionment with the Middle East peace process more than 20 years after the Oslo Accords of 1993: no Palestinian state has been created, Israeli settlements are still expanding in the West Bank, and Israel has constructed a separation wall across the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The failure of the peace process has made the politics of boycotting Israel more popular, as the creation and successes of the globally operating Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Movement (BDS), founded in 2005, demonstrate.

17. Weiss, “Arab League Boycott of Israel,” p. 4.

18. Losman, “Arab Boycott of Israel,” p. 108.

19. Losman, “Arab Boycott of Israel,” p. 112.

20. Weiss, “Arab League Boycott of Israel,” p. 2.

21. Samira Shackle, “What’s Behind the Proposed Visit of Qatari Royal to Israel?” *Middle East Monitor* (UK), January 23, 2014, www.middleeastmonitor.com/20140123-whats-behind-the-proposed-visit-of-qatari-royal-to-israel/.

22. Weiss, “Arab Boycott of Israel,” p. 3.

23. Jack Khoury, “Egypt Media Group Agrees on Massive Israel Boycott,” *Haaretz*, September 28, 2009, www.haaretz.com/news/egypt-media-group-agrees-on-massive-israel-boycott-1.7079.

In 2015, the European Commission issued guidelines for labeling products made in Israeli settlements on occupied land, arguing that settlements constitute an obstacle to a two-state solution. European pension funds have been divested from companies with links to Jewish settlements.²⁴ While there is growing sympathy with BDS in Europe, North American governments have taken a different stand: In February 2016, Canada's parliament passed a motion formally condemning BDS, stating that it would demonize and delegitimize the State of Israel.²⁵ The United States Congress passed anti-boycott legislation in the late 1970s to discourage US citizens and businesses seeking to operate in the US from cooperating with the secondary and tertiary boycotts by the Arab League.²⁶

In contrast to their governments, there are other stakeholders in North America who are more sympathetic to the boycott of Israel: US pension fund TIAA-CREF (now known simply as TIAA) removed several businesses from its portfolio in 2013; among them is Veolia, a French company that helped Israel run a tram into occupied East Jerusalem. American mainline Protestant churches — such as the Presbyterian Church (USA), the United Church of Christ, and the United Methodist Church have divested from companies like G4S, a company involved in Israel's prison system. Canadian and US student associations have also passed resolutions to support boycott measures against Israel.²⁷

Although efforts to boycott Israel economically are increasing beyond the Arab world, sporting boycotts have not become a major tool of the boycott movement. While the BDS movement compares Israel with South Africa under white minority rule, it is more difficult to make that case when it comes to sports. Sorek even considers Israeli sports as “an integrative enclave.”²⁸ Unlike apartheid-era South Africa, which had different sports governing bodies for each officially recognized ethno-racial group (White, Black, Asian, Coloured), “mainstream Israeli football [i.e., soccer] is not explicitly or uniquely divided along ethno-nationalist lines, unlike much of the rest of Israeli society and politics.” According to Malcolm MacLean, “in the absence of sport-specific issues, a sport-focused campaign may find it difficult to gain traction.”²⁹ Arabs are able to participate in Israeli sports leagues and are also nominated for Israeli national teams. There were no Arabs among the 47 athletes that represented Israel in the 2016 Summer Olympic Games, but six Arab players were on the Israeli soccer team at the Union of European Football Associations' 2013 Under-21 Championship.³⁰ However, in an article on

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24. “1976: African Countries Boycott Olympics,” *BBC News: On This Day, 1950–2005*, July 17, 1976, <https://bbc.in/1mTqsF0>.

25. Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA), “Canada’s Parliament Rejects BDS Movement,” *The Times of Israel*, February 23, 2016, www.timesofisrael.com/canadas-parliament-rejects-bds-movement/.

26. Weiss, “Arab Boycott of Israel,” p. 7.

27. Palestinian BDS National Committee, “Palestinian and Brazilian Civil Society Launch ‘Olympics without Apartheid!’ Campaign,” BDS website, August 17, 2015, <https://bdsmovement.net/news/palestinian-and-brazilian-civil-society-launch-olympics-without-apartheid-campaign>.

28. Tamir Sorek, *Arab Soccer in a Jewish State: The Integrative Enclave* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

29. Malcolm MacLean, “Revisiting (and Revising?) Sports Boycotts: From Rugby against South Africa to Soccer in Israel,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol. 31, No. 15 (2014), p. 1,848.

30. Jon Dart, “Israel and a Sports Boycott: Antisemitic? Anti-Zionist?” *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (Mar. 2017), p. 170; Sayed Kashua, “My Dad Taught Me Never to Root for the Israeli delegation, Now I Understand Why,” *Haaretz*, August 13, 2016, www.haaretz.com/opinion/premium-1.736333.

Israeli media treatment of Arab athletes, Eran Shor and Yuval Yonay concluded, “It is evident that the Arab-Palestinian football players who excel on the turf are prevented from serving as a channel to convey the voice of Palestinian citizens in Israel. When they try to fulfill such a role, they are vehemently silenced and sent back to the turf.”³¹

LEBANON’S BOYCOTT OF ISRAEL AT THE OLYMPIC GAMES

The first Olympic Games that were held after the Lebanese Parliament passed its 1955 boycott law were the 1956 Summer Olympics in Melbourne, Australia. Lebanon, along with Egypt and Syria, boycotted the games in protest of Israel’s invasion of Egypt following Egyptian president Gamal ‘Abd al-Nasser’s nationalization of the Suez Canal.

As Victor Cha noted on boycotting mega-sporting events, “Sport’s high profile is often deemed an effective medium for getting a message out to a wide audience. It also symbolically conveys one’s political intentions. Furthermore, sport is relatively costless to the government relative to other means of statecraft such as war or economic sanctions.”³² More specifically on the 1956 Olympic boycott, Pierre Tristam noted, “Lebanon, which barely had an army to speak of and traditionally sent minute delegations to the Olympics, usually in weightlifting, showed solidarity the only way it could.”³³ Until 1955, “Lebanon had successfully maintained a neutral position in inter-Arab affairs and its president had even mediated inter-Arab disputes.”³⁴ Hilal Khashan described Lebanon in the 1950s as being “the least hostile Arab state” toward Israel and the “most unwilling to involve the country in anti-Israeli activities.”³⁵ For many, the Suez Crisis transformed the perceived nature of the Arab-Israeli conflict, forcing Lebanon to decide which side of the Arab world it would be on: pro-West or pro-Nasser. On November 10, 1956, two weeks prior to the opening ceremony in Melbourne, the Lebanese Olympic Committee announced its boycott of the games: “Sportsmen in Lebanon appreciate the efforts of Egyptian sportsmen and extend their wishes to Egypt for its final successes in the present crisis.”³⁶

Lebanese sports federations are highly politicized bodies, and the Lebanese Olympic Committee is no exception. While there is no official distribution of powers inside the national sport system, sport remains informally structured according to political and religious allegiances. Around 80% of the country’s sporting federations have a president and secretary general from the same state-recognized religious denomination as one another. Key positions in Lebanese sports are usually political appointments.³⁷ This makes political interference (such as in the case of the 1956 Olympic boycott) easier than in other countries where sports and politics are more separate spheres.

31. Eran Shor and Yuval Yonay. “‘Play and Shut Up’: The Silencing of Palestinian Athletes in Israeli Media,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (2011), p. 244.

32. Victor D. Cha, *Beyond the Final Score: The Politics of Sport in Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 9.

33. Pierre Tristam, “Arab Countries’ 1956 Olympic Boycott over the Suez Crisis,” *About.com* (a version from January 16, 2013, available at <http://archive.fo/FULiL>).

34. Caroline Attié, *Struggle in the Levant: Lebanon in the 1950s* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003), p. 100.

35. Khashan, “Evolution of Israeli-Lebanese Relations,” p. 327.

36. Tristam, “Arab Countries’ Olympic Boycott over the Suez Crisis.”

37. Nadim Nassif and Mahfoud Amara, “Sport, Policy and Politics in Lebanon,” *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (2015), pp. 449, 451.

Lebanon's boycott of the 1956 Olympics received only limited global attention. First of all, the absence of Lebanon, Egypt, and Syria did not affect the quality of the sporting competitions, since athletes from the three countries were not likely to win medals. Second, while Lebanon's boycott is often described as the first political boycott of the Olympic Games and the beginning of an era of political sporting boycotts, it was in fact only one of several boycotts of the 1956 Olympics in Melbourne. The Netherlands, Spain, and Switzerland, which were all more likely to have an impact on the sporting events with their absence, boycotted the games in Australia in protest of the Soviet Union's decision to send troops to Hungary to suppress the anti-regime uprising. The People's Republic of China represented the third and final boycott of the 1956 games; it withdrew in protest of the inclusion of the Republic of China (Taiwan).

The boycotts were an unfortunate development for Australia, since none of them had anything to do with the host country. More unfortunate still was that the boycotts would have likely been avoided if the Olympics had been held in another country. Unlike most Summer Olympics, the Melbourne games were held in November because Australia is located in the southern hemisphere. If the Olympic Games had taken place in Europe or North America (like they usually were at that point), they would have likely been held in July, August, or maybe September. Thus competition would have been over by the start of the Hungarian uprising or the breakout of the Suez Crisis, both in October. (Even the 1964 Summer Olympics in Tokyo, which were held between October 10 and 24 of that year were complete by October 29, the date in 1956 when Israel invaded Egypt.)

Despite the many military confrontations with Israel and its 1976–2000 occupation of southern Lebanon, 1956 was the only time Lebanon engaged in a full Olympic boycott, even throughout the 1975–90 Lebanese Civil War.³⁸ Instead of boycotting, Lebanon developed a different approach toward Israel in the Olympics: participating in the games but avoiding direct contact with those whom Lebanon considered “the enemy.”

BEYOND THE OLYMPICS: LEBANON'S BOYCOTT OF ISRAEL IN INTERNATIONAL SPORT

According to one Lebanese track and field athlete who participated in the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles, the organizing committee had anticipated the tensions between Lebanon and Israel. The Olympic Village was divided into three different university campuses, and Israeli and Lebanese athletes were placed in separate compounds. The Lebanese Olympic Committee informed its athletes in advance about the Lebanese legislation restricting them from communicating at any time with their Israeli counterparts.³⁹

38. However, Lebanon did not participate in a controversial event during the 1972 Summer Olympics in Munich. Along with other Arab countries and the Soviet Union, Lebanon refused to attend a memorial ceremony for the 11 Israeli Olympians and 1 German security officer killed in a botched rescue operation after a Palestinian group, the Black September Organization, took the Israeli delegation hostage. The Arab countries, including Lebanon, also protested against the IOC's decision to fly the Olympic flag and the flags of all participating countries at half-mast. Simon Reeve, “Olympics Massacre: Munich — The Real Story,” *Independent* (UK), January 22, 2006, <https://ind.pn/2ioZ2O1>; Amichai Alperovich, *Israel in der Olympischen Bewegung* [Israel in the Olympic movement] (Cologne: Deutsche Sporthochschule Köln, 2008), pp. 205–6.

39. Interview by the author with a former Lebanese Olympian, September 28, 2015, Beirut.

According to Lebanese sports officials interviewed for this research, the IOC is aware of the Lebanese position toward Israel, and as the example of athlete housing at the 1984 Olympics demonstrates, attempts are often made to anticipate potential conflicts discreetly without officially communicating them. However, incidents have still occurred, as demonstrated by the aforementioned cases of the 2012 and 2016 Olympics in which Israeli and Lebanese judo athletes were supposed to practice next to each other (London 2012) and share a bus with each other (Rio 2016). The issues were resolved by erecting a curtain screen (2012) and assigning them to different buses (2016); however, it is more difficult to avoid contact between the two countries in competitions. According to all persons interviewed for this research, no incidents have occurred at an Olympic contest, since Lebanese and Israeli athletes have never competed directly against each other at the games. However, the 1955 boycott law has affected other international championships.

There are two recent examples of the consequences of the 1955 boycott law on global sport competitions. In 2010, 16-year-old Lebanese athlete Christopher Finan travelled to Tijuana, Mexico, for the World Taekwondo Junior Championships. The result of the draw was that Finan had to compete in the first round against Gil Haimovitz, a 15-year-old Israeli athlete. Instead of competing against an Israeli, Finan chose to forfeit the fight. “He paid for his own training and even bought his own ticket, which cost over \$1,000, to reach Mexico, but he was in for an ugly surprise,” reported the English-language news outlet *NOW*.⁴⁰

At the 2015 Summer World University Games in Gwangju, South Korea, Lebanese fencer Rita Aboujaoude withdrew from the women’s épée individual, which had been “her favorite event,” because she was drawn against a fencer from Israel. Aboujaoude was luckier than Christopher Finan at the taekwondo championships because she was also registered in another event, the women’s foil individual.⁴¹ At the 2007 World Artistic Gymnastics Championship in Stuttgart, Germany, a Lebanese judge was scheduled to sit next to an Israeli judge. After being informed of the seat order, the head of Lebanese gymnastics called the head of the international federation and asked that the two judges be separated in order to avoid any interaction and to ensure that no pictures could be taken of them together.⁴²

For a long time, the problem of how to deal with Israeli athletes occurred only at the Summer Olympic Games. While Lebanon has participated in the Winter Olympics since 1948 (except in 1994 and 1998, when they had no qualifying athletes⁴³), Israel only began to compete in 1994. Although Israeli and Lebanese athletes participated in different competitions at the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, the case of the 2010 Winter Olympic Games in Vancouver shows that there was some flexibility in the application of Lebanon’s boycott law. In the men’s slalom, both Israeli and Lebanese athletes

40. Ana Maria Luca, “Lebanese Athletes Cannot Defeat Israel,” *NOW*, April 4, 2010, https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/reports/features/lebanese_athletes_cannot_defeat_israel_.

41. “Lebanese Badminton and Fencing at the 28th Summer Universiade Gwangju 2015,” *Sports961* (Lebanon), July 15, 2015, <https://sports-961.com/lebanese-badminton-and-fencing-at-the-28th-summer-universiade-gwangju-2015/>.

42. Interview by the author with a Lebanese sports official, October 23, 2015, Beirut.

43. Sports Reference, “Olympic Sports: Lebanon” www.sports-reference.com/olympics/countries/LIB/ (last updated 2016).

participated. Ghassan Achi represented Lebanon, while Mikail Renzhyn started for Israel.⁴⁴ Since slalom athletes start one after another, a Lebanese athlete can participate in the same event with an Israeli without violating the boycott law because there is no direct encounter between the two. This means that, de facto, a boycott of Israeli sports does not happen in all sports, only in those such as fencing or martial arts where athletes are dueling directly.⁴⁵

The aforementioned examples may be an incomplete list of incidents, since not all cases are reported in the media nor could they be recounted during interviews conducted for this research. Only a few athletes communicated their refusal to compete with an Israeli athlete as openly as Christopher Finan. One of the interviewed sports officials said to the researcher that instead of just openly refusing, “there are some tricks.” One common method is to claim to be injured. This is the preferred method to avoid competition with Israelis and to circumvent sanctions such as bans in future competitions by international sporting federations.⁴⁶

A much-reported case at the 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens occurred when Arash Miresmaeili, an Iranian world judo champion and carrier of his country's flag in the games' opening ceremony, was not willing to compete against an Israeli: “Although I [had] trained for months and was in good shape, I refused to fight my Israeli opponent to sympathize with the suffering of the people of Palestine and I do not feel upset at all,” Miresmaeili said. Iran's sports officials were quoted in newspaper articles saying that Miresmaeili should still be paid the \$115,000 prize the Iranian Olympic medal winners were promised by Iran's Olympic committee.⁴⁷

There were a number of similar incidents at the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio and the qualifying events for them. In June 2016, Syrian boxer 'Ala Ghassoune refused to compete in a qualifying fight against an Israeli, stating, “I quit the competition because my rival was Israeli, and I cannot shake his hand or compete against him while he represents a Zionist regime that kills the Syrian people.”⁴⁸ At the Olympics themselves, Joud Fahmy, who lived in the United States but represented Saudi Arabia in the female judo competition, forfeited a first round fight. Israeli media described her move as a tactic to avoid facing Gili Cohen from Israel in the second round of the competition. The Saudi Arabian delegation claimed Fahmy had been injured.⁴⁹ Unlike Fahmy, Egyptian judoka Islam El Shehaby did not forfeit his fight against Israeli judoka Or Sasson in Rio. However, after losing

44. International Olympic Committee, “Vancouver 2010: Alpine Skiing; Slalom Men,” www.olympic.org/vancouver-2010/alpine-skiing/slalom-men (modified June 3, 2017).

45. At the 2017 Summer Universiade in Taipei, a Lebanese runner was scheduled to be competing in the same race as an Israeli. Beforehand, the Lebanese delegation was unsure of whether they would be violating Lebanese law by competing. After consideration, the decision was made to allow Lebanon's Christophe Boulos to run in the race since he and Israel's Imri Persiado were only two of the eight runners in that race and would not interact with each other directly.

46. Interview by the author with a Lebanese Olympian, October 9, 2015, Beirut.

47. The Associated Press (AP), “Iranian Judo Champion Refuses to Face Israeli,” *The New York Times*, August 14, 2004, <https://nyti.ms/2ATiaem>.

48. “Olympics in Rio: Not All Fun, Games for Israeli Athletes,” *CBN* (US), August 13, 2016, www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/world/2016/august/olympics-in-rio-not-all-fun-games-for-israeli-athletes.

49. “Saudi Judo Forfeits Rio Match, Apparently to Avoid Israeli,” *The Times of Israel*, August 7, 2016, www.timesofisrael.com/saudi-judoka-forfeits-rio-match-apparently-to-avoid-israeli/.

the fight, Shehaby refused to shake Sasson's hand — an action widely reported in the international media. Shehaby was sent home by the Egyptian delegation and reprimanded by the IOC for his actions.⁵⁰

At the 2016 Summer Paralympic Games in Rio, the Algerian women's goalball team arrived late, missing their first two games against the United States and Israel. While the Algerian team claimed they had traffic issues, many suspected that the delay was politically motivated to avoid playing against Israel.⁵¹

Before the 2012 Summer Olympics in London, IOC president Jacques Rogge said that any Olympic athlete who boycotted a competition in which he or she would have faced an Israeli opponent would be punished:

If an athlete is genuinely injured or ill, then of course it is understandable. But we will examine every case thoroughly with an independent medical team, and if the medical team does not ratify the decision of the first doctor, then the athlete will be punished. We have clearly told the [national committees] that refusal to compete against another athlete is totally forbidden.⁵²

When Rogge refers to “we,” he means the 99 members of the IOC, including one Israeli and one Lebanese who have known one another for a long time and have participated in many common sessions. Toni Khoury from Lebanon was an IOC member from 1995 until 2015, and Alex Gilady from Israel has been in the IOC since 1994. The IOC demonstrated in October 2015 that it is serious about its nondiscrimination principle: When Kuwait denied an entry visa to an Israeli official for the Asian Shooting Championships, the IOC stripped the tournament of its status as an Olympic qualifying event, arguing that “The Olympic Charter must apply for all Olympic Qualification competitions.”⁵³

In 2012, the anti-Israeli boycott also became a topic in domestic Lebanese sports. Lebanon's Parliament clarified the 1955 law with new legislation that prevents sports clubs from recruiting foreign players who had previously played for Israeli clubs.⁵⁴ At the time the law was passed, there were eight basketball players in the Lebanese professional basketball league who had previously played in Israel. One of the players, Sam Hoskin, was even allowed to become a Lebanese citizen while playing for Lebanon's national team.⁵⁵

50. Karolos Grohmann, “Egyptian Judoka Sent Home over Handshake Refusal with Israeli,” Reuters, August 15, 2016, <https://reut.rs/2z7tGFR>.

51. “Rio Paralympics: Algeria Goalball Team ‘Did Not Boycott’ Games,” *BBC*, September 12, 2016, <https://bbc.in/2mwTHZj>.

52. Agence France–Presse, “IOC Warns Athletes Not to Boycott Israeli Opponents,” *Haaretz*, July 24, 2012, www.haaretz.com/israel-news/sports/ioc-warns-athletes-not-to-boycott-israeli-opponents-1.453181.

53. AP, “Kuwait Loses Olympic Qualifying Event over Visa Denial,” *USA Today*, October 29, 2015, <https://usat.ly/2yRDAXR>.

54. Dany Abboud, “Khazzouh, the Latest to Join Sagesse Revolution, Signs Six-Year Deal,” *The Daily Star* (Lebanon), October 20, 2012, www.dailystar.com.lb/Sports/Basketball/2012/Oct-20/192107-khazzouh-the-latest-to-join-sagesse-revolution-signs-six-year-deal.ashx.

55. Roi Kais, “Hezbollah TV: Basketball Players from Israel May Be Mossad Spies,” *Ynetnews* (Israel), December 23, 2011, www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4165779,00.html.

Some months after the law had passed in early 2012, one of the leading Lebanese basketball clubs, Sagesse, announced “the most lucrative contract in Lebanese basketball history.”⁵⁶ Julian Khazzouh signed a six-year deal worth \$350,000/year for the team that has, within the sectarian environment of Lebanese sports, a clear Maronite-Christian identity.⁵⁷ The signing of the Australian-Lebanese player was discussed as controversial in some media outlets because Khazzouh had played the previous 2011/12 season in the Israeli league with the ‘Ironi Ramat Gan club. The argument was that athletes who have previously played in Israel “may have been recruited by [the] Mossad,” referring to Israel’s spying agency, the Institute for Intelligence and Special Operations (*ha-Mosad le-Modi’in u-le-Tafkidim Meyuhadim*).⁵⁸ Sagesse responded that Khazzouh played in Israel with his Australian passport and said that he would be an asset to the national team. Although Khazzouh started playing for Sagesse in mid-2012 without any government interference, he quit his contract with Sagesse for unknown reasons after three years, never accepted invitations from the national team, and left the country for Australia in April 2015, before the Lebanese basketball season had even ended.⁵⁹

CONSEQUENCES FOR LEBANON OF THE SPORTING BOYCOTT OF ISRAEL

An effect of the sporting boycott of Israel is that Lebanon is not able to host international championships. While Lebanon hosted events such as the Asian Football Confederation’s Asian Cup in 2000 and the Francophonie Games in 2009, it cannot host any sporting events that potentially include Israel. It is the policy of all international sporting federations that the host country of world championships and other international competitions must issue entry visas for all participants, regardless of their country of belonging or personal characteristics such as religion, race, gender, etc.⁶⁰ Hosting mega-sporting events is a common tool used to project the image of a country to a global audience and to stimulate tourism and trade. While other countries in the Arab world such as Qatar are aggressively using the hosting of international sporting events to advertise their countries on the global stage, Lebanon’s sporting boycott of Israel limits the country to a continental audience.⁶¹ It cannot use international sports to gain soft power on the global stage. Joseph Nye coined the term *soft power* to describe a country’s

ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments
 . . . When you can get others to admire your ideals and to want what you want,

56. Dany Abboud, “Curious Khazzouh Leaves Sagesse Reeling,” *The Daily Star*, April 11, 2015, www.dailystar.com.lb/Sports/Basketball/2015/Apr-11/294090-curious-khazzouh-leaves-sagesse-reeling.ashx.

57. Danyel Reiche, “War Minus the Shooting? The Politics of Sport in Lebanon as a Unique Case in Comparative Politics,” *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (2011), pp. 261–77.

58. Quoted in Kais, “Hezbollah TV.”

59. Abboud, “Khazzouh, the Latest to Join Sagesse Revolution.”

60. Interview by the author with the media officer of the Lebanese Football Association, October 2, 2015, Beirut.

61. Danyel Reiche, “Investing in Sporting Success as a Domestic and Foreign Policy Tool: The Case of Qatar,” *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (2015), pp. 489–504.

you do not have to spend as much on sticks and carrots to move them in your direction. Seduction is always more effective than coercion.⁶²

Sport is a popular tool for gaining soft power because of its mass popularity and, therefore, visibility. Given Lebanon's lack of military and economic power, organizing international sporting events could be used as a vehicle toward attaining global recognition and advancing geopolitical goals.⁶³

However, to many in the West, Lebanon's boycott has been undermined by the Israeli government's ability to neutralize critics with accusations of anti-Semitism.⁶⁴ For example, a Lebanese participant in track and field at the 1984 Summer Olympic Games in Los Angeles interviewed for this article said "one has to put the boycott in the political context, otherwise the Lebanese people look stupid." The context is the 1948 Arab-Israeli war and its consequences for Lebanon and other countries in the region such as Jordan and Syria. According to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), there are about 5 million Palestinian refugees as a result of the 1948 war, the creation of the State of Israel, and the eviction of Palestinians from their homes. Palestinian refugees represent an estimated 10% of the population of Lebanon. There are 449,957 registered Palestinian refugees and 12 recognized Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon.⁶⁵ If Israeli athletes were to perform in international sporting events held in Lebanon, there would likely be heavy protests by Palestinians and serious security concerns for the visitors.

Even for sporting events outside Lebanon, there is a rationale for the boycott, argued a scholar and specialist on Lebanese sport politics: "Imagine an Israeli wins a competition and a Lebanese athletes [*sic*] comes in second; both would stand together on the podium, the Lebanese would have to listen to the Israeli anthem, the anthem of a country his country does not recognize."⁶⁶ One Lebanese Olympian told me that at the age of 16, she came home from an international youth competition with a souvenir given to her by an Israeli athlete. After finding out about it, her parents were alarmed and gave her instructions to avoid any contact with Israelis at future competitions.⁶⁷

In one conversation we had, representatives from the Lebanese Olympic Committee and national sport federations recalled how their Israeli colleagues would always try to interact with them at international competitions, an attempt that they would ardently refuse. The head of the 2016 Lebanese Olympic delegation clarified that "it's not because of the law, we don't want that." The chair of the gymnastics federations added: "How can we interact with the enemy who does not respect our borders and enters on a

62. Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (Cambridge: Public Affairs, 2004), p. x.

63. Scarlett Cornelissen "The Geopolitics of Global Aspiration: Sport Mega-Events and Emerging Powers," *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol. 27, Nos. 16–18 (2010), pp. 3,008–25.

64. Dart, "Israel and a Sports Boycott," p. 178.

65. UNRWA, "Where We Work: Lebanon," www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/lebanon (accessed October 6, 2015).

66. Interview by author, September 25, 2015, Beirut.

67. Interview by author, October 14, 2015, Beirut.

daily basis into our airspace? We are not against Jews, we are against Israel and Zionism.” The head of the delegation seconded: “I come from a village in the South that was occupied for 25 years by the Israelis. They destroyed everything.”⁶⁸

While the Ministry of Youth and Sport has had ministers from different parties since it was established in 2000, the ministry's director of sport has always been a member of the Amal Movement. Derived from an Arabic acronym for the Lebanese Resistance Regiments (*Afwaj al-Muqawama al-Lubnaniyya*), a Civil War-era Shi'i militia, Amal (which also means “hope”) is a Shi'i party that belongs to the March 8 Alliance, a bloc of parties that is pro-Iranian, in favor of the Syrian government of Bashar al-Asad, and whose name is taken from the date of a large 2005 rally in Beirut that opposed calls for Syria to withdraw from Lebanon. One of the leading factions in March 8 is Hizbullah (“the party of God”), another Shi'i party, that, among other things, “seeks to restore Arab-Muslim historical rights in Palestine and is totally against any ceasefire, truce, land for peace, peace negotiations, or normalization of relations with Israel.”⁶⁹ According to Augustus Richard Norton, Hizbullah “is likely to retain its dominant role in Lebanon,” since it is the strongest military force in the country and has veto power because it is part of the Lebanese consensus government.⁷⁰

Lebanon has three options for the future. First, it could try to convince other countries to join its boycott of Israeli athletes to isolate Israel in the global world of sports, as happened in the 1960s and 1970s on the continental level in Asia. An example to follow on the global level would be the boycott of South Africa. The country was banned from the Olympics from 1964 until 1992 in protest of its apartheid regime.⁷¹ In 1976, 26 African countries boycotted the Summer Olympics in Montreal, in opposition to the IOC's refusal to ban New Zealand after its rugby team toured South Africa in 1976.⁷² The chances of the Arab world uniting in a similar way are low, particularly since some Middle Eastern countries have started to develop a more pragmatic approach toward Israeli sports. Most prominently is Qatar, which assured the International Federation for Association Football (FIFA, from the French *Fédération internationale de football association*) in its bid for hosting the World Cup in 2022, that Israel (assuming it qualifies) would be welcome: “We have consistently stated that all will be welcome for the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Qatar will comply with all FIFA rules.”⁷³ This is a credible assurance, given that Israeli athletes have already competed in sporting events in Qatar; for example, five Israeli swimmers swam in the 2014 World Swimming Championships in Doha.⁷⁴ Qatar is strategically using sports as a domestic and foreign policy tool that contributes to national security and gaining soft power.⁷⁵ Joining the Lebanese sporting

68. Interview by author, October 23, 2015, Beirut.

69. Joseph Alagha, *Hizbullah's Documents: From the 1985 Open Letter to the 2009 Manifesto* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011), p. 19.

70. Augustus Richard Norton, *Hezbollah: A Short History*, updated edition (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. xi.

71. However, South Africa had some bilateral sporting relations in cricket and rugby union (“rebel tours”) that weakened the boycott, as MacLean elaborated in “Revisiting (and Revising?) Sports Boycotts.”

72. “1976: African Countries Boycott Olympics.”

73. Cohen, “World Cup 2022.”

74. Allon Sinai, “Five Israeli Swimmers in Qatar for Worlds,” *The Jerusalem Post*, December 3, 2014, www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Five-Israeli-swimmers-in-Qatar-for-Worlds-383501.

75. Reiche, “Investing in Sporting Success as a Domestic and Foreign Policy Tool.”

boycott of Israel would jeopardize Qatar's overall political objectives. The same applies to the UAE: In 2009, Israeli tennis player Andy Ram participated in the Dubai Tennis Championships for the first time.⁷⁶

While convincing all Middle Eastern countries to join its sporting boycott might be difficult, Lebanon could also choose a second approach: to convince international sporting federations to not pair its athletes with Israeli counterparts. Lebanon is not alone in such an approach. For example, the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) decided in 2014 that Russian and Ukrainian national and club teams would not meet at UEFA tournaments. In the past, similar decisions were made on Armenian and Azerbaijani teams as well as those from Russia and Georgia.⁷⁷

A third option would be to amend or repeal the 1955 boycott law to allow Lebanese athletes to compete with their Israeli counterparts. Since a repeal is unlikely in a country where Hizbullah has de facto veto power, the boycott law could at least be modified and limited to economic activities, but even this measure is highly unlikely.

AVOIDING HOSTILITY: ISRAEL'S MOVE FROM ASIA TO EUROPE

Because of the size of the event, direct contact at the Olympic Games between Israeli and Lebanese athletes is not likely. For example, at the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio there were 306 events across 28 sports and 11,303 participants, among them only 9 (in 7 sports) from Lebanon and 47 (in 17 sports) from Israel. At the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, there were 98 events and 2,800 participants. The Israeli delegation consisted of five competitors in three sports, while two represented Lebanon in one sport.⁷⁸

Direct contact is more likely between Lebanese and Israeli athletes on the regional level, since both countries are located on the same continent. There are two competitions under the patronage of the IOC in which both countries are (in theory) eligible to compete — the Asian Games and the Mediterranean Games. Because of the nominal state of war between Israel and Egypt, Israel could not participate in the first Mediterranean Games in Alexandria in 1951. Barcelona did not invite Israel for the 1955 games for the same reason, arguing that if Israel were invited, Egypt would not attend. Israel then strongly lobbied on the continental as well as the international level to be included in the third Mediterranean Games in 1959 in Beirut. The Lebanese Organizing Committee argued that an invitation to Israel would not be possible because of the daily incidents at the Lebanese-Israeli border, the resistance of all Arab countries,

76. Richard Jago and Owen Gibson, "‘New Snipers Please’: Dubai Welcomes Israeli Tennis Star," *The Guardian*, February 25, 2009, www.guardian.co.uk/sport/2009/feb/26/ram-dubai-open-tennis. Just a week before allowing Ram in, the UAE government refused to grant a visa to another Israeli player, Shahar Pe'er, to the women's competition; the Emirati government was fined \$300,000 for the refusal.

77. Alexey Mosko, "UEFA to Separate Russian and Ukrainian Soccer Clubs in European Cups," *Russia Beyond the Headlines*, July 21, 2014, www.rbth.com/sport/2014/07/21/uefa_to_separate_russian_and_ukrainian_soccer_clubs_in_european_cups_38391.html.

78. IOC, "This Was Rio 2016: The Olympic Games in Numbers," August 22, 2016, available on the Internet Archive at <https://web.archive.org/web/20161126023119/https://www.rio2016.com/en/news/rio-2016-the-olympic-games-in-numbers>; IOC, "Factsheet: Sochi 2014, Facts and Figures; Update: February 2015" (uploaded June 10, 2016), https://stillmed.olympic.org/Documents/Games_Sochi_2014/Sochi_2014_Facts_and_Figures.pdf.

and security concerns for Israeli athletes in Lebanon.⁷⁹ IOC president Avery Brundage supported the Lebanese position: "I am in complete sympathy with your point of view. Moreover, I cannot understand why people should will to go where they are not wanted."⁸⁰ In the end, the Beirut games took place without Israel and under the patronage of the IOC. Israel was never able to participate in the Mediterranean Games, but it was more successful in lobbying for full participation in the Asian Games.

Since Israel was only recognized by the IOC in 1952, it therefore missed the first Asian Games in 1951 in Delhi. Israel first participated in the continental event in 1954, when the games were held in Manila. However, when the Asian Games were held in Jakarta in 1962, the government of Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim-majority country, "banned Israel from participating as an act of solidarity with other Muslim states and in protest of U.S. Middle East policy."⁸¹ In turn, the IOC forbade the hoisting of the Olympic flag at the Asian Games in Jakarta and suspended Indonesia from the 1964 Summer Olympics in Tokyo. Israel participated again through the 1974 Asian Games. That year, Israel had bid to host the tournament in Tel Aviv but lost out to Tehran. At that point, Israel's relations with Iran were not as hostile, and Israel sent 61 athletes to Iran, the largest delegation it had ever sent to the Asian Games. Several countries refused to compete with Israel, including the Pakistani soccer team and the Kuwaiti basketball team.

The next Asian Games in 1978 were originally supposed to be hosted in Pakistan, but Thailand agreed to host after Pakistan unexpectedly decided not to host. Due to financial difficulties, Thailand turned to the Arab oil states for help funding the games. They agreed on the condition that Israel would not participate, as it had the previous times the Asian Games had been hosted in Bangkok, in 1966 and 1970. Thailand accepted, and the Asian Games Federation made a formal decision to exclude Israel from the games. One of the reasons given was that the security costs for protecting Israeli athletes would be too high.⁸² In 1982, India hosted the Asian Games and refused to invite Israel due to the lack of diplomatic relations between the two countries and the Israeli invasion of Lebanon earlier that year. During those games, the new Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) was established, replacing the Asian Games Federation (AGF). While Israel had belonged to the AGF, it was denied membership in the OCA.⁸³

Israel's sporting situation in Asia showed the difficulties in finding regional partners to cooperate with and can be summarized as following: "Israel has been locked in a state of enmity with its Arab neighbors, including those with whom it signed peace treaties."⁸⁴ The exclusion from the 1978 Asian Games marked the end of Israeli participation in Asian sports. The country began to focus its efforts on joining European sporting associations. Opposed by the Soviet Union at first, Israel was only able to join the UEFA and the European Olympic Committees (EOC) in 1994, after the end of the Cold War.⁸⁵

79. Alperovich, *Israel in der Olympischen Bewegung* [Israel in the Olympic movement], p. 254.

80. Alperovich, *Israel in der Olympischen Bewegung* [Israel in the Olympic movement], p. 258.

81. Cha, *Beyond the Final Score*, p. 97.

82. Alperovich, *Israel in der Olympischen Bewegung* [Israel in the Olympic movement], pp. 286–87.

83. Alperovich, *Israel in der Olympischen Bewegung* [Israel in the Olympic movement], p. 292.

84. Hilal Khashan, "The Energy Factor in Eastern Mediterranean Relations," *Études helléniques/Hellenic Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (Autumn 2014), p. 163.

85. Alperovich, *Israel in der Olympischen Bewegung* [Israel in the Olympic Movement], p. 294.

According to MacLean's proposed theory of sporting boycotts, they "operate in a market determined by monopolistic cartels, so analysis of likely and actual effectiveness must address: (a) access to alternatives in sender states, (b) access to alternatives in target states."⁸⁶ Israel's move from Asian to European sports has provided the country with an opportunity to compete in an alternate sports arena. Joining European sports also served "Israel's powerful desire to normalize its global position."⁸⁷ Consequently, Lebanon's sporting boycott of Israel can hardly affect Israel's "national psychological wellbeing," a second component of MacLean's three-tier model on the effectiveness of boycotts. Israel would only be impacted if its athletes were banned from competing in international sporting events such as continental championships and the Olympic Games, something that has happened only to South African athletes. Only the third criterion of MacLean's model, that the sporting boycott is "part of [a] broader suite of isolating activities," applies to Lebanon's sporting boycott of Israel, if one takes the campaigns of the BDS movement into account.

According to Hilary and Steven Rose, "Israel's increasingly successful positioning as a European nation" refers not only to Israel's membership in European sports associations but also to its inclusion in the European Research Area and in cultural events such as the Eurovision Song Contest.⁸⁸ While Israel is not boycotted in Europe as it has been in Asia, the Middle East conflict occasionally becomes visible there. For example, in 2007, Ashkan Dejagah, an Iranian-born soccer player of the German under-21 youth team who had lived in Germany since he was two-years old, asked his coach to be excused from playing a match against Israel in Tel Aviv. A German newspaper quoted Dejagah: "There are political reasons. Everyone knows I'm a German-Iranian. I have more Iranian than German blood in my veins. Besides, I'm doing this out of respect. After all, my parents are Iranian. I have nothing against Israel. But I'm worried about having problems later when traveling to Iran."⁸⁹

When Wales played against Israel in a 2016 UEFA European Championship qualifier game in Cardiff in September 2015, the Football Association of Wales announced that fans could be ejected from the stadium if they waved the Palestinian flag, and would face a stadium ban of up to three years if they were caught showing solidarity with Palestine at the match against Israel. That same month, the Scottish clubs Dundalk, Celtic, and St Johnstone were all handed fines by the UEFA for breaching disciplinary regulations when their supporters raised the Palestinian flag.⁹⁰

Another controversial issue was the UEFA European Men's Under-21 Championship in June 2013 hosted by Israel. More than 50 soccer players from European clubs signed a statement that condemned the decision to award the hosting of the tournament to Israel "as a reward for actions that are contrary to sporting values,"

86. MacLean, "Revisiting (and Revising?) Sports Boycotts," p. 1,842.

87. MacLean, "Revisiting (and Revising?) Sports Boycotts," p. 1,846.

88. Hilary Rose and Steven Rose, "Israel, Europe and the Academic Boycott," *Race and Class*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (July 2008), p. 2.

89. "German Jews Offended: Iranian-Born German Soccer Player Refuses to Play Israel," *Spiegel Online* (Germany), October 9, 2007, www.spiegel.de/international/germany/german-jews-offended-iranian-born-german-soccer-player-refuses-to-play-israel-a-510269.html.

90. "Wales V Israel: Let the Palestinian Flags Fly," *Morning Star* (UK), September 5, 2015, <http://www.morningstaronline.co.uk/a-e161-Wales-v-Israel-Let-the-Palestinian-flags-fly>.

referring to the Israeli bombardment of a sport stadium in Gaza in November 2012. Among the athletes that signed the declaration were Arab players from Algeria (Ryad Boudebouz, Yacine Brahimi, El-Arabi Hilal Soudani, Hassan Yebda, and Bil-el Omrani), Libya (Djamal Mahamat), and Morocco (Karim Aït-Fana, Chahir Belghazouani, and Aatif Chahechouhe).⁹¹

Israel's move toward Europe minimized sporting conflicts with its Arab neighbors but did not completely end them, as demonstrated by the temporary boycott of the German sporting goods company Adidas. In April 2012, the Lebanese youth and sports minister and his colleagues from the Arab League member countries called for a boycott of Adidas because of its sponsorship of the Jerusalem Marathon, which routed through East Jerusalem, an area considered by most of the world as occupied territory. After sponsoring the Jerusalem Marathon in 2011 and 2012, Adidas finally withdrew its sponsorship.⁹²

While these examples show that the Arab-Israeli conflict will be present in sports as long as the conflict continues, overall Israel's move to Europe has paid off: the country is now competing on the continental level with less hostile countries. For Lebanon, Israel's gradual exclusion from Asia and its integration into European sports has significantly limited the country's sporting boycott of its southern neighbor. Because direct contact among athletes in international sports occurs only occasionally, primarily at less prominent competitions such as international youth championships, sporting boycotts have become more of a symbolic tool.

CONCLUSION

Lebanon's ability to help block Israeli participation in any regional and continental sporting federations for nearly two decades was remarkable. The effectiveness of the Lebanese and Arab sporting boycott of Israel is a unique feat in the sports world. Currently, Lebanon's sporting boycott receives less attention because of Israel's success in joining European sporting federations, consequently limiting potential sporting contacts between both countries, and depriving Lebanon the opportunity to publicly protest Israel. Additionally, there is a lack of support for the boycott outside of the Arab world. In contrast, when South Africa was boycotted, it established some alternative bilateral sports events ("rebel tours"⁹³) but was unable to insert itself in sporting events outside of Africa, and was thus isolated until the end of apartheid. The country was banned from international sporting federations and mega-sporting events, including the Olympic Games, because of its policy of segregation and separate sport institutions for different ethnic groups. Because Israel's domestic sporting system is more inclusive than apartheid South Africa's was, it is not banned from international competition.

91. Frédéric Oumar Kanouté, "European Footballers Declare Support for Palestine," personal website, November 29, 2012, www.kanoute.com/EUROPEAN-FOOTBALLERS-DECLARE-SUPPORT-FOR-PALESTINE_ad-id!35.ks. See also MacLean, "Revisiting (and Revising?) Sports Boycotts."

92. Jodi Rudoren, "Palestinians Protest Route of Marathon to Sponsors," *The New York Times*, February 22, 2013, <https://nyti.ms/2mCcUcb>; Aaron Kalman, "Arab League Calls for Adidas Boycott after Jerusalem Marathon," *The Times of Israel*, April 5, 2012, www.timesofisrael.com/arab-countries-boycott-adidas-for-endorsing-jerusalem-marathon/.

93. MacLean, "Revisiting (and Revising?) Sports Boycotts," p. 1,837.

The main victims of Lebanon's sporting boycott of Israel, as is the case with all sporting boycotts, are the athletes. Sporting careers are short, and participation in events such as world championships and the Olympics is, for many athletes, a once-in-a-lifetime experience. In the first phase of Lebanon's sporting boycott of Israel (when Israel still participated in Asian sporting events) the main victims were Israeli athletes, but in the second phase (after Israel's move to Europe) the primary victims are Lebanese athletes.

Becoming a world-class athlete in Lebanon is difficult. Standard support in other countries such as elite sport schools, first class facilities, professional coaching, financial help, etc. is hardly existent in the poorly governed Middle Eastern country.⁹⁴ Athletes mainly depend on themselves and family support. If they qualify for international sporting events in spite of these unfavorable conditions, they still have to be fearful that all their work might be for naught in the event that they are paired with an Israeli athlete, and according to Lebanese law, are not allowed to compete.

From a global perspective, Lebanese athletes directly competing against Israeli athletes would be far from revolutionary, given that even North and South Korean athletes regularly compete against each other. Additionally, Iran and the United States were in the same group and played against each other at the 1998 World Cup in France held by International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) in spite of the US economic sanctions in place against Iran at that time. In both countries there is also a passion for wrestling. American athletes travelled to Iran for competitions even though tensions have nearly always been high between the two countries.⁹⁵

Interestingly, the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement (BDS) in recognition of Palestinian rights does not call for a sporting boycott of Israel and, at the 2016 Summer Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, focused on campaigning against a contract between the organizing committee of both the main Olympic Games and the Paralympic Games and the Israeli company ISDS (International Security and Defense Systems). The BDS slogan was "Ban ISDS from the Olympics! For Olympic Games without Israeli contractors! For Olympic Games without Apartheid!"⁹⁶

As long as the Lebanese government is unable to defend its people against foreign threats — and unable to provide the population with basic goods such as water, electricity, and waste management — a sporting boycott is a welcome opportunity for policy-makers to distract from the real problems the country faces. It also distracts from the fact that the Ministry of Youth and Sport provides, with its minimal budget and lack of strategies, only limited support for Lebanese sporting success on the international stage. What works well in Lebanese sports (as in other sectors of society such

94. Danyel Reiche, "Why Developing Countries Are Just Spectators in the 'Gold War': The Case of Lebanon at the Olympic Games," *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (2017), pp. 996–1,011.

95. "Olympic Wrestling Becomes Common Ground for US and Iran," *RT* (Russia), February 19, 2013, www.rt.com/sport/wrestling-us-iran-olympic-613/.

96. Palestinian Grassroots Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign, "BNC: Join Us — Olympics without Apartheid!" August 19, 2015, www.stopthewall.org/2015/08/19/bnc-join-us-olympics-without-apartheid/; JTA, "Canada's Parliament Rejects BDS Movement," *The Times of Israel*, February 23, 2016, www.timesofisrael.com/canadas-parliament-rejects-bds-movement/.

as education) are mainly private initiatives. An example is the successful organization of the annual Beirut Marathon.⁹⁷

At the 2012 Summer Olympics in London, the Lebanese team consisted, for the first time, of more female than male athletes, demonstrating that Lebanon is a more modern and open society than other Middle Eastern countries. However, the incident with the Lebanese judo team that was not willing to practice next to the Israel team overshadowed this news in the international media. This also happened with the “bus incident” that shaped the perception of Lebanon’s participation in the 2016 games in Rio. While the sporting boycott is not costly for politicians, Lebanese athletes paired against Israeli athletes at international sporting events pay a high price. Lebanese law prohibits Lebanese athletes from the chance to win against Israeli athletes, thus allowing Lebanon’s declared enemy to be victorious.

In the world of sports, there is a need for a broad debate on whether to award mega-sporting events to countries that violate human rights. Global sports governing bodies have ignored the humanitarian aspect in the past, as demonstrated not only by the case of Israel hosting the Union of European Football Associations’ Men’s Under-21 Championship in 2013, but also the recent 2008 Summer Olympic Games in Beijing and the future FIFA World Cup in Russia (2018) and Qatar (2022). While organizing international sporting events would become impossible if all countries in conflict refused to compete with each other, awarding the right to host a mega-sporting event is a different issue that solely serves to promote a country on the global stage and is an unnecessary reward for countries that violate basic rights.



97. Bruno Coppieters, “The Organisation of Marathons in Divided Cities: Brussels, Belfast, Beirut and Jerusalem,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol. 29, No. 11 (2012), pp. 1,553–76.