

Boycott Without a State Is a Wound Without a Body

Talha Ibn Yusuf Al Hanafi
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Introduction

A boycott list circulates every few months among Muslims, passed from phone to phone, updated whenever a new company is found to have a hand in the killing of Palestinians. Millions of Muslims take part in it with sincerity, refusing a certain soft drink, a certain coffee chain, a certain fast food brand, believing that this refusal is their contribution to the defense of Gaza. This article affirms that their instinct is correct and rooted in the Sharīʿah. Withholding wealth from an enemy actively killing Muslims is a religious obligation, grounded in the Qurʾān, the Sunnah, the applied reasoning of the classical fuqahāʾ, and the **near** unanimous verdict of the scholarly bodies of the Ummah in our own time. But this article also has to say something that the boycott movement rarely says about itself. A boycott carried out by scattered individuals, with no authority coordinating it, no state enforcing it, and no unified Ummah standing behind it, is a fraction of what the Sharīʿah actually asks for. It is the maximum that can be achieved without a Khalīfa, and the maximum that can be achieved without a Khalīfa is still very small next to what an actual Islamic state could do in a single week. The boycott the Ummah practices today is a wound treated with a bandage bought at the pharmacy, sincere and well intentioned, while the surgeon who could actually close it stays absent. This article makes the case for the obligation, establishes its scriptural and scholarly foundation, defines its limits, and then makes the case that the obligation itself points beyond itself, toward the institution the Ummah has been without for a century.

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The Command: Cooperation Has Two Directions Only

Ibn Taymiyyah (رَحِمَهُ ٱللَّهُ) divided cooperation into exactly two kinds, and that division is the frame this entire argument works within. He (رَحِمَهُ ٱللَّهُ) wrote that cooperation on righteousness and piety includes jihad, establishing the legal punishments, securing rights, and giving the deserving what is theirs, and that whoever withholds from this out of fear of being counted among the helpers of the oppressors has abandoned an obligation while imagining himself scrupulous, since cowardice and failure are very often mistaken for scrupulousness. He (رَحِمَهُ ٱللَّهُ) then defined the second kind, cooperation on sin and transgression, as assisting in shedding protected blood, taking protected wealth, or striking one who does not deserve to be struck, and stated plainly that this is what Allah and His Messenger have forbidden.[1]

A purchase made from a company whose profits are known to be channelled into an army actively engaged in killing Muslim civilians and demolishing their homes is not a

[1] Ibn Taymiyyah, cited in *Mawsūʿat al-Akhlāq wa'l-Sulūk*, "Aqsām al-Taʿāwun," al-Durar al-Saniyyah, citing *al-Siyāsah al-Sharʿiyyah* (p. 40). https://dorar.net/alakhlaq/624

neutral commercial act sitting outside this division. It falls squarely inside the second kind. Money paid at the till does not remain inert, it becomes revenue, and revenue funds the ledger from which weapons, fuel, and wages are drawn. To hand money to that ledger while knowing where it goes is to place oneself, in Ibn Taymiyyah's own words, among those assisting in the shedding of protected blood.

Shaykh Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī (رَحِمَهُ ٱللَّٰهُ) gave the same reasoning in terms that leave nothing ambiguous, writing that **every coin spent on the enemy's goods is transformed in the end into a bullet fired into the chests of the Muslims of Palestine, and that buying from them is therefore forbidden precisely because it constitutes assistance in sin and transgression.**[2] He (رَحِمَهُ ٱللَّٰهُ) then completed the argument with a principle of uṣūl that carries the case to its conclusion: **the Ummah is obligated to weaken its enemy where it cannot strengthen its brothers, and if weakening that enemy cannot be achieved except through boycott, then the boycott inherits the ruling of the obligation itself, since whatever an obligation cannot be completed without becomes obligatory in turn.**[3]

Imam Ibn Taymiyyah (رَحِمَهُ ٱللَّٰهُ) applied an almost identical logic to trading with belligerents directly. Discussing whether a Muslim may travel into hostile territory for trade, he affirmed this is permitted in principle, citing the journeys of Abū Bakr and ʿUmar into hostile lands for trade during the Prophet's lifetime, peace be upon him. He then qualified the permission immediately: **selling goods that assist non-Muslims in observing a forbidden festival contains a form of assistance in an unlawful matter, built on the foundation that selling grapes to someone who will turn them into wine is impermissible, and likewise it is not permitted to sell weapons to those who will use them to fight a Muslim.**[4] A transaction licit in its bare form becomes illicit the moment the seller knows, or has strong reason to believe, that the proceeds or the goods will be turned against Muslims. Selling a weapon to a combatant is forbidden not because the sale itself is defective, but because the seller has made himself a partner in what follows from it. Buying from an entity whose revenue funds a campaign against Muslims mirrors this exactly. The transaction is reversed and the harm is financial rather than material, but the underlying reasoning, assisting a party actively fighting Muslims to keep fighting them, is identical.

This connects to the wider uṣūl principle of *sadd al-dharāʾiʿ*, blocking the means that lead to a forbidden end. Where a means reliably and knowingly leads to harm, the Sharīʿah treats the means itself as subject to the ruling of the harm it produces.

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[2] Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, "مقاطعة البضائع الإسرائيلية والأمريكية," al-Qaradawi.net, published 15 July 2001. https://www.al-qaradawi.net/node/3579

[3] Ibid

[4] Ibn Taymiyyah, cited in *Mawsūʿat al-ʿAqīdah*, "al-Farq bayn al-Muwālāt wa bayn al-Muʿāmalah bi'l-Ḥusnā," al-Durar al-Saniyyah, citing *Iqtiḍāʾ al-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm* (2/15). https://dorar.net/aqeeda/400

The Sunnah Precedent: Thumāmah ibn Uthāl and the Wheat of Yamāmah

The case for boycott does not rest on uṣūl reasoning alone. There is a precedent in the Sunnah, recorded in Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, in which a Companion used economic strangulation as a weapon against the enemies of Islam, and the Prophet ﷺ did not declare the act impermissible.

Thumāmah ibn Uthāl al-Ḥanafī, chief of the tribe of Banū Ḥanīfah in Yamāmah, accepted Islam and then travelled to Makkah for ʿumrah. When the Quraysh accused him of abandoning his religion, he answered that he had followed the best of religions, the religion of Muhammad ﷺ, and swore that not a single grain of wheat would reach them from Yamāmah without the permission of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. He returned to Yamāmah and cut off the grain supply entirely. Makkah depended on that supply, and the pressure was severe enough that Quraysh wrote to the Prophet ﷺ appealing to him on the basis of kinship ties, complaining that their fathers were being killed by the sword and their sons by hunger, and the Prophet ﷺ then wrote to Thumāmah instructing him to let the grain through.[5] [6]

The Fatwa and Ijtihād Committee of the International Union of Muslim Scholars cited this exact narration from Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī as the scriptural evidence establishing the legitimacy of economic boycott in the Sharīʿah.[7] Two things in this incident deserve close attention, because both of them carry directly into the argument of this article.

The first is that Thumāmah **acted on his own initiative.** No command came down instructing him to impose the blockade. He saw an enemy waging war against the Muslims, he possessed the economic leverage to hurt them, and he used it, and the Prophet ﷺ did not rebuke him for acting without instruction. This alone dismantles the claim, examined in detail later in this article, that a Muslim must wait for a ruler's summons before he may withhold his own wealth from an aggressor.

The second is that **the boycott ended by the command of the Prophet ﷺ, acting as the head of the Islamic state.** Thumāmah himself had made his oath conditional on that authority from the very beginning, swearing that the grain would not reach them until the Messenger of Allah ﷺ permitted it. He understood that while the initiative to begin was his, the authority to regulate, sustain, or lift the measure belonged to the

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[5] Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, "مقاطعة البضائع الإسرائيلية والأمريكية," al-Qaradawi.net, published 15 July 2001. https://www.al-qaradawi.net/node/3579

[6] Fatwa and Ijtihād Committee, International Union of Muslim Scholars, "فتوى لجنة الاجتهاد والفتوى بالاتحاد العالمي لعلماء المسلمين حول العدوان الإسرائيلي على غزة," 21 October 2023, clause 8. https://iumsonline.org/archives/97554

[7] Ibid

leadership of the Muslims. That is precisely the relationship that has been broken. The individual initiative survives in the Ummah today. The authority that should govern, coordinate, and direct it does not.

The Scholarly Verdict Across the Ummah

This is not a private reading of old texts stretched to fit a modern cause. When scholars and fatwa bodies across widely separated regions, schools, and orientations examine this precise question, they arrive at the same ruling by the same method, and the breadth of that agreement is itself part of the argument.

Jordan

More than fifty scholars of Sharīʿah issued a joint statement declaring the economic boycott of the Zionist entity and those who support it, whether states or institutions, to be obligatory in the Sharīʿah. The statement classified **failure to observe the boycott, once the ruling is known, as a major sin, and described economic boycott as one of the faces of jihād that the Sharīʿah makes obligatory.** It called on the Ummah, rulers and peoples alike, to commit to boycotting the enemy economically, describing this as falling within the **weakest degree of faith,** and it forbade the full range of economic dealings with the enemy including importing their goods, consuming them, exporting to them, selling or leasing property to them, brokering on their behalf, promoting their products, or partnering with them in companies and factories. The signatories included a former Jordanian Minister of Awqāf along with prominent scholars and current and former deans of Sharīʿah faculties at Jordanian universities, drawn from more than one methodological orientation.[8]

Qatar and the global body of scholars

The Fatwa and Ijtihād Committee of the International Union of Muslim Scholars, an independent international body gathering scholars from across the schools and orientations of the Ummah, ruled that Muslims, rulers and peoples together, **are obligated to boycott the Zionist entity and whoever supports and assists it in its war on the people of Gaza, and stated that economic, cultural, and academic boycott, along with every other form of boycott, is obligatory in the Sharīʿah.** The committee grounded this ruling in the narration of Thumāmah ibn Uthāl in Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī.[9] In a

[8] "فتوى توجب مقاطعة إسرائيل," Al Jazeera, 12 May 2010, reporting the joint statement of over fifty Jordanian scholars of Sharīʿah. https://www.ajnet.me/news/2010/5/12/فتوى-توجب-مقاطعة-إسرائيل

[9] Fatwa and Ijtihād Committee, International Union of Muslim Scholars, "فتوى لجنة الاجتهاد والفتوى بالاتحاد العالمي لعلماء المسلمين حول العدوان الإسرائيلي على غزة" 21 October 2023, clause 8. https://iumsonline.org/archives/97554

later ruling the same committee held that Muslims must boycott the entity and those participating with it politically by withdrawing ambassadors and economically by ceasing purchases of weapons, equipment, aircraft, vehicles, and other goods, and declared it impermissible for states to remain shareholders in companies engaged in settlement construction, describing continued investment of Muslim wealth in such companies as a **grave betrayal.**[10]

Shaykh Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī (رَحِمَهُ ٱللَّهُ)

Beyond the uṣūlī argument quoted above, Sheikh Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī (رَحِمَهُ ٱللَّهُ) issued the ruling in its most direct form, holding that **any Muslim who buys Israeli or American goods when an alternative from another source is available to him has committed something forbidden and taken on sin.**[11] He (رَحِمَهُ ٱللَّهُ) extended the ruling beyond the consumer to the merchant, stating that traders who import such goods for profit and take up agencies for these companies carry **a heavier prohibition and a greater sin than the ordinary buyer.**[12] He (رَحِمَهُ ٱللَّهُ) also recorded that in his view purchasing these goods in the present circumstances falls among **the major sins.**[13]

Shaykh ʿAlī Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Qaraḍāghī

The current head of the International Union of Muslim Scholars confirmed that his own fatwa and that of al-Qaraḍāwī together hold the boycott of all Israeli goods obligatory **without distinction between a small product and a large one**, and condemned the Arab League's dismantling of the collective boycott after Oslo as contrary to the Sharīʿah of Allah and to the interests of the Ummah.[14]

The Council of Palestinian Scholars

The Council of Palestinian Scholars issued a fatwa stating that every Islamic state is **obligated to boycott the occupying Zionist entity, and that it is forbidden for the rulers and officials of those states to deal with the occupation in any form.**[15] Note

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[10] Fatwa and Ijtihād Committee, International Union of Muslim Scholars, fatwa on the continuation of the aggression on Gaza and the halting of the truce, clause 9. https://ejournal.tuah.or.id/index.php/ilsiis/article/download/21/13

[11] Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, "مقاطعة البضائع الإسرائيلية والأمريكية," al-Qaradawi.net, published 15 July 2001. https://www.al-qaradawi.net/node/3579

[12] Ibid

[13] Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, "شراء البضائع الإسرائيلية والأمريكية في هذا الوقت من الكبائر," al-Qaradawi.net. https://www.al-qaradawi.net/node/4174

[14] ʿAlī Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Qaraḍāghī, "حكم وجوب مقاطعة البضائع الإسرائيلية," official website. https://www.alqaradaghi.com/fatwa/حكم-وجوب-مقاطعة-البضائع-الإسرائيلية/

[15] Dr. Muḥammad Humām Malḥam, "فتوى حول المقاطعة الاقتصادية للاحتلال الصهيوني وشركاته وداعميه," Council of Palestinian Scholars. https://palscholars.org/news/فتوى-حول-وجوب-المقاطع/

carefully what that fatwa assumes: the natural subject of this obligation is the state itself, not merely the individual consumer standing at a shelf.

The Indonesian Ulema Council

The Indonesian Ulema Council, the principal religious authority in the largest Muslim population on earth, issued Fatwa No. 83 of 2023 on supporting the Palestinian struggle, **ruling that support for Israeli aggression, whether direct or indirect, is forbidden, and calling on Muslims to refrain from transactions involving Israeli products and products affiliated with the occupation.**[16] The Council subsequently specified the criteria of the products falling under the ruling, identifying companies whose shares are controlled by foreign firms with business ties to the occupation, and it moved to disseminate the ruling through mosque networks and preachers across the country.[17]

Muhammadiyah

Within the same Indonesian scholarly discussion, the ijtihād of Muhammadiyah, one of the two largest Islamic organizations in the world by membership, classified the boycott as **fard ʿayn upon Palestinians and fard kifāyah upon Muslims in other countries**, holding the boycott of products from companies clearly supporting the occupation to be obligatory.[18] This independent classification, arrived at in Southeast Asia with no reference to the Arab fatwa bodies, matches the classification this article defends.

The League of Ahl al-Sunnah Scholars.

The same body of scholars ruled that purchasing Israeli and American goods is forbidden **except in a state of necessity**,[19] which is the precise structure this article follows: an obligation established firmly, with a narrow exception governed by the classical rules of darūrah rather than by convenience.

What emerges from this survey is a rare degree of convergence. Scholars in Amman, Doha, Gaza, and Jakarta, working from different schools, different political contexts, and

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[16] "MUI calls for Israeli goods boycott, issues fatwa in support of Palestine," The Jakarta Post, 10 November 2023, on Indonesian Ulema Council Fatwa No. 83 of 2023. https://www.thejakartapost.com/indonesia/2023/11/10/mui-calls-for-israeli-goods-boycott-issues-fatwa-in-support-of-palestine.html

[17] "Never Get Bored of Boycotting Pro-Israel Products: MUI," Jakarta Globe. https://jakartaglobe.id/news/never-get-bored-of-boycotting-proisrael-products-mui

[18] Giyarsi et al., "Indonesian Ulema Council Fatwa on Boycotting Products Supporting Israel," on the ijtihād of Muhammadiyah classifying the boycott as fard ʿayn for Palestinians and fard kifāyah for Muslims elsewhere. https://juna.nusantarajournal.com/index.php/juna/article/download/96/60/579

[19] "رابطة علماء أهل السنّة: شراء البضائع الإسرائيلية والأمريكية حرام إلا لضرورة," League of Ahl al-Sunnah Scholars. https://www.rabtasunna.com/4025

different methodological traditions, reading the same verses and the same narration from Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, reached the same conclusion. A Muslim who tells himself the matter is disputed, or that scholars have not spoken clearly **has lied**.

Historical Precedent: The Boycott as a Weapon of War

The Ummah does not need to imagine what an economic siege against believers looks like, because it lived through one at the very beginning of its history, on the receiving end of the weapon.

In the seventh year of the Prophetic mission, the clans of Quraysh drew up a formal pact and hung it inside the Kaʿbah, ceasing all trade, marriage, and social dealing with Banū Hāshim and Banū al-Muṭṭalib in an attempt to force them to surrender the Prophet ﷺ. The two clans were confined to the valley of Shiʿb Abī Ṭālib for three years, cut off from the markets of Makkah, their children's hunger audible to the very people who had imposed the siege.[20] Al-Qaraḍāwī cited this same episode as proof that boycott is an effective weapon of war both in the past and in the present, noting that the polytheists used it against the Prophet ﷺ and his Companions in the Meccan period and injured them so severely that they were reduced to eating the leaves of trees.[21] Quraysh understood something the modern Ummah has largely forgotten: **that severing an enemy's access to wealth and trade is not a symbolic gesture.** It is a weapon capable of breaking a people, which is precisely why they reached for it when open persecution had failed them.

The lesson works in both directions. Quraysh's boycott was not a spontaneous decision by scattered individuals in the Meccan marketplace, each choosing, on his own initiative, not to sell to Banū Hāshim. It was an organized instrument of a political order, drafted, ratified, publicly displayed, and enforced by the leadership structure Makkah actually possessed, tribal and pagan though it was. That is what gave it its force. An organized boycott, backed by a structure capable of enforcing it, starved an entire clan into desperation within three years. A disorganized boycott does not carry that kind of weight, because sincerity was never the variable that made the Meccan siege effective. Organization was.

The same pattern appears in the modern struggle against colonialism. Al-Qaraḍāwī pointed to Gandhi's call for the Indian people to boycott British goods as the most prominent modern example, observing that it had a profound effect on the war of

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[20] "Boycott of Banu Hashim," WikiShia, on the three year siege of Shiʿb Abī Ṭālib. https://en.wikishia.net/view/Boycott_of_Banu_Hashim

[21] Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, "مقاطعة البضائع الإسرائيلية والأمريكية," al-Qaradawi.net, published 15 July 2001. https://www.al-qaradawi.net/node/3579

liberation.[22] That campaign worked because it was directed by a leadership with a nationwide organizational structure capable of sustaining it over years.

Palestine itself furnishes the closest parallel. When the Arab Higher Committee formed in 1936 under the leadership of the Grand Muftī of Jerusalem, it did not merely appeal to individual conscience. **It called on Palestinians to launch a general strike, withhold tax payments, and boycott the goods of the Zionist settlement project as a coordinated act of a unified political leadership.**[23] The results followed from that coordination: the strike carried a total boycott of Zionist goods alongside a prohibition on selling to them, agricultural workers on settlements left their jobs, laborers in factories and construction accepted serious material sacrifice by refusing to work, and government employees who stayed in their posts to retain influence contributed a share of their earnings to support those who had lost income.[24] That is a boycott with a command structure, a treasury sustaining those who bore its cost, and enough coordination to hold together for months. The uprising it fed into changed British policy in ways that scattered individual abstention could never have achieved.[25]

Compare that to the boycott the Ummah runs today. No treasury exists to support the Muslim who loses income for refusing to stock a boycotted brand. No unified leadership issues the call with binding force across the Ummah's fifty capitals. No mechanism verifies which companies genuinely fund the killing of Muslims, so lists circulate on messaging apps with errors, omissions, and contradictions between one country and the next. The difference between 1936 and today is not that the Muslims of that generation were more sincere. It is that they possessed, in that moment and in that territory, the one thing the Ummah now lacks entirely: an authority capable of organizing sincerity into force.

Why a Scattered Boycott Cannot Do What the Obligation Demands

This is the point at which the argument must be honest about its own limits, because inflating what a scattered boycott can achieve does the Ummah no favors.

A boycott run by millions of disconnected individuals faces problems no amount of sincerity can resolve. There is **no reliable mechanism** to verify which corporations

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[22] Ibid
[23] "The 1936 Palestine strike: A history of Palestinian revolt," Middle East Eye, 18 May 2021. https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/palestine-strike-history-explained-revolt
[24] "Great Uprising of Arabs in Palestine," EBSCO Research Starters. https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/great-uprising-arabs-palestine
[25] Ibid

actually fund the killing of Muslims, so boycott lists multiply, contradict one another, and lose credibility the moment a single item on them is shown to be inaccurate.

There is **no capacity to redirect the economic activity** withheld from the boycotted company toward Muslim producers, so the money simply moves to a different non-Muslim multinational rather than building the independent economic capacity of the Ummah.

There is **no enforcement**, so the boycott's success depends entirely on whether each individual Muslim, alone, under no supervision and facing no consequence for defection, chooses to maintain it on a random Tuesday when the boycotted product happens to be on offer.

There is **no scale**, because the aggregate purchasing power even of an engaged minority, uncoordinated, is a fraction of what a bloc of Muslim states acting in concert could remove from an enemy's economy in a single directive.

This is exactly the gap the fatwa of the Palestinian Scholars points toward when it addresses the state directly rather than the individual consumer.[26] It is also the gap that al-Qaraḍāwī (رَحِمَهُ ٱللَّهُ), the strongest advocate of popular boycott among contemporary scholars, acknowledged at the close of his own argument, where he called on the people of wisdom and expertise in every country to form committees that would organize the boycott, prepare alternatives, avoid its negative consequences, and continue educating the public.[27] Even the scholar who insisted most forcefully that the boycott is a weapon in the hands of the masses recognized that the masses cannot wield it properly without an organizing structure standing behind them. He called for committees because he understood that a weapon without a hand to aim it strikes very little. What he was describing in miniature, at the level of voluntary local committees, is what a state performs at the level of a civilization.

The classical fuqahāʾ built the category of fard kifāyah for obligations of exactly this shape, duties that require organization above the level of the individual to be properly discharged. Ibn Taymiyyah (رَحِمَهُ ٱللَّهُ) made this explicit even in the closely related duty of enjoining good and forbidding evil, writing that it is a duty binding on the whole Ummah, known to the scholars as an obligation of collective responsibility, discharged on behalf of the rest when a group within the society undertakes it.[28] A boycott is precisely this kind of obligation. It functions as intended when a state, or a genuine collective authority, organizes it, verifies it, enforces it, and directs the wealth withheld

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[26] Dr. Muḥammad Humām Malḥam, "فتوى حول المقاطعة الاقتصادية للاحتلال الصهيوني وشركاته وداعميه," Council of Palestinian Scholars. https://palscholars.org/news/فتوى-حول-وجوب-المقاطع/

[27] Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, "مقاطعة البضائع الإسرائيلية والأمريكية," al-Qaradawi.net, published 15 July 2001. https://www.al-qaradawi.net/node/3579

[28] Ibn Taymiyyah, *Enjoining Good, Forbidding Evil*. https://islamhouse.com/en/books/339184

toward building the Ummah's own capacity. It functions as a shadow of itself when fifty million individuals, none coordinating with the others, each try to carry a fragment of a duty that was never designed to be carried that way.

Debunking the Claim That Only a Ruler May Call for Boycott

A specific objection surfaces regularly in this discussion, usually from those uncomfortable with any Islamic obligation being acted upon outside the permission of the sitting rulers: that a Muslim needs the call of a legitimate Islamic ruler before he may boycott anything, and that acting without that call is a form of unauthorized vigilantism outside the bounds of the Sharīʿah.

This objection collapses on its own terms, and it collapses in four distinct places.

First, it misapplies a rule belonging to a different category of obligation. The requirement of a ruler's authorization applies specifically to matters that constitute an exercise of state power over others, such as executing ḥudūd punishments, declaring war, or levying taxation, precisely because these acts involve coercion over another person's body, property, or freedom, and coercion of that kind cannot be left to whoever feels moved to exercise it. Refusing to spend one's own money with a particular seller is not an act of coercion over anyone. It is the free disposal of one's own property, which every school of fiqh recognizes as squarely within an individual's personal discretion. No school has ever required a ruler's permission before a Muslim may choose which merchant to patronize.

Second, the Sunnah itself settles the question. Thumāmah ibn Uthāl imposed his blockade on Makkah by his own decision, without instruction, and the Prophet ﷺ did not treat the act as an overreach requiring correction.[29] A Companion cut off the food supply of an entire hostile city on his own initiative, and the objection under discussion would have required him to wait for permission that never came.

Third, the branch of the Sharīʿah from which the boycott partly draws its force is explicitly established as independent of a ruler's summons. The scholars of hisbah distinguished between the *muḥtasib*, appointed by the state to a formal post, and the *mutaṭawwiʿ*, the ordinary Muslim who undertakes enjoining good and forbidding evil regardless of whether the ruler in charge of the Muslims' affairs has permitted him to do

[29] Fatwa and Ijtihād Committee, International Union of Muslim Scholars, "فتوى لجنة الاجتهاد والفتوى بالاتحاد العالمي لعلماء المسلمين حول العدوان الإسرائيلي على غزة" 21 October 2023, clause 8. https://iumsonline.org/archives/97554

so.[30] Ibn Taymiyyah (رَحِمَهُ ٱللَّهُ) held that this duty rests on the entire Ummah collectively and becomes **binding on every capable individual specifically where no organized authority is discharging** it on their behalf, which is exactly the situation the Ummah occupies today.[31] Al-Qaraḍāwī (رَحِمَهُ ٱللَّهُ) stated the practical dimension of this even more bluntly, saying that the boycott is a weapon in the hands of the peoples and the masses alone, since governments have no power to compel people to buy goods from any particular source.[32] The weapon was placed in the hands of the Ummah's individuals by the nature of the act itself, and no ruler's silence can take it out of their hands.

Fourth, and most importantly for the argument of this article, the demand that a ruler must issue the call quietly assumes the very thing the nation state system has made impossible: a ruler whose call would actually bind the Ummah rather than merely his own national population. Even where a Muslim majority government does issue a boycott call, it binds only its own citizens, carries no authority over the other fifty or so Muslim majority states, and can be reversed the moment that government's foreign policy interests shift, exactly as happened after Oslo when the Arab League dismantled a functioning collective boycott under diplomatic pressure, a decision al-Qaraḍāghī (رَحِمَهُ ٱللَّهُ) condemned as contrary to the Sharīʿah of Allah and to the interests of the Ummah.[33] A ruler bound by nation state logic is structurally **incapable** of issuing the kind of call this objection demands, because his authority stops precisely at the border where the Ummah's need for unity begins. Waiting for that call is not caution. It is waiting for a door that the nation state system was built to keep closed.

What If There Is No Real Alternative

Having established the obligation and its proper scale, the boundary the individual Muslim actually lives inside must be stated clearly, because the exception matters as much as the rule.

The governing qāʿidah is that necessity makes permissible what is otherwise forbidden, established in the verse on the prohibition of carrion, blood, and swine, where Allah says:

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[30] "Hisbah (Enjoining Good and Forbidding Evil)," kalamullah.com, on the distinction between the muḥtasib and the mutaṭawwiʿ. https://www.kalamullah.com/manhaj01.html

[31] Ibn Taymiyyah, *Enjoining Good, Forbidding Evil*. https://islamhouse.com/en/books/339184

[32] Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, "مقاطعة البضائع الإسرائيلية والأمريكية," al-Qaradawi.net, published 15 July 2001. https://www.al-qaradawi.net/node/3579

[33] ʿAlī Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Qaraḍāghī, "حكم وجوب مقاطعة البضائع الإسرائيلية," official website. https://www.alqaradaghi.com/fatwa/حكم-وجوب-مقاطعة-البضائع-الإسرائيلية/

إِنَّمَا حَرَّمَ عَلَيْكُمُ ٱلْمَيْتَةَ وَٱلدَّمَ وَلَحْمَ ٱلْخِنزِيرِ وَمَآ أُهِلَّ بِهِۦ لِغَيْرِ ٱللَّهِ ۖ فَمَنِ ٱضْطُرَّ غَيْرَ بَاغٍ وَلَا عَادٍ فَلَآ إِثْمَ عَلَيْهِ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ

> "*He has only forbidden to you dead animals, blood, the flesh of swine, and that which has been dedicated to other than Allāh.* ***But whoever is forced [by necessity], neither desiring [it] nor transgressing [its limit], there is no sin upon him.*** *Indeed, Allāh is Forgiving and Merciful.*"[34]

And again in Sūrat al-Anʿām:

وَمَا لَكُمْ أَلَّا تَأْكُلُوا۟ مِمَّا ذُكِرَ ٱسْمُ ٱللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ وَقَدْ فَصَّلَ لَكُم مَّا حَرَّمَ عَلَيْكُمْ إِلَّا مَا ٱضْطُرِرْتُمْ إِلَيْهِ ۗ وَإِنَّ كَثِيرًا لَّيُضِلُّونَ بِأَهْوَآئِهِم بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ ۗ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِٱلْمُعْتَدِينَ

> "*And why should you not eat of that upon which the name of Allāh has been mentioned while* ***He has explained in detail to you what He has forbidden you, excepting that to which you are compelled.*** *And indeed do many lead [others] astray through their [own] inclinations without knowledge. Indeed, your Lord - He is most knowing of the transgressors.*"[35]

The scholars drew from these verses that the permission of necessity applies generally wherever necessity is genuinely present.[36] The Sunnah confirms the same principle in the report that ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAwf and al-Zubayr complained to the Prophet ﷺ of lice, and he granted them a concession to wear silk, otherwise forbidden to men, and Anas reported seeing them wearing it on a military expedition.[37]

But the same verses that establish the exception also establish its ceiling. The phrase "*neither desiring nor transgressing*" in al-Baqarah, and the parallel phrase in Sūrat al-Māʾida, "*but whoever is forced by severe hunger, not inclining to sin, then indeed Allah is Forgiving and Merciful*"[38] were read by the mufassirūn as meaning that the permission to eat carrion is bounded **strictly by the extent that removes the fatal hunger, and once that hunger is lifted, the obligation to stop resumes.** The application of this qāʿidah by the fuqahāʾ is precise: one who is compelled to eat carrion may not eat beyond the amount that repels death, and no more than that is permitted to him.[39]

Al-Qaraḍāwī (رَحِمَهُ ٱللَّهُ) applied exactly this framework to the boycott question itself. Addressing Muslims living inside Israel or inside America, who have no practical way to avoid dealing with the goods around them, he ruled that they are in a state of

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[34] al-Baqarah, 2:173
[35] al-Anʿām, 6:119
[36] *Mawsūʿat al-Qawāʿid al-Fiqhiyyah*, "al-Ḍarūrāt Tubīḥu al-Maḥẓūrāt," al-Durar al-Saniyyah. https://dorar.net/qfiqhia/387
[37] Ibid
[38] al-Māʾida, 5:3
[39] *Mawsūʿat al-Qawāʿid al-Fiqhiyyah*, "Mā Ubīḥa li'l-Ḍarūrah Yuqaddaru bi-Qadrihā," al-Durar al-Saniyyah. https://dorar.net/qfiqhia/391

compulsion, invoking the principle that Allah does not burden a soul beyond its capacity, and stating that necessities carry their own rulings but are measured by their own measure, citing the command to fear Allah as much as one is able and the instruction of the Prophet ﷺ that when commanded with a matter, one should perform of it what one is able.[40] The same scholar who ruled the boycott obligatory in the strongest terms drew the boundary of the exception in the classical language of the fuqahāʾ, and the boundary is narrow.

Applied to the ordinary Muslim, this produces a clear position. A Muslim who genuinely cannot obtain an alternative, whose hardship in going without rises to a level of real difficulty rather than mere preference for a familiar brand, may use the boycotted good to the exact extent that removes that hardship, and no further. He may not treat this exception as a **general licence to disregard the boycott whenever convenience favours the boycotted product, and he may not extend it to goods for which an alternative exists, even if that alternative costs more or requires more effort to obtain, since inconvenience alone has never been treated by the fuqahāʾ as darūrah.** Al-Qaraḍāwī (رَحِمَهُ ٱللَّهُ) made this boundary explicit in the opposite direction as well, ruling that a Muslim who buys these goods while an alternative from another source is available to him **has fallen into the forbidden.**[41] The moment an alternative becomes available, the exception lapses, exactly as the one compelled to eat carrion must stop the instant his hunger is relieved.

What If a Muslim Is Not Sure Whether Something Is Boycotted

A second, quieter problem faces the ordinary Muslim standing in front of a shelf: the lists in circulation are inconsistent, some items appear on one list and not another, the ownership structures of large multinationals are genuinely difficult to trace even for researchers, and a Muslim without specialist knowledge cannot always know with certainty whether a given product carries a real link to the harm this boycott addresses.

Here two principles operate together rather than in tension. The first is the general uṣūlī rule that **certainty is not overturned by mere doubt**, meaning a Muslim is not obligated to launch a forensic investigation into every item he purchases, tracing ownership through holding companies and franchise agreements before he is permitted to buy anything. The obligation attaches where the link between a company and the harm is known or reasonably established through credible reporting, and it does not attach to every conceivable transaction inside a globalised economy that no individual

[40] Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, "مقاطعة البضائع الإسرائيلية والأمريكية," al-Qaradawi.net, published 15 July 2001. https://www.al-qaradawi.net/node/3579
[41] Ibid

can fully map. The Sharīʿah does not obligate what exceeds ordinary capacity, and the same verse al-Qaraḍāwī (رَحِمَهُ ٱللَّهُ) invoked when defining the limits of the exception, the command to fear Allah as much as one is able, governs here too.[42]

The second principle is that where a credible and reasonably sourced determination does identify a company with a demonstrable link, ignorance ceases to function as an excuse the moment that knowledge reaches the person. Willful avoidance of easily available information in order to preserve a comfortable ignorance is a different thing entirely from genuine uncertainty. A Muslim who has seen credible evidence and chooses not to look further so that he may keep buying comfortably **has not encountered a case of doubt.** He has encountered knowledge he preferred not to hold. The Jordanian scholars' statement addressed this directly when it tied the sin to the point at which the ruling becomes known to the person, rather than treating the matter as permanently excused by uncertainty.[43]

Between these two poles, the practical position is that a Muslim should follow determinations issued by scholarly bodies and credible researchers rather than unverified messages forwarded between phones, and where genuine doubt survives reasonable effort, meaning the sources conflict or the link remains speculative rather than demonstrated, the default returns to permissibility, because the Sharīʿah does not obligate a boycott on the basis of rumour.

The Indonesian Ulema Council recognized this problem and responded to it, publishing criteria identifying the categories of companies covered by its ruling rather than leaving individuals to guess.[44] That response is instructive in itself. The remedy for uncertainty is an authority capable of issuing binding determinations, and the further the Ummah is from possessing such an authority at a global level, the more this uncertainty will persist.

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[42] Ibid

[43] "فتوى توجب مقاطعة إسرائيل," Al Jazeera, 12 May 2010, reporting the joint statement of over fifty Jordanian scholars of Sharīʿah. https://www.ajnet.me/news/2010/5/12/فتوى-توجب-مقاطعة-إسرائيل

[44] "Never Get Bored of Boycotting Pro-Israel Products: MUI," Jakarta Globe. https://jakartaglobe.id/news/never-get-bored-of-boycotting-proisrael-products-mui

The Deeper Problem: A Boycott Is Not Really a Thing Without a State

Step back from the individual rulings and look at what a boycott actually is as a piece of statecraft, because that is what it is, whether or not the people practicing it think of it that way.

A boycott is an act of economic warfare. It is meant to inflict a measurable cost on an adversary sufficient to change that adversary's behavior or degrade its capacity to continue harming its target. Every historical boycott that achieved this, from the Meccan siege of Shiʿb Abī Ṭālib to the blockade of Thumāmah ibn Uthāl to the organized strike of 1936 Palestine to Gandhi's campaign against British goods, achieved it because **an organizing authority stood behind it,** verifying targets, enforcing compliance, sustaining those who bore its cost, and applying it uniformly across a defined population with the power to punish defection. Remove the organizing authority and what remains is not a smaller version of the same weapon. It becomes a different thing entirely, a gesture of personal conscience that happens to share a name with the weapon it is trying to imitate.

This is precisely the condition the Ummah finds itself in. There is no bayt al-māl to compensate the Muslim shopkeeper who loses his livelihood for refusing to stock a boycotted product, though the Palestinians of 1936 built exactly such a fund out of the contributions of those who kept their salaries.[45]

There is no unified authority to verify boycott targets, so the sincere effort of millions is squandered on inaccurate lists.

There is no single body capable of directing the economic weight of a billion and a half Muslims toward one target at one moment, the way a Khalīfa commanding the resources of a unified Ummah could direct that weight against any company, any state, any economy participating in harm against Muslims anywhere in the world. The Ummah's population alone is large enough to inflict real pain on the economies backing the occupation.[46] This is also an indictment, because a weight that large has sat unused for a century for want of a hand capable of lifting it.

What exists instead is fifty competing nation states, several of which maintain open diplomatic and trade relations with the very entity the boycott targets, each protecting its own treaties and its own seat at the United Nations, none answerable to the others,

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[45] "Great Uprising of Arabs in Palestine," EBSCO Research Starters. https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/great-uprising-arabs-palestine

[46] Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, "مقاطعة البضائع الإسرائيلية والأمريكية," al-Qaradawi.net, published 15 July 2001. https://www.al-qaradawi.net/node/3579

none capable of being compelled by the others, and none willing to sacrifice national interest for the sake of a collective Islamic duty its own constitutional structure was never built to recognize. The Palestinian Scholars addressed their fatwa to the Islamic states because those states are the natural bearers of this obligation.[47] The states did not carry it. The obligation did not disappear when they refused. It fell backward onto the individual, fragmented and weakened, exactly the way any collective duty degrades when the structure meant to organize it collectively is missing.

The boycott the Ummah practices today, then, is not the Sharīʿah's instrument functioning at reduced capacity. It is the residue left over after the instrument's proper housing was demolished. Individual Muslims are doing, at real personal cost, what a state should be doing at a civilizational scale. Their sincerity is not in question. Their sufficiency is. A single directive from a unified Islamic authority commanding the economic resources of the Ummah could remove more revenue from an enemy in a week than a decade of scattered consumer abstention, because that authority alone could verify targets accurately, enforce compliance uniformly, absorb the economic shock for those who bear it, build the alternative industries that make the boycott sustainable, and apply the full weight of the Ummah's combined market rather than the fragment any one individual can withhold.

Everything argued above points toward one place. The boycott is obligatory, and every Muslim capable of observing it must observe it to the full extent his capacity allows, but the boycott's weakness is not a flaw in the ruling. It is a symptom of a deeper absence, the same absence running through nearly every failure of the Ummah in the modern age: the absence of a unified authority capable of translating the Sharīʿah's obligations into organized, sustained, civilizational action.

Allah says in Sūrat Āl ʿImrān:

> وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا
>
> *"And hold firmly to the rope of Allah, all together, and do not be divided."*[48]

The rope of Allah is one rope. A boycott carried out separately by fifty nation states, several of which maintain trade ties with the entity the other Muslims are boycotting, is a division dressed up as participation. Allah continues in the same sūrah:

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[47] Dr. Muḥammad Humām Malḥam, "فتوى حول المقاطعة الاقتصادية للاحتلال الصهيوني وشركاته وداعميه," Council of Palestinian Scholars. https://palscholars.org/news/فتوى-حول-وجوب-المقاطع/

[48] Āl ʿImrān, 3:103

وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ تَفَرَّقُوا وَاخْتَلَفُوا مِن بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَهُمُ الْبَيِّنَاتُ

"Do not be like those who became divided and disputed after clear proofs came to them."[49]

The clear proofs has arrived. Scholars in Amman, Doha, Gaza, and Jakarta have spoken with one voice on this question. The Qurʾān is explicit that cooperation in aggression is forbidden. Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī records a Companion using the weapon and the Prophet ﷺ regulating rather than forbidding it. What has not arrived, because the Ummah has not rebuilt it, is the authority capable of carrying that clear proof out of the individual's private conscience and into a civilizational act.

The Prophet ﷺ said, as narrated by Muslim:

"Whoever dies without a bayʿah on his neck dies the death of jāhiliyyah."[50]

There is no bayʿah to give in a world without a Khalīfa, and there is no single hand into which the Ummah may place its collective economic weight, which is exactly why the boycott today falls so far short of what Quraysh achieved against a single clan with a fraction of the population and none of the modern world's economic reach. The Ummah's problem is not that its individuals lack faith. It is that a body of believers without a head cannot act as a body, no matter how sincere its individual limbs remain.

The Ṣaḥābah, raḍiya Allāhu ʿanhum, understood the gravity of leaving the Ummah even briefly without unified leadership so deeply that they gave bayʿah to Abū Bakr before burying the Prophet ﷺ, recognizing that establishing legitimate collective leadership was the most urgent matter before them, more urgent even than burying the man they loved most.[51] A century has now passed since the Ummah's last unified authority was dismantled, and in that century the Ummah has relearned, boycott after boycott, ceasefire after ceasefire, betrayal after betrayal, exactly what the Ṣaḥābah already knew.

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[49] Āl ʿImrān, 3:105

[50] Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 1851

[51] al-Suyūṭī, *Sharḥ al-Maḥallī ʿalā Jamʿ al-Jawāmiʿ*, 2:487. https://www.islamiqate.com/4483/what-is-the-greatest-obligation-in-islam

The Use of AI

Artificial intelligence was used in the research and drafting of this article, and that fact should be stated plainly rather than left for the reader to guess at.

Jordan's Dār al-Iftāʾ addressed the matter directly, describing artificial intelligence as a technical system for processing data and extracting patterns, capable of surveying a vast body of texts in a short time, indexing them precisely, comparing wordings and positions across sources, and tracing evidences to their locations, all of which assists a researcher in gathering material and organizing it without this constituting ijtihād in itself.[52] The same statement was equally direct about the boundary: a fatwa is the human application of a revealed ruling to a real situation, requiring the weighing of circumstances, consequences, and the condition of the person asking, and this is a task that belongs to the qualified scholar and cannot be delegated to a machine, since no tool of this kind possesses the understanding of purpose and value that ijtihād demands, and it operates only within whatever data it has been fed, without the capacity to distinguish the strong position from the weak one on its own authority. Jordan's Dār al-Iftāʾ accordingly set out professional guidelines requiring that **AI remain a servant of ijtihād** rather than a producer of it, that its output be reviewed critically by a qualified scholar rather than accepted at face value, and that whoever relies on it disclose to the one asking that the ruling given rests on human scholarly effort and that artificial intelligence was no more than a tool in reaching it.[53]

Waʾllāhu Aʿlam (Allah Knows Best)

[52] ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sharīf, "توظيف الذكاء الاصطناعي في الفتوى," Jordan's Dār al-Iftāʾ al-ʿĀmm, published 20 April 2026. https://www.aliftaa.jo/article/5996/توظيف-الذكاء-الاصطناعي-في-الفتوى

[53] Ibid

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