# Bill To Counter Israel Boycott Movement Passes Senate

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<https://www.wsj.com/articles/bill-to-counter-israel-boycott-movement-passes-senate-11549402182>

The Republican-controlled Senate on Tuesday passed legislation that would allow state and local governments to bar contractors from advocating for sanctions and a boycott of Israel.

The measure, part of a broader bill setting U.S. policy in the Middle East, is aimed at discouraging the so-called BDS movement that aims to end Israel’s occupation of the Palestinian territories through boycotts, divestment and sanctions.

The bill, which the Senate passed on a 77-23 vote, is unlikely to succeed in the House, where the majority Democratic caucus is split between supporters of Israel and a newly empowered progressive wing critical of the nation’s treatment of the Palestinians, aides said.

The legislation, sponsored by Sen. Marco Rubio (R., Fla.), also authorizes assistance and weapons transfers to Israel and extended U.S. defense cooperation with Jordan. In addition, it contains a resolution, sponsored by Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, opposing President Trump’s pledge [to withdraw troops from Syria and Afghanistan](https://www.wsj.com/articles/senate-republicans-rebuff-trump-on-syria-withdrawal-plan-11548975257?mod=article_inline).

At least 27 states have adopted laws that are designed to discourage boycotts against Israel, according to the American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, an organization focused on strengthening the U.S.-Israel relationship.

Mr. Rubio’s legislation would allow state and local governments to adopt policies that would prohibit investment in entities that support boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel or restrict contracting with them. Critics of the policies say they violate citizens’ freedom of speech, and the policies have prompted legal challenges.

“There is clearly a question of drawing the line on free speech and the right of anybody to advocate the policy that they want,” said House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D., Md.) last week. “I am not sure the Rubio legislation drew that distinction properly.”

Because the legislation would split the new Democratic House majority it is unlikely to come up for a vote in that chamber, where Democrats control the schedule, aides said.

Rep. Rashida Tlaib (D., Mich.), the first Palestinian-American woman in Congress, said boycotts should be constitutionally protected.

“This is a bad faith and disingenuous effort by Republicans to turn boycotts into a wedge issue, and to threaten Americans’ right to free speech,” she said. “Economic boycotts have defined historic social justice and human rights movements in the United States and beyond.”

The bill also contains an amendment that opposes President Trump’s decision to withdraw troops from Syria and Afghanistan, warning that a “precipitous withdrawal of United States forces from either country could put at risk hard-won gains and United States national security.”

Military planners had hoped to keep troops in Syria until a local security force strong enough to thwart Islamic State’s attempts to re-emerge could be put in place. The U.S. withdrawal is expected to take between four and six months, defense officials have said.

The vote is indicative of the growing unrest among Republicans on Capitol Hill about the president’s foreign policy. Votes aimed at overturning the Trump administration’s removal of sanctions on Russian companies and withdrawing U.S. support from the Saudi war in Yemen also have shown GOP discontent with the administration’s approach to foreign affairs.