We write to you in regards to "Challenging States: Boycott Diplomacy of P2P Networks" (manuscript #2022-01-0039), which you submitted to *International Studies Quarterly*.

We have now received reviews from two highly qualified scholars. Please find their reports below.

Unfortunately, their assessments provide us with insufficient support to continue the review process. *ISQ* receives an extraordinarily large number of submissions each year, and we can only pursue publication for a few of these manuscripts. This means that we must decline a number of high-quality and promising submissions. We summarize our thoughts on the reviews below.

In brief:
- Both reviewers find the manuscript compelling and well-written. But the reviewers also see theoretical and conceptual weaknesses. Reviewer 1 is perhaps the most critical, but Reviewer 2 has some of the same concerns, especially when it comes to theoretical under-development and conceptual vagueness. Both reviewers think more work is needed before the manuscript is ready for publication in ISQ and both agree that the changes required are too extensive for the typical revision process.
- The reviewers provide thoughtful comments on your manuscript as well as useful feedback on how to best revise the work. We hope you find these reviews helpful.

Thank you for considering *International Studies Quarterly* for the publication of your research. We hope that the outcome of this specific submission will not discourage you from allowing us to consider future manuscripts.

Sincerely,
The Editors

Lead Editors: Brandon Prins & Krista Wiegand, University of Tennessee, Knoxville | Associate Editors: Monika Barthwal-Datta, University of New South Wales Sydney; Pinar Bilgin, Bilkent University; Christopher Butler, University of New Mexico; Ajin Choi, Yonsei University; Martin Edwards, Seton Hall University; Courtney Hillebrecht, University of Nebraska, Lincoln; Reyko Huang, Texas A&M University; Wonjae Hwang, University of Tennessee, Knoxville; Brian Phillips, University of Essex

----

Reviewer 1
The author(s) make a very important attempt to connect two lines of research that have so far been tangential but not much crossed roads: transnational advocacy networks, and public diplomacy. However, they fall short of achieving this goal. My suggestion for this article is to be rejected. But I hope that the authors can improve this manuscript and publish it elsewhere.

The author(s) touch upon some important lines of research including work on transnational advocacy networks, and legitimacy, but do not engage with those more relevant literature and theories in depth. Instead, they keep coming back to their soft power argument which is not based on a strong foundation. Mainly because of the relatively weak foundation, they do not build an analytically or theoretically strong case for their arguments.

The non-state actors' boycott of powerful actors including MNCs, states, international organizations, and transnational networks (WEF etc.) is very much covered in the literature on transnational advocacy networks and "global/ transnational" civil society. The authors do not distinguish their case for soft power, public diplomacy, digital diplomacy or boycott diplomacy from this vast literature which indeed is more theoretical. Or they do not make much connection between those theories and their arguments. Instead, what is new in this article is only renaming an old and established practice. Therefore, it is difficult to tell what this article's contribution to the literature is.
There are a few more points that I would like to raise about the article:

1- there is no soft power theory to speak of although the author(s) refer to it as such.

2- their definition of soft power is very different than that of Nye or other literature, but they do not explain much regarding this difference: "systematic use of nonviolence to achieve strategic goals." For Nye, soft power is different than coercion or inducement. However, one can have nonviolent tactics that are still coercive. Indeed, Nye talks about sanctions as an economic power, not soft power. And sanctions remain on the hard side of Nye's hard-soft dichotomy (see Nye 2004, p. 8 for example). Propaganda or manipulation too can be nonviolent, but are still coercive, and are not regarded as soft power by Nye or by most scholars. If boycotts are a form of soft power, then what is not soft power except weapons?

3- the author(s) keep referring to hard and soft, but without making clear the distinction in this dichotomy, although it implicitly means violent and nonviolent from their earlier definition: "hard and soft IR interactions", "'mixed' soft and hard diplomatic tool known as 'boycott diplomacy'" and so on.

4- it is also not very clear why the author(s) prefer to categorize boycott as "diplomacy".

5- the author(s) refer to reputation/ status/ standing a lot, but without adequately engaging with the IR side of said literature.

6- the article would be stronger if the author(s) weighed more heavily on the empirical aspects of their case study, rather than spending vast majority of the article to review very different lines of research (and without making much connection between them).

7- legitimacy literature is not recent as the author(s) suggest on page 5. It is at least as old as Thucydides. Indeed, it is one of the oldest concepts discussed in the IR literature.

8- most of the time when the author(s) refer to soft power decreasing or increasing, they probably would be better off referring to legitimacy or maybe even authority.

9- it is not surprising that a transnational advocacy network does not engage in "hard power attacks" (p. 16) which the author(s) implicitly define as violence. That is probably the dividing line between TANs and terrorist organizations. However, TANs often engage in coercive tactics including naming and shaming, boycotting etc.

Thinking from the author(s)'s perspective, I am sorry that I recommended a rejection decision. However, I hope that the author(s) would find my comments constructive and would be able to improve and publish their manuscript. If I may, I would encourage them again to focus more on the empirical part of their case study rather than the conceptual aspect of the article. I wish them the best during these difficult times. Stay safe and healthy.

Reviewer 2

The article indeed raises several questions that are of critical importance for the study of today's international relations, notably with respect to the role of non-state actors and that of digitization. The author/s is/are correct in maintaining that P2P networks are a relatively new phenomenon and that more research needs to be conducted to better understand the way they operate and the impact they have on international politics in general and diplomacy in particular. Also, the BDS seems to be a particularly appropriate case to address these questions. Yet I have major concerns regarding the discussion of the theoretical approaches and the presentation of the article's main arguments.

1) The article addresses several intersecting theoretical concepts and approaches, namely soft power, diplomacy, public diplomacy, and social power (the latter comes a bit abruptly at p. 11 and is no longer dealt with upon its introduction, which is why I wonder why it is mentioned at all). Yet as this is so, more efforts need to be made to thoroughly disentangle the concepts and define the terms the author/s is/are using.

2) The author/s suggest/s that "soft power theory … is an appropriate framework for analyzing the boycotting phenomenon" (p. 9). If this is so, I would have expected a more detailed discussion of the concept itself, the (severe) criticism it has faced in the literature, and its connection with (the new) public diplomacy. For instance, there are many studies challenging the soft-hard power binary / dichotomy (Hagström & Pan 2020; Bially Mattern 2005 et cetera). It is thus not novel to maintain that the "dichotomous distinction between hard and soft [power] … is delusional" (p. 21). Also, regarding both the presentation of the concept as well as the subsequent analysis of Israel and BDS it appears that the author/s fail/s to distinguish between outcome (soft power) and means (soft power tools), see particularly pp. 15-6. Here, it is also important to note that public diplomacy is probably the only way for a state to coherently sway its attractiveness in the eyes of others (Blechman 2004; for non-state actors, see my comments below).

3) Seeing the article's main topic, I am surprised that the author/s spend/s so many words discussing the soft power of Israel, although the article's focus is the boycott diplomacy of P2P networks / BDS. The latter's efforts are certainly also intended to undermine Israel's "world status and global legitimacy" (p. 15). Yet, for one thing, one should be cautious to confuse these with "its [i.e., Israel's] soft power components" (ibid). For another, this would suggest an osmosis-like process, i.e., an increase of BDS' soft power goes along with a decrease of Israel's soft power. If there is a relationship between the former and the latter, it operates

indirectly; and if the author/s assume/s such a relationship to be at work, then more efforts should be made to illustrate and explain it.

4) I think more must be said about the agency of P2P networks. What are they, how do they work, and why, if at all, can we conceive of a them as conducting (public) diplomacy. I surmise a recent article by Bos and Melissen (2019; "Rebel diplomacy and digital communication: public diplomacy in the Sahel") could be helpful in this regard.