**Finkelstein’s Slander Against Israel**

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Norman Finkelstein, the professional Israel-basher, appeared before the United Nations Correspondents Association in New York on April 7th to hawk his newest diatribe against Israel entitled ‘This Time We Went Too Far.’ Finkelstein claimed in his book that he was providing “an accurate record” of the “suffering” that the Gazan population “endured” as a result of the “merciless Israeli assault.” He urged the UN correspondents to publicize his message about what he called the “bloodletting in Gaza.”

Finkelstein was referring to Operation Cast Lead, which Israel launched in December 2008 to put a stop to the incessant rocket attacks launched from Gaza by Palestinian terrorists against civilians living in Southern Israel.

In his remarks to the UN correspondents, Finkelstein said that it was inaccurate to characterize what happened in Gaza as a war. He described it as a “massacre” deliberately designed by the Israeli government and military to terrorize the people of Gaza with “disproportionate force.” The real reason for Israel’s invasion, Finkelstein asserted, was to teach Arabs a lesson after Israel’s “defeat” in Lebanon in 2006.

To support his thesis that Israel used unreasonably disproportionate force against a defenseless civilian population and engaged in a “massacre” rather than a war, Finkelstein cited testimony from unnamed Israeli soldiers who were quoted as saying that they did not engage any combatants on the Hamas side. He also referred, as an example of Israel’s true intentions, to former Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, who said at the time that “Israel demonstrated real hooliganism during the course of the recent operation, which I demanded.”

Often associated with rowdiness at soccer games, “hooliganism” is a slang word that in the worst dictionary definition of the term refers to willful wanton and malicious destruction of the property of others. Let us suppose for the moment that this is what Livni actually meant and that “willful wanton and malicious destruction of Palestinian property” in Gaza reflected Israel’s true intentions. Is Israel expected to stand by and let Hamas and its other terrorist allies shoot rockets into Israeli civilian centers all day and night long, day after day – following repeated Israeli warnings to stop or face the consequences – without finally inflicting real damage to Hamas’ infrastructure in return? The use of disproportionate force to inflict damage against the enemy’s infrastructure was the only means available to stop Hamas’ campaign of aggressive violence against Israeli civilians.

If destroying the enemy’s infrastructure were considered a “war crime” or a “crime against humanity,” then Abraham Lincoln deserves to be branded a war criminal for endorsing the strategy of his general Ulysses S. Grant who took command of the Union Army with the goal of seeking “the utter destruction of the Confederacy’s capacity to wage war.” Grant ordered his subordinates, “To strike against [the enemy] and break it up, get into the interior of the enemy’s country as far as you can, inflicting all the damage you can upon their war resources.”

Cruel, yes, but the strategy put an end to the four year Civil War.

I understand that this is a crude comparison, but Israel was at war with terrorists determined to destroy the Jewish state and who refused to heed Israel’s many warnings to stop the rocket attacks meant to kill and terrorize innocent Israeli civilians. On the other hand, Finkelstein does not believe there was any war in Gaza at all to bring to an end, which would possibly justify what Israel did. But he completely ducked my question concerning the Hamas Covenant’s threat of annihilation of Israel, backed by Hamas’ terrorism campaign. Didn’t Israel have a legitimate existential fear for its survival, I asked him? His response indicated the twisted nature of this Hamas apologist’s way of thinking.

First, Finkelstein said that my question was made up of “99% fantasy,” even though I was quoting from the Hamas Covenant:

“Israel will exist and will continue to exist until Islam will obliterate it, just as it obliterated others before it” (The Martyr, Imam Hassan al-Banna, of blessed memory).”

“There is no solution for the Palestinian question except through Jihad. Initiatives, proposals and international conferences are all a waste of time and vain endeavors.”

I also quoted Al-Zahar, the overall leader of Hamas in the Gaza Strip who said:

“I hope that our dream of having an independent state on the entire territory of historical Palestine will be realized one day.” This dream, he added, “will become real one day. I’m certain of this because there is no place for the state of Israel on this land.”

After refusing to directly respond to my question, Finkelstein said that even if this threat to Israel’s existence were real (which he continued to deny was the case) it would not justify Israel’s actions. This regular mocker of his fellow Jews’ Holocaust suffering (which had included his own Holocaust survivor parents) gave an incredible response to a question from another UN correspondent, who had asked him to compare the Nazi horrors with Israel’s alleged war crimes. Finkelstein said that he saw little difference between Jewish children being murdered in gas chambers by the Nazis and Palestinian children being burnt by white phosphorous in Gaza.

The loss of any innocent child’s life – whether Palestinian or Israeli – is tragic. Perhaps Israel could have done more to avoid some deaths and serious injuries in Gaza, even though the former commander of British forces in Afghanistan observed that in its offensive against Hamas in Gaza the Israeli army “did more to safeguard the rights of civilians in a combat zone than any other army in the history of warfare.” But even assuming the accuracy of the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights’ worst case figure of 313 children killed among the 1414 Palestinians who died over a 23-day period (which defined a child as anyone under the age of 18), does that really compare with the more than 1.2 million Jewish children deliberately exterminated by the Nazis during the Holocaust?

By 1945, the Germans and their collaborators killed nearly two out of every three European Jews. In the Gaza Strip, the Arab population grew from 82,500 to 1,428, 757 between 1948 and 2006. There were no Jews at all living in Gaza in 2006. The Palestinians were handed a golden opportunity to govern themselves and create the foundation for an independent state. After Israel withdrew unilaterally from Gaza, there was no blockade of the borders. Only after Hamas came to power, bringing with it the real potential to make good on its threat to annihilate Israel, did Israel take more defensive precautions that included a blockade. Finkelstein never mentioned that Hamas smuggled arms into Gaza, crossed the Israeli border to kidnap an Israeli soldier who is still languishing in Hamas’ hands if he is alive at all, and launched thousands of rockets targeted to hit schools and other Israeli civilian centers.

After Finkelstein got through excoriating Israel for what he called a “terrorist attack on a civilian population” and denying that Israel was engaged in a real bona fide war with a terrorist enemy sworn to Israel’s destruction, he went on to defend the findings of the Goldstone Report that had been commissioned by the anti-Israel United Nations Human Rights Council. He called the report’s findings incontrovertible and its conclusion that Israel “might” have committed crimes against humanity the most “cautious” of all human rights reports. Finkelstein claimed that the only reason Israel and its supporters were trying to debunk the report was because they were particularly upset about the credentials of the prime author, Judge Richard Goldstone of South Africa – a Jew and a self-described committed Zionist as well as a distinguished international jurist.

First of all, Finkelstein conveniently left out of his praise of the Goldstone Reportthe part about Hamas’ own violations of international human rights law. Second, he neglected to mention the biased composition of the panel serving with Judge Goldstone that conducted its fact-finding mission in Gaza at the UN Human Rights Council’s behest.

The fact-finding mission had pledged to impartially assess “all violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law that might have been committed” in the Israel-Gaza conflict. International law requires such impartiality – an ingredient missing in virtually every UN-sponsored investigation of Israel and sadly missing in this case.

For example, prior to seeing any evidence a panel member, Professor Christine Chinkin, had publicly declared that one of the parties—Israel—was guilty. She remained on the panel even after this obvious bias was pointed out. Another biased member of the four person panel, Ms. Hina Jilani, was quoted as stating in 2005: “Israel is depriving Palestinians of their basic human rights using security as an excuse.” A third member of the panel, Irish Colonel Desmond Travers, showed his anti-Israel bias and motivation to find Israel guilty irrespective of the facts when in an interview he accused Israeli soldiers of having killed Irish soldiers in Lebanon with “a significant number who were taken out deliberately and shot (in southern Lebanon.).” There was no credible evidence presented for that allegation either.

Poor Judge Goldstone, even assuming he brought to his task the most honorable of intentions, was outnumbered 3-1.

How was the majority’s bias reflected in the Goldstone mission’s fact-finding? It simply ignored inconvenient evidence that contradicted the majority opinion that Israel was guilty as charged. For example, Israel produced photographic evidence that Gaza mosques were used to store rockets and other weapons. That could not be, said Desmond Travers. “I don’t believe the photographs… Those charges reflect Western perceptions in some quarters that Islam is a violent religion.”

Finally, the Goldstone Report applied an outdated notion of international law that, in its interpretation, requires a democracy to sit back and wait for its citizens to be murdered in droves by armed terrorists before responding with overwhelming military force to prevent more attacks. Israel has the right to defend its innocent civilian citizens from attack by whatever means it deems necessary after fair warning and less forceful measures were tried without success.

Norman Finkelstein said that he is working with Arab nations and others to wrangle an invitation to address the United Nations General Assembly about Israel’s alleged “crimes” against the Palestinians. Of course, his arrogant pitch for attention and 15 minutes of fame should be rejected out of hand. But knowing the present composition of the General Assembly, he may well get that invitation. If he does, the United States and its allies should insist on a rebuttal address by someone like Professor Alan Dershowitz who can cut this provocateur down to size.