**The Moral Clarity of Richard Falk**

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“The Palestinian struggle for self-determination has become the great international moral issue of our time,” the international law expert Richard Falk declares in his latest book, Palestine: The Legitimacy of Hope (Just World Books).

Falk calls it “the last major anticolonial struggle.”

In this wide-ranging book, the professor emeritus of international law at Princeton University embraces the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement, advocates abandoning the two-state solution and argues that the best way of understanding Israel is as a settler-colonial state.

He notes that the importance of BDS lies in the fact that it is Palestinian-led and that Israel has “no intention of allowing a viable Palestinian state to be established.”

He also introduces a new lexicon to avoid the obscurantism that language can often lend itself to. Occupation, he argues, should be called what it is — annexation.

Israel’s “democracy” is in reality an ethnocracy, human rights “violations” are better described as crimes, home demolitions represent ethnic cleansing and Israeli military doctrine is a form of state terrorism.

Falk writes that he is not yet ready to use the word “genocide” to characterize Israel’s behavior but “genocidal” is implicit in where its policies seem to be heading.

Falk recently completed a six-year stint as the United Nations’ special rapporteur on theWest Bank and Gaza. A rapporteur, derived from the French, is an investigator assigned to a deliberative body, in this case the UN Human Rights Council, to which Falk reported from March 2008 to March 2014.

Nearly all of Palestine: The Legitimacy of Hope is based on articles that Falk wrote while he was special rapporteur.

The book is divided into seven chapters, each with an original introduction that provides a framework for what follows. The seven chapters range in topic from peace negotiations to hunger strikes by Palestinian prisoners and the massacres in Gaza to the role of international law and global solidarity movements.

Astute

In these writings, Falk demonstrates that he is more than just an expert on international human rights. He is also an astute political observer and a compassionate and compelling moral voice.

The central theme of the book is that Palestinians are waging — and winning — a struggle for their legitimate right to self-determination. It is, in effect, a “soft power” struggle of global public opinion and Palestinian resistance, both violent and nonviolent, against the “hard power” of Israeli military superiority backed by the economic, political, military and diplomatic support of the world’s lone superpower, the United States.

Falk weighs in on the role of the global Palestine solidarity movement in support of this struggle. In a striking example of humility, he apologies for coming across as “unwittingly paternalistic” by appearing to approve a Palestinian shift toward nonviolent resistance strategies. “No outsider,” he writes, “has the moral authority or political legitimacy to tell those enduring severe oppression how to behave.”

Elsewhere, he elaborates: “It seems important to understand, especially for non-Palestinians, that it is the Palestinians who should retain control over the discourse on their struggle, vision and strategy. It is up to the rest of us … that we not encroach on this political space and appreciate that our role is secondary.”

Falk underscores that the military methods used by Hamas and its allies should be “viewed in the context of the internationally recognized right of peoples to use all necessary means to resist foreign military occupation … unlawful blockade, collective punishment and [the] regime of state terror” imposed by Israel.

At the same time, he is unequivocal about condemning violence directed at civilians and says militants waging armed struggle must also respect the norms of international law, even when Israeli violence is often purposely meant to provoke a violent Palestinian response.

Passionate

Falk is at his most passionate when he writes about the Palestinian prisoner hunger strikers. He excoriates the liberal New York Times columnists Nicholas Kristof andThomas Friedman for relentlessly calling for a “Palestinian Gandhi.”

Yet when Palestinians held under Israel’s system of administrative detention — a misnomer for imprisonment without trial or charges — went on hunger strike to protest this absence of due process and brutal prison conditions, those same liberal voices said nothing.

The fact that many of the hunger strikers belonged to Islamic Jihad undoubtedly played a role in this silence, Falk notes.

Even though a hunger strike is quintessentially nonviolent, demanding, as Falk writes, “the finest qualities that human beings can ever hope to achieve,” neither The New York Times nor other outlets of Western liberal media acknowledged that their long-sought Gandhian moment had arrived.

It is also refreshing to see that Falk is not utopian or idealistic about the role of international law. He readily acknowledges that geopolitical interests take precedence.

Despite the fact that Palestinians have international law on their side, they have nevertheless steadily lost ground to Israel’s brand of settler colonialism and the US role of neo-colonial supporter.

Yet Falk approaches the issue dialectically, showing that invoking international law is nevertheless a vital part of the Palestinians’ struggle and — along with BDS — can help bring about the same type of pressure that ended white minority rule in South Africa.

Like all books that rely on newspaper articles or blog posts for the bulk of their content,Palestine: The Legitimacy of Hope is very much in the moment, caught up in the particular event that inspired that day’s or that week’s commentary.

When transformed into a book, the perspective of time is sometimes lacking, including the historical background that would identify patterns and lend even more weight to the arguments being made.

Despite this minor caveat, the importance of this book is that it does, indeed, legitimize hope.

Rod Such is a former editor for World Book and Encarta encyclopedias. He is active with Americans United for Palestinian Human Rights, Jewish Voice for Peace-Portland Chapter and the Seattle Mideast Awareness Campaign.

 Image of Palestine: The Legitimacy of Hope

Palestine: The Legitimacy of Hope

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