



Palestine's Horizon: Toward a Just Peace, by Richard Falk. London: Pluto Press, 2017. 196 pages. \$99.00 cloth, \$21.00 paper, \$21.00 e-book.

REVIEWED BY ARDI IMSEIS

In *Representations of the Intellectual*, Edward W. Said observed that “despite the abuse and vilification” that pro-Palestinian advocates invite for themselves, “the truth deserves to be spoken, represented by an unafraid and compassionate intellectual.”* Few public intellectuals have devoted themselves so fully to this ideal as Richard Falk. From his opposition to the Vietnam War to his support for the environment and human security, no progressive movement of global consequence has gone untouched by the Albert G. Milbank Professor, Emeritus, of International Law and Practice at Princeton. For those engaged with the question of Palestine through the lens of international law, Falk’s presence in both the literature and

praxis has loomed larger and longer than most, from his work on the MacBride Commission following the Sabra and Shatila massacre (1982) to his role as United Nations special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967 (a post he held 2008–14). It is against this great corpus of work as a scholar/practitioner/activist that Falk’s *Palestine’s Horizon: Toward a Just Peace* must be read.

Palestine’s Horizon is a general meditation on where the Palestinian struggle for dignity and justice stands in 2017, a century following the Balfour Declaration, seventy years after the UN partition of Palestine, and fifty years following Israel’s occupation of its remnants in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The book is divided into four parts. In part 1, Falk interprets the above anniversaries to provide a “helpful perspective on the present,” and argues that the following four features are salient: (1) the collapse of the Oslo process and the resulting widespread disillusionment with the two-state paradigm; (2) the persistence of a “dual reality” in which Palestinian suffering is correlative with increased Israeli encroachment on Palestinian rights; (3) the growth in global solidarity with Palestine, epitomized by the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, resulting in Israeli efforts to equate that movement with a new form of anti-Semitism; and (4) the overshadowing of Palestine’s cause by other acute regional crises in Syria and Yemen (pp. 5–6). The result, according to Falk, is that “we are now experiencing both a post-diplomatic mood of frustration and an emerging pre-diplomatic mood of expectation,” the success of which will ultimately depend on an unlikely dramatic shift in both the U.S. and European positions (p. 9).

Part 2 focuses on the gradual shift toward nonviolent strategies to achieving Palestinian rights, and the resulting “war of legitimacy.” Falk identifies BDS as both “a legally and morally appropriate means to carry on the struggle for Palestinian rights,” and a principal component of

* Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* (New York: Pantheon, 1994), p. 101.

the “soft power” required to compel changes in Israeli behavior. Likewise, Falk points to the Palestine’s recent diplomatic successes, including gaining recognition as a non-member observer state at the UN and its accession to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, as important elements of the legitimacy war. In his view, this strategic use of the law—increasingly referred to as “lawfare” by proponents and opponents alike—has become a “major dimension of the current phase of the Palestinian national movement [and] has a positive role to play” (pp. 92–93).

Part 3 expounds on the false conflation of anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism among some commentators, including in reference to the work of the UN and the academy. As to the UN, Falk argues that it was an historical mistake for the UN General Assembly to have equated Zionism with racism in 1975, if only because doing so shifted the focus of inquiry toward the legitimacy of Israel’s ideological foundations, as opposed to its concrete and continuing actions under law. One result has been to obscure “real grievances of Palestinians . . . behind a smokescreen of a false debate about whether or not deep criticisms of Israel were anti-Semitic” (p. 113). In his view, “it is not Zionism as an ideology that should be evaluated as racist or not, despite its ethnic exclusivity, but Israel as a state subject to international law” (pp. 109–10). From there, Falk reflects on increasing efforts “to stifle criticism of Israel by inappropriately deploying this charge of anti-Semitism” (p. 115).

Finally, part 4 is devoted to a short discussion of Said’s emancipatory ideas behind the Palestinian liberation struggle juxtaposed against current overwhelming material odds. Falk draws upon Said’s critique of Oslo to address how “the Palestinians are waging and winning a legitimacy war for control of the heights of international morality and international law, for the public perception of justice and right” (p. 137). In a *cri de coeur*, Falk urges his readers to “not be misled by accepting the (mis)guidance of self-proclaimed realists who continue to shape the policies of government, proclaiming that the achievement of justice and genuine peace is unattainable for the Palestinians, indeed for the entire peoples of the Middle East” (p. 141).

Palestine’s Horizon is a thoughtful and timely monograph on where the struggle for Palestinian and, by extension, Israeli liberation is today. As ever, it is a movement that must be guided as much, if not more, by the metaphysical realm of principle, morality, and justice as by the physical realms of politics, capital, and force. For anyone who cares to explore a deeper and more critical analysis of the contemporary history and geopolitics of Palestine/Israel, as explained through the relationship between hard and soft power in global politics, this is a book that should be consulted.

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