

# Israel a colonialist solution to a European problem

*Richard Anderson Falk:* The Zionists' vision of a Jewish homeland has always carried within it the current attempts to erase the Palestinians from their own homeland



By Ali Amiri  
Cultural critic

## INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE

Richard Anderson Falk is an esteemed American professor emeritus of international law at Princeton University. Throughout his career, he has made significant contributions to the field of international law, as well as the United Nations. He has an extensive publication record which includes authoring, coauthoring, editing, and coediting numerous books, among them scholarly ones about the Palestinian issue. In 2008, Falk was appointed by the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) as the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Israeli violations of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967. His efforts to raise awareness about the suffering of Palestinians and the human rights violations committed by Israel have made him the target of defamation campaigns by Zionists. In this extended interview, the 93-year-old professor not only contextualizes the crimes committed by Zionists but also shares his firsthand experiences of Israel's attempts to defame and silence him. He also points out that the rise of anti-Zionist sentiments in the Western population could mark the beginning of the end for Israel's apartheid regime.

**IRANDAILY:** At first, there's a need to contextualize for our readers Israel's urge to silence pro-Palestinian voices and the voices of the critics of Israel, both in the US and globally. As someone who has experienced it firsthand, can you please explain that urge?

**RICHARD A. FALK:** Israel is very sensitive to international criticism, especially by critics associated with its base of support in the colonial settler and European colonial states, which together comprise the White Global West. It is also sensitive to pro-Palestine lawfare associated with international institutions, especially the UN, International Court of Justice (ICJ), International Criminal Court, and the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) because its legitimacy as sovereign state partly rests on the claim to be the only democratic state in the Middle East, a (mis)perception reinforced by US at the highest levels of governments pointing to 'shared values' that were at the core of 'the special relationship,' overlooking the crimes against the indigenous majority Arab population of Palestine involving massive expulsion in 1948 and exploitative dominance since at least 1967 over the Occupied Palestinian Territories of East Jerusalem, West Bank, and Gaza.

I was the target of Israeli smears and defamatory attacks during the period I served as Special Rapporteur on Israeli Violations of Human Rights in Occupied Palestine in the period of 2008-2014. The attacks involved slanderous accusations of antisemitism on my part, and also sharp criticism of the UN as biased due to its disproportionate attention given to alleged Israeli wrongdoing.

The UN responded defensively doing whatever it could to distance itself from me, especially during the time that Ban Ki Moon was Secretary General. He explained my remaining as Special Rapporteur by reminding Israel and the world that I, as an unpaid appointee of the Human Rights Council, was not part of the UN civil service and hence beyond his disciplinary reach. This was a virtual admission that the Israel defamatory criticism were justified.

Attacking its critics became a policy tool used by Israel and its Zionist support structure in Global West countries with increasing frequency for two reasons: the weakness of Israel's substantive position creating an incentive to shift the conversation from a focus on its severe violations of law and morality to the credibility of the critics a process that I have called 'the politics of deflection' in which the attention of the media is diverted to the messenger rather than the substantive message about Israel's violations, and the related intimidation directed at activists

and others who dare promote non-violent solidarity initiatives such as BDS (boycott, divestment, and sanctions). No comparable effort was made to stifle such criticism or activism of South Africa during the apartheid period even though the governments of the US and UK were strategically aligned with apartheid South Africa during the Cold War years. The presence of a pro-Israeli Zionist network that shields Israel from criticism by 'weaponizing antisemitism' in varying ways that cause imbalances in the media and infringements upon academic freedom within educational institutions of the West.

**How can we explain Israel's tight grip on public discourse on Israel-Palestine issue for so long? How could it accumulate so much power and influence within different states and international entities? If there is a financial aspect to it, how powerful is it?**

This is a complex, fundamental question. Israel established its legitimacy as a new state shortly after World War II in the twilight of the European colonial order, imposing its sovereign claim on a resident Arab majority that identified as belonging to the nation of the Palestinian people. The Zionist project of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine was a dream of a small dedicated movement in late 19th century Europe that became a political project when the UK pledged its support in the Balfour Declaration (1917) for a Jewish Homeland in Palestine, a purely colonial interference with the self-determination rights of people. The statehood of Israel became an attainable goal during the British mandate period in which the UK administered Palestine as an International Mandate on behalf of the League of Nations, and encouraged Jewish immigration, a process accelerated in response to the rise of fascism in Europe, climaxing in the Holocaust that put to death as many as six million Jews in Europe, and caused a sense of guilt on the part of Western liberal democracies for their meager efforts to oppose such genocidal behavior. The British ended their mandate, partly in reaction to Zionist anti-British terrorism dumping on the newly formed UN the daunting challenge of finding a solution to the surging internal conflict in Palestine between settler Jews and indigenous Arabs. The UN relied on British experience with its divide and rule style of colonialism. It established a commission that made recommendations centering on a proposed partition of Palestine into two states with Jerusalem as both their common capital and an international city. The Zionist Movement accepted

partition, the representatives of the Palestinian people rejected it. Against this background Israel was established in the aftermath of a war internal to Palestine between Jewish militia forces and the armed forces of neighboring Arab countries, ending with an agreed 'green line' that was treated as a provisional internal boundary between the two peoples that enlarged Israel beyond the UN partition territorial allocations, giving the Jewish state 78 percent of Palestinian territory rather than the 45 percent contained in the UN plan, and dividing Jerusalem between the two peoples, leaving the control of Palestinian side of the green line to Jordan and Gaza to Egypt.

Even with its military victory and Western diplomatic and economic support, Israel was founded in a context that contained challenges to its legitimacy as a state from its region and indeed from most of the Global South. From the outset Israel realized that its security and status in international life would be greatly helped if it could control the public discourse that shaped international public opinion. Its fragile security was highlighted by the fact that in its early years it was surrounded by hostile larger states that perceived the establishment of Israel in their midst as a territorial, racial, and religious intrusion, a colonialist solution of a European problem at the expense of the Islamic, Arab bloc of countries.

Israel's success in discourse control was greatly aided by the extent of Jewish influence in the large media platforms of the West, especially in the US and UK, as facilitated by the wealth of Diaspora Jews mobilized after Hitler to support the establishment and development of a Jewish state as a place of secure sanctuary in the event of future outbreaks of lethal antisemitism. This propaganda tool was used in sophisticated ways to create great admiration for Israel as liberal democracy in the Western mold and a modernizing success in contrast to the supposedly backward, stagnant, impoverished Palestinian society. In contrast, Israel was portrayed as socially progressive, economically successful, and even managed to make 'the desert bloom.'

At first, there were tensions in the West between support for Israel and maintaining reliable access to the huge oil and gas reserves of the region. Israel was able to resolve these tensions with its victory over its Arab adversaries in the 1967 War, as well as occupying the territories allocated to the Palestinians in 1948. And most symbolically important it unilaterally incorporated Jerusalem as the eternal capital of Israel, an initiative that to this day is not accepted by many governments.

