

# Richard Falk. Palestine's Horizon: Towards a Just Peace

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**Falk, Richard. *Palestine's Horizon: Toward a Just Peace*. London: Pluto Press, 2017**

What is the relationship between our limited knowledge, especially of the future, and our political and moral will? This is the question behind the title of Richard Falk's book. It is inspired by an essay by his friend Edward Said: 'On Lost Causes', first delivered as a Tanner Lecture at the University of Utah in 1997. By then Said had resigned from the Palestinian National Council because he considered the agreement by the PLO leadership to the Oslo Accords to be tantamount to Palestinian surrender. His resignation was an affirmation of his individual will to resist the partition of Palestine into two states, one Arab and one Jewish, and the denial of Palestinian refugees' right of return to the homes they had left in 1948. This resistance was, in Said's view, better than the acceptance of the intolerable. More than twenty years later, Said's position is more widely understood, and through their increasingly open opposition to the Oslo Accords, Palestinians are exercising the freedom to create their own horizons and, as long as they do so, Falk argues Palestine is not a lost cause.

Said ends his essay 'On Lost Causes' by arguing that as long as there is intellectual resistance, then no cause could be said to be 'lost'. Falk goes further saying that, contrary to what governmental realists proclaim, the political outcome of most conflicts since 1945 (but not before) has been controlled by the winners of Legitimacy Wars and not by the side with hard power dominance (p137). According to Falk the Israel-Palestine conflict is no longer a territorial encounter between occupier and occupied, but a worldwide struggle without boundaries, and that Palestinians are winning the competition for the sympathies of public opinion and the media. By

combining his critique of the Oslo Accords with an optimistic and acceptable horizon, Falk's book stands out from the many others related to the Palestinians. The book is divided into three. Part 1, 'Palestine's Emergent Imaginary', suggests that we are experiencing a mood of frustration with the discredited diplomatic framework which led to the Oslo Accords, and a shift towards a mood of expectation as global solidarity with the Palestinian struggle for rights under international law grows in strength. Part 2 discusses 'Palestine's Legitimacy War' and the way in which the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians can be seen as a soft-power competition based on controlling the legal and moral high ground. Falk makes an important digression to acknowledge the history of Palestinian nonviolent resistance stretching back to the Ottoman and British Mandate periods, reminding us that this nonviolent action was met with a British response which was 'brutal, calculating, and divisive'. In Falk's view, Palestinian nonviolent resistance has so far failed, not because Palestinians have no Palestinian Gandhi, but because international attention has been blinkered and intermittent. Falk discusses two recent forms of nonviolent resistance where Palestinians are making gains in terms of global solidarity and attention. The first is the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement which is based upon an appeal to people of conscience to act in defense of Palestinian rights. This movement is closely linked with the second form of nonviolent resistance, what Falk calls Palestinian lawfare. Although "lawfare" has been coined as a word to denote recourse to international law and the UN system for irresponsible purposes, as Falk says, recourse to law and legal remedies is a positive alternative to a failed diplomatic process in which the negotiations are weighted in favour of the stronger party.

The third part tackles the pushback to these more recent Palestinian tactics. Falk makes a plea for the defense of nonviolent resistance and global solidarity initiatives which have been demonized both by Israel, and by the US State Department in its newly adopted formal definition of anti-Semitism.

This is a book of less than 200pp, but is densely written and surprisingly wide in its scope. Falk combines the helicopter view of the UN diplomat with the granular evidence of the intolerable living conditions of Palestinians across Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory (the perspective of Palestinian refugees living in the diaspora merited more room, even in this slim book). A strength of the book is that it looks both forward to the horizon of a just peace and backwards to the conflict between the Palestinians and the first Zionist settlers in Ottoman times.

In conclusion, Falk says that a dedication to what seems impossible from a realistic perspective, is in truth the only realism with emancipatory potential. What is therefore required of us is the courage to embark on a utopian project. I return at this point to Said's essay: Said not only says that causes are not lost, but he also says that new causes emerge. He talks about how, as a child, he witnessed the emergence of Arabism, and that events can be strung together in 'a new triumphalist story'. Falk encourages the reader to think about what part he or she can play in a new triumphalist story based on respect for international law and equal rights.

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