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Book Marks

Beyond Chutzpah: On the Misuse of Anti-Semitism and the Abuse of History
Finkelstein, Norman G.
University of California Press, 2008. Pp. 412.
\$12.89 (paper)

Chastised by the right-wing Jewish community, renowned writer, scholar and teacher, Dr. Norman G. Finkelstein has the audacity to reproach Israel's ethical role in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. In his book, *Beyond Chutzpah: On the Misuse of Anti-Semitism and the Abuse of History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), Finkelstein's thesis argues:

today the interests of Jews are not so much threatened by their familiar nemesis, crude anti-Semitism as by a-Semitic governmental policies, the proponents of which may be free of anti-Semitism and indeed may well--literally count Jews among some of their best friends. Practically, this meant pinning the epithet "anti-Semitic" on domestic challenges to Jewish class privilege and political power as well as on global challenges to Israeli hegemony. political power as well as on global challenges to Israeli hegemony (27).

Finkelstein dedicates the first half of the text to a critique on the works of Phyllis Chesler, Abraham Foxman, Gabriel Schoenfield and their approaches to the "New Anti-Semitism that is argued to be resurging in the world today. He argues that the anti-Semitic idiom presented by these authors is somewhat inflated with contemptuous rhetoric in

order to sidestep the questionable actions perpetrated within the Israeli occupied Palestinian territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Finkelstein is also relentless in his critique of Harvard Law School's Alan Dershowitz's book, *The Case for Israel*. He holds no punches to explicitly describing how Dershowitz boasts about being part of an assassination during one of his visits to Israel:

I watched as a high-intensity television camera, mounted on a drone, zeroed in on the apartment of a terrorist... I watched as the camera focused on the house and the nearly empty streets (lxviii).

Finkelstein's attacks on Dershowitz range from sarcasm to outright accusations of ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in the occupied territories and beyond. He asserts, "It is hard to make out any difference between the policy Dershowitz advocates and the Nazi destruction of Lidice, for which he expresses abhorrence except that Jews, not Germans, would be implementing it" (176). He posits that anyone, whether Jewish or Gentile, that ever dares to criticize Israeli policy towards Palestine will incur the wrath of being called an anti-Semitist. For example, when Jewish billionaire and financier George Soros addressed a gathering of Jewish notables and remarked on how the "resurgence of anti-Semitism in Europe" was due to Sharon's policies and the behavior of the Jews" (78, 79), he incurred the wrath of the Jewish intelligence and was labeled an anti-Semitic.

There is arguably no question about the book's criticism of Israel's policies towards the Palestinian problem, especially after the 1967 war. Finkelstein cites the seemingly unbroken support of the U.S. government for these policies and warns of the diminishing support for

Israel among the European community. However, the overwhelming message that Finkelstein provides is the pronouncement of the holocaustic experience of WWII to justify and defend the actions of the Israeli Defense Forces in carrying out atrocities and torture in the occupied territories during any hostile confrontations with the Palestinian populace. In addition, he back up his claims with extensive research and support from B'Tselem (The Israel Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories), Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch.

Finkelstein's account of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict has an uncanny similarity to the Cuban exile community's terrorist actions that have been carried out against the Cuban government for the past 50 years. These actions are not as evident as the Israeli/Palestinian conflict; they do however have parallels in that they both have the indirect support of the United States and have been condemned by the world community. For example, on October 26, 2010 the United Nations General Assembly again condemned the U.S. embargo against Cuba for the 19th straight year in a row. In a overwhelming vote in which 187 countries voted in favor of discontinuing the U.S.'s economic, commercial and financial embargo. Those voting in favor of maintaining it were, you guessed it, the U.S. and Israel with three smaller U.S. allies abstaining.

Finkelstein's approach has been greatly influenced by Noam Chomsky and his relentless pursuit to write the truth, no matter what the consequences may bring.