

Hawking, Goldstone and political warfare

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The Durban campaign and its abuse of human rights claims was the central factor in Hawking's action. He had previously been a supporter of Israel, but in 2009 denounced the military operation in Gaza, referring to the response to Palestinian rocket attacks against Israeli civilians as "plain out of proportion.... The situation is like that of South Africa before 1990 and cannot continue."

This language is an accurate summary of the infamous Goldstone Report, which copied texts from hundreds of condemnations from the network of political NGOs that had previously authored and endorsed the Durban statement.

Goldstone's report and the NGO publications on which it was based have since been thoroughly discredited, and Goldstone himself disowned the allegations after the absurdity of the claims and contradictions in his report were too obvious to ignore.

Although a highly respected judge, Goldstone failed to look beyond the NGO political façade when he took on this role, and when he belatedly acknowledged his own failures, it was too late to reverse the impact on the delegitimization campaign.

Similarly, although Hawking is a scientist, when it comes to politics, he has violated all of the tenets of independent inquiry in examining the evidence (or its absence), instead succumbing to the propaganda campaign of the Durban process. The professor acknowledges relying on leaders of the anti-Israel campaigns to mold his assessments, explaining, "I have received a number of emails from Palestinian academics. They are unanimous that I should respect the boycott. In view of this, I must withdraw from the conference."

This is hardly the result of a rational or moral decision.

At the same time, the Israeli government shares much of the blame for the failure to rebuff these repeated attacks in the political war. The campaign to delegitimize Israel began with its founding, and has not stopped since. In the early decades (before the pretext of occupation after the 1967 war), the Arab League boycott office, located in Damascus, persuaded many firms, including Pepsi and American Express, not to do business with Israel. And anyone with an Israeli visa in their passport was

barred from entering Arab countries.

Israel's leaders during that period did a good job of defeating the first boycott, but for more than a decade, they have failed to grasp the impact of the digital-age version, in the form of the Durban strategy.

In this crucial political combat, Israel is scarcely on the battlefield, and officials are surprised whenever the delegitimization campaign scores another victory, as exemplified by Goldstone and now Hawking. This incompetence stands in sharp contrast to the activities of groups like Electronic Intifada, (led by Ali Abunimeh), the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott (Omar Barghouti) and scores of powerful politicized NGOs such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and Oxfam, as well as their Israeli and Palestinian affiliates.

This NGO network has learned how to extract vast sums from European governments, and use these resources to bombard churches and academic institutions, such as Cambridge University, where Professor Hawking works, with pseudo-academic speakers and publications repeating the mantras of war crime and apartheid.

In the long term, and in order to prevent more Hawking-like defeats and the wider exploitation of moral principles for immoral objectives, an aggressive, proactive approach and far more resources are required. Twelve years after the Durban NGO declaration, the Israeli government has no excuse for treating this assault and the ongoing process of demonization as a minor irritant.

In the short term, it is important to show Professor Hawking the contradiction between the moral language of the delegitimizers and the immoral substance of their campaigns. In this process, perhaps Hawking will follow the Goldstone precedent, and recognize that he has been used as part of the ongoing war against Israel. Until he does, the moral stain caused by his actions will continue to spread.

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