

Noam Chomsky Rails Against Israel, Again

Conjures images of apartheid, and the United States as a "Mafia don"

03.03.2010

By Susan Seligson

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Noam Chomsky addressed more than 500 people at Sleeper Auditorium last night as part of Israeli Apartheid Week. Photo by Vernon Doucette

World-renowned linguist and U.S. foreign policy critic Noam Chomsky addressed an audience of about 500 people at BU last night, lashing out at what he calls Israel's "escalating policy of apartheid," which he believes is in some respects worse than the longtime degradation of the nonwhite majority in South Africa.

Addressing a supportive crowd at the College of General Studies Jacob Sleeper Auditorium in his signature fluid monotone, the 82-year-old Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor emeritus of linguistics offered a torrent of factoids, indicting Israel for its actions in Lebanon, the West Bank, east Jerusalem, and especially Gaza. The author of dozens of books, including most recently the upcoming

Hopes and Prospects, Chomsky spoke at the invitation of the BU student group [Students for Justice in Palestine](#) as part of the University's first-time participation in [Israeli Apartheid Week](#) (IAW), a series of events held in cities and campuses across the globe. According to its Web site, prominent Palestinians, Jewish anti-Zionists, and South Africans have been at the forefront of the IAW effort to exert pressure on Israel "to alter its current structure and practices as an apartheid state."

Under the watchful eye of four University police officers, the proceedings were calm except for a verbal altercation during the question-and-answer period following Chomsky's talk. Identifying herself as a "member of the BU community," a woman called out, "You are distorting the truth!" Several audience members yelled back, "Shut up," and a woman seated near the protestor shouted, "We want to hear him, not you."

With references to "slaughter" in Gaza and Israel's successful efforts (with U.S. complicity) to quell protest and expressions of sympathy among Palestinians in the West Bank, Chomsky returned often to the apartheid theme. At one point he described Gaza's living conditions as being worse than the bantustans, the so-

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called homelands of apartheid South Africa. He later referred to Israel's actions in sealed-off Gaza as a campaign of extermination.

His comments were punctuated by his familiar refrain that the United States and Israel are "rogue states." With few exceptions, U.S. support of Israel has been unflagging, he said.

"The world works like the Mafia, and we're the don," Chomsky said. "You do what we say or else." Israel is on its way to becoming a pariah state, he continued, yet like South Africa, it receives increasingly lonely U.S. support.

Chomsky took issue with Israel's claims of self-defense, especially in its attacks on Hamas for firing rockets into Israel. As for Israel's pretext for its 2006 invasion of Lebanon — the capture of two Israeli soldiers by Hezbollah — he asserted that "for decades, Israel has been kidnapping and killing civilians," sometimes at sea. "That's piracy worse than the Somalis'," he said. And he referred to Israel's practice of detaining Palestinian prisoners without formal charges as "holding hostages." Chomsky added that he doubts that Mossad, Israel's intelligence agency, is the culprit in the recent assassination of Hamas leader Mahmoud-al-Mabhouh in Dubai. "It was carried out so unprofessionally, I could've carried it out," he said to laughter.

Despite his railing against what he sees as a history of Israeli war crimes and sabotage of peace efforts, Chomsky ended on a positive note. "Pretty much everything turns on a change in U.S. policy," he said. "Those of us inside the United States can influence policy. No one else can. If any change is going to take place in Palestine, there will have to be change here.

"It's hard work," he said in closing, "but it's possible."

Susan Seligson can be reached at sueselig@bu.edu.

Original URL: <http://www.bu.edu/today/2010/noam-chomsky-rails-against-israel-again/>