



ADL Talking Points on President Jimmy Carter's *Palestine Peace Not Apartheid*

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Former United States President Jimmy Carter's new book *Palestine Peace Not Apartheid* is receiving significant publicity both for its high profile author and its inflammatory title. Carter's profile vis-à-vis the Middle East rose previous to the book's release as a result of his outspoken criticism of Israel during the summer war in Lebanon, taking the form of off-the-cuff condemnations and op-ed pieces in major American newspapers.

The book has been stimulating considerable discussion since its release and Carter himself has been promoting it across national media including on *Meet The Press* and *CSPAN's BookTV*. The following are a list of pertinent talking points, by no means comprehensive, to be used when understanding and responding to Carter's arguments in op-ed pieces, letters to the editor, personal correspondence, and face-to-face meetings.

A fundamental flaw in Carter's handling of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict lies with the title of his book itself. By using the term "apartheid," Carter insinuates a comparison between the racist South African government and Israel. While Carter assures readers that the focus of his book is on the Palestinian occupied territories rather than Israel proper—which is true for much of the book—use of the term apartheid leaves the reader little choice in believing that the accusation is against Israel itself.

A defense of this accusation is rather simple. The South African apartheid regime was a minority imposing inhumane restrictions on a majority based on racial qualifications. The analogy breaks down if only it is observed that Jewish Israelis are not a minority but a majority. More importantly, within Israel, non-Jewish minorities—Arab, Muslim, Christian, Bedouin, Druze, et al—are given equal treatment under the law. All are entitled to Israeli citizenship; allowed the right to vote, form political parties, and hold public office; allowed freedom of association and movement; etc.

In the book, Carter employs the apartheid analogy to accuse Israel of inhumane tactics within the occupied territories, including the use of a security fence and checkpoints. In doing so, he ignores two important realities. The first is that Israel's presence in the West Bank and Gaza is based on security and a matter of necessity. Israel is threatened by very real violent elements in Palestinian society that have publicly held positions committed to Israel's destruction and have demonstrated their seriousness with suicide bombings and rocket attacks (which continue even under a ceasefire at the time this memorandum was composed). Every state has a right to defend itself against such threats.

The second forgotten reality is that despite the settler movement, Israel's government and the Israeli public have expressed Israel's ultimate commitment to withdraw from virtually all of the occupied territories in exchange for a believable prospect of peace. Israelis on the whole supported former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's plan to withdraw from Gaza and elected Ehud

Olmert as Prime Minister under the Kadima platform of withdrawal from the West Bank. The plan was put on hold only after Hamas and Hezbollah terrorists kidnapped Israeli soldiers on its southern and northern borders sparking the summer war.

With specific regard to checkpoints and the security fence that Israel utilizes in the territories, Carter fails again to present the complete story and to justify his use of the loaded apartheid analogy. There is no mention that when violence temporarily subsides, Israel significantly eases restrictions put on Palestinians in the territories and only in response to violence or credible threats tightens them again. Carter accuses Israel of erecting the security fence as an enclosure, neglecting to point out that the current path slated for the fence does not extend along the Jordan River, leaving the Palestinians with no permanent barriers to their west, and that the fence is indeed effective in reducing smuggling of explosives and suicide bombers into Israel. There is no convincing argument that can compare Israel's security fence to the racist Bantustans of apartheid South Africa. Unlike under apartheid, Israel's security fence does not divide territory by race but rather by nationality. It is a non-permanent national border, subject to negotiation during a final peace agreement, that protects Israeli land—lived on by Israelis of all races, ethnicities, and religions—from those who wish to enter Israel with weapons.

Extremely troubling is that Carter seems to contradict accepted history when speaking about the Camp David meeting in 2000 between then-Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and then-Palestinian Authority leader Yassir Arafat mediated by United States President Bill Clinton. As a matter of historical record, including that of Clinton himself in his memoir *My Life*, an agreement was put forward that would have given the Palestinians an independent state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip giving up approximately only 5 percent of the land to Israel on which a majority of Israeli settlers lived. Barak accepted the offer; Arafat rejected it. Carter posits two revisions to the story: (1) Arafat did in fact reject the offer but it was an offer such that *any* Palestinian leader would have been *forced* to reject it, and (2) Barak far from accepted the offer and instead presented pages of reservations. On an appearance on the *Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer*, Carter goes as far as to say that Clinton is mistaken about what happened at Camp David. Participants of other meetings at which Carter was present have also been contradicted by accounts in the book, including Dennis Ross and Dr. Kenneth Stein, who resigned from the Carter Center after a 23-year tenure in response to the new book.

It is truly shocking, at a time of Islamic extremism running rampant, of suicide bombs polluting cities in Europe, Asia and the Middle East, of Iran publicly stating its desire to wipe Israel off the map and building nuclear weapons to achieve that end, of the missile and rocket attacks by Hezbollah and Hamas on Israel, that Jimmy Carter can to a large degree only see Israel as the party responsible for conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.

In some ways, Carter's book reminds of the outlandish paper on "The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy" by professors John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, though he doesn't go to their extremes. Like them, his examination of almost every issue concerning the conflict results in blaming Israel for most or all of what has gone wrong.

Listen to his conclusions: "Israel's continued control and colonization of Palestinian land have been the primary obstacles to a comprehensive peace agreement in the Holy Land." And, "The bottom line is this: Peace will come to Israel and the Middle East only when the Israeli government is willing to comply with international law, with the road map for peace..."

In order to reach such a simplistic and distorted view of the region, Carter has to ignore or downplay the continuing examples of Palestinian rejection of Israel and terrorism, which have been part of the equation from the beginning and which are strong as ever today. He has to minimize or condemn all the instances of Israel's peace offers and withdrawals, most particularly former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak's initiative at Camp David in 2000, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's disengagement from Gaza in 2005 and current Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's campaign pledge to withdraw from the West Bank. And he has to frame every example of Palestinian distress as simply the product of Israeli repression instead of Palestinian extremism, e.g., the economic condition of the Palestinians, which has much to do with the continued terrorism against Israel.

Much as in the paper of Mearsheimer and Walt, one doesn't have to be a pro-Israel advocate to recognize that the issues in the long conflict are a lot more complicated than Carter would portray. It's particularly revealing that at a time when even many Arab leaders are recognizing the destructive and dangerous policies of the Palestinians, Carter can hardly bring himself to speak to such matters.

It is not the goals that Carter seeks that are so troubling -- he calls for a two-state solution, with Palestinians and Israelis living securely in two states, which, of course, is the policy of Israel -- but his obsession with blaming Israel for these goals not being achieved.

The problem with this approach is two-fold. He unjustly encourages Israel-bashers around the world. The legitimizing factor of being able to quote a former President of the United States and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize cannot be overestimated.

Secondly, this gives comfort to the extremists on the Palestinian side who are reinforced in their extremism by this kind of "analysis." In the end, it is the Palestinians themselves who are hurt by such a biased approach because they become even further entrenched in their illusions about weakening Israel and the need not to change.

As disturbing as Carter's simplistic approach is, however, even more disturbing is his picking up on the Mearsheimer -Walt theme of Jewish control of American policy, though in much more abbreviated form and not being the focus of his work. Referring to U.S. policy and the "condoning" of Israel's actions, Carter says: "There are constant and vehement political and media debates in Israel concerning its policies in the West Bank but because of powerful political, economic, and religious forces in the U.S., Israeli government decisions are rarely questioned or condemned, voices from Jerusalem dominate our media, and most American citizens are unaware of circumstances in the occupied territories." In other words, the old canard and conspiracy theory of Jewish control of the media, Congress, and the U.S. government is rearing its ugly head in the person of a former President.

It is sad that Mr. Carter would attempt to use his influence in this way. It is dangerous because he will be used by elements that want to undermine support for Israel in this country.

Ultimately, we have faith in the good sense, fairness and understanding of the American people. They know that life in the Middle East is much more complicated and will require seeing all sides of the issue, something President Carter doesn't seem to be interested in doing.