

The Palestine Issue in the Eyes of Jimmy Carter: A Book Review

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Jimmy Carter, *Palestine: Peace not Apartheid*, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2006.

U.S. President and Nobel Peace Laureate, Jimmy Carter (1977-1981) has written nearly 20 books, including two on the Middle East, both *The New York Times* bestsellers: *The Blood of Abraham Insights into the Middle East* published by Houghton Mifflin with printings and updates in 1985, 1993, and 2007, and *Palestine: Peace not Apartheid*. Appearing on the English channel of *Al Jazeera*, initiated in November, 2006, Carter has made the statement, "People in America see it as a security fence. It is not a fence; it's a wall." The Israeli Government calls it a "separation barrier." Carter has been heavily criticized for identifying the situation in Palestine as Apartheid, reflecting back to the more than 45 year history of Apartheid in South Africa before the first totally free elections there in 1994 when Nelson Mandela became the first native African to be elected President. However, Carter defends his book's title: "(Israel's) presumption is that an encircling barrier will finally resolve the Palestinian problem. Utilizing their political and military dominance, they are imposing a system of partial withdrawal, encapsulation, and apartheid on the Muslim and Christian citizens of the occupied territories. The driving purpose for the forced separation of the two peoples is unlike that in South Africa – not racism, but the acquisition of land (189-190)."

Carter notes that his first visit to Israel was in 1973, plus several more visits during his presidency and since that time including in 2008 where he met with Hamas leaders with the displeasure of the Bush administration. In his first visit, Carter relates, in a very autobiographical manner as he does throughout the book, that during his earlier visits, the Israeli and Muslim leaders had great cordiality for each other. Carter hosted the 1978 Camp David Accords between President Anwar Sadat of Egypt and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, which fully supported UN SC Resolutions 242 and 338. However, he indicates that shortly after the final details had been accepted, the Israeli government, while celebrating the peace treaty with Egypt, began violating terms of the agreement, which he argues has continued to the present day. In the summary chapter of the book, Carter isolates

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two interrelated obstacles to permanent peace in the Middle East: 1. *Some Israelis believe that they have the right to confiscate and colonize Arab land and to justify the sustained subjugation and persecution of the Palestinians.* 2. *Some Palestinians react by honoring suicide bombers as martyrs and consider the killing of Israelis as victories.* However, he believes that there are 3 key requirements for a revised peace process: First, the security of Israel must be guaranteed. Second, the internal debate within Israel must be resolved in order to define Israel's permanent legal boundaries. Third, the sovereignty of all Middle Eastern nations and sanctity of international borders must be honored. Carter argues that for most of George W. Bush's presidency the U.S. government almost entirely supported Israel against Palestine, including a total isolation of PLO Chairman Yassir Arafat. Carter claims that the United States condoned Israeli violence against the occupied territories of the Palestinians, vetoed numerous UN SC resolutions which condemned illegal Israeli actions, and remained highly submissive and passive in offering serious leadership toward a permanent Middle East peace process. President Bush has subsequently made two visits to the region in 2007 and 2008.

An *International Herald Tribune* October 2003 poll of 7,500 citizens in 15 European nations saw Israel as the top threat to world peace, ahead of North Korea, Iran, or Afghanistan. Added to the negative unilateral actions on the part of Israel, the Israeli and American refusal to engage the elected leadership of Hamas, and its leaders' refusal to accept the legitimacy of Israel as a state with secure borders, Carter sees positive developments toward a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine, but only if Israel ceases its unfavorable partition of Palestine through its total separation of the two populations by the wall and conforming to international law, and if the U.S. government begins to take its role as a leader or honest broker in the peace process. At the same time, the Arab states must pledge to live in peace with their Israeli neighbor and stop their violence against Israel, which also means that the major Arab states besides Jordan and Egypt must consider recognizing Israel's right to exist and develop diplomatic relations with Israel.

In November, 2007, President Bush held the Israeli-Palestinian peace summit at Annapolis, Maryland. Shortly after it, Israeli troops began an additional blockade of Gaza, with frequent air strikes. Simultaneously, numerous missiles were shot into Israel from Gaza. In March, 2008, Israel retaliated with air and land attacks, killing over 120 Palestinians in Gaza, and then a Palestinian gunman killed eight students studying in the Yeshiva seminary in West Jerusalem. Shortly before, U.S. Secretary of State Condolisa Rice, had visited both Israeli and Palestinian leaders, seeking to rekindle the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Earlier, the wall between Gaza and Egypt had been breached, and Gazans crossed into Egypt in great numbers to buy food and other supplies, but it was since restored. Thus a wall still separates Gaza both from Egypt and from Israel. Particularly on the Israel-Gaza fractured border, the wall has been called "the wall of shame."

