

Jimmy Carter's 'Apartheid' Book

*Jimmy Carter was interviewed on the [PBS "NewsHour"](#) broadcast of Nov. 28. Carter makes it clear to me (although surely not to all) that he's **not** an enemy of Israel, but he is an overly one-sided critic. For example, he admits to being provocative in using the noxious term, "apartheid," in the title of his new book, but he immediately explains that he's not referring to Israel within its pre-1967 boundaries. What follows is an abbreviated version of this interview interspersed with my comments italicized in brackets. – R. Seliger*

JUDY WOODRUFF, NewsHour Special Correspondent: The former president and Nobel Peace Prize-winner has just written his 21st book... The title, you chose, "Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid": Did you mean to be provocative, because this immediately calls to mind South Africa, the repression of blacks by whites?

JIMMY CARTER: Yes... I wanted to... provoke discussion, debate, inquisitive analysis of the situation there, which is almost completely absent throughout the United States, but it's prevalent every day in Israel and in Europe. This is needed, I think, for our country to understand what's going on in the West Bank.

And I chose this title very carefully. It's Palestine, first of all. This is the Palestinians' territory, not Israel...

Apartheid doesn't apply at all, as I made plain in my book, anything that relates to Israel, to the nation. It doesn't imply anything as it relates to racism. This apartheid, which is prevalent throughout the occupied territories, the subjection of the Palestinians to horrible abuse, is caused by a minority of Israelis – we're not talking about racism, but talking about their desire to acquire, to occupy, to confiscate, and then to colonize Palestinian land. So the whole system is designed to separate through a ferocious system Israelis who live on Palestine territory and Palestinians who want to live on their own territory.

In order to have peace, Israel has got to withdraw from the occupied territories, not just from token withdrawals from a few settlements leaving about 150 other settlements on Palestinian land. [***I have no fondness for the settlements either, but Carter surprisingly ignores the prospect of trading those settlement blocs closest to Green Line Israel for other territory going to the Palestinians, as envisioned in the [Geneva Accord/Initiative](#) – probably a more realistic basis for peace than the unlikely scenario of Israeli doves mobilizing the support of a majority of the electorate to remove all 300-400,000 settlers wholesale. Carter even attended the gala unveiling of the Geneva Accord, in Switzerland in December 2003. Since a swap of territory is acceptable to prominent Palestinians who have signed onto Geneva, why is this concept absent from Carter's discussion?***]

JUDY WOODRUFF: ... your book comes out at a moment when ... you have the Israeli

prime minister, Mr. Olmert, announcing just yesterday that he is putting a proposal on the table.

He's saying, "We will give back most of the West Bank..." He's saying, "We will release prisoners, if there will be a good-faith effort on the part of the Palestinians." Is this the kind of progress you're looking for?

JIMMY CARTER: I think that's a minor first step, yes, to give back some of their land. The demand is for them to give back all the land. **[Again, if there are mutually-agreed upon swaps, why "all"? And his underwhelming response to Olmert's new peace initiative is chilling.]**

The United Nations resolutions that apply, the agreements that have been made at Camp David under me and later at Oslo for which the Israeli leaders received the Nobel Peace Prizes, was based on Israel's withdrawal from occupied territories.

And the present only game in town – that is, the international quartet's road map – calls for the withdrawal of Israel from occupied territories. That road map, by the way, all of the terms of it have been adopted by the Palestinians. All the major terms of the road map have been rejected officially by the Israeli government... **[This is news to me. In principle, even Sharon accepted the road map; where he was blameworthy was in not removing the "outposts" unauthorized by Israel's gov't. Has the Hamas government yet signed onto the road map or any international agreement concerning Israel?]**

JUDY WOODRUFF: But are you dismissing what Mr. Olmert is proposing as of yesterday?

JIMMY CARTER: Well, the New York Times said it was a non-substantive speech that didn't bring anything new to the table. I haven't read the entire speech...

But when he says we're going to withdraw from part ... of the land that we're occupying, and keep the rest, we're going to keep our wall there, which surrounds the remnant of the Palestinians' land that they're going to be permitted to live on, where we're going to keep Israeli settlements all over the land even that the Palestinians will retain, and keep the wall around Gaza, all of these things need to be changed and not just a token withdrawal from some of the land that the Israelis have acquired. **[Carter speaks of the "wall" as if it were not a response to hundreds of civilian deaths from terror attacks; he coldly speaks of Israeli actions as if they were simply malicious acts occurring in a vacuum.]**

JUDY WOODRUFF: So you're saying it's not nearly enough?

JIMMY CARTER: No, it's not nearly enough, and everybody knows that. In fact ... a strong majority of the Israeli people all agree that, in order to have peace, Israel has got to withdraw from the occupied territories, not just ... from a few settlements...

And as a matter of fact, Hamas, whom everyone criticizes – the fact is that

Hamas, since August of 2004, has not committed a single act of terrorism that cost an Israeli life, not a single one.

[This was true only until this past summer, when Hamas participated in that cross-border raid that not only captured Gilad Shalit but killed two of his comrades; and they have since participated in rocket attacks, alongside other groups, which have killed at least two Israeli civilians. This complete exoneration of Hamas, also leaves out the fact that even as the governing party in the Palestinian territories, Hamas refused to condemn, let alone act to prevent, suicide bombings and rocket attacks by other groups during the time that Hamas was formally holding to its 'Tahidya' (the half-hearted cease-fire).]

JUDY WOODRUFF: President Carter, people would listen to what you're saying here, and they would read your book, and they would say, "He's putting the onus here on the Israelis." And many would return that by saying, "But wait a minute. It's the Palestinians who continue to fire rockets into Israeli land. It's the Palestinians who have kidnapped Israeli soldiers. It's the Palestinians that continue to perpetuate terrorist acts against the Israelis."

JIMMY CARTER: Sure, that's what you say, and that's the general consensus in the United States. The fact is that, when the Palestinians dug under the Israeli wall from Gaza and captured the Israeli soldier, one soldier, at that time, Israel was holding 9,200 Palestinians prisoner, including 300 children ... some of them 12 years old, and holding almost 100 women prisoner.

And immediately, the Palestinians who took that soldier said, "We want to swap this soldier for some of our women and children." And the Israelis rejected that proposal and refused to swap at all with the Palestinians in the West Bank. That was the key to the issue.

So it's right that the Palestinians took a soldier, which they should release. But for Israel to keep 9,000 Palestinians and not release any of them is something that you don't mention in the question, and it's generally not even known in this country... **[What you don't know from what is said here is that this cross-border raid that captured one Israeli soldier, also killed two; this and the fact of eight deaths in the initial attack from Lebanon this past summer, is largely lost in the public memory because newscasters are constantly referring only to "kidnapped" soldiers and not to those killed.]**

JUDY WOODRUFF: But what would you say, President Carter, to the Israeli public who would, again, listen to what you're saying, and they would say, "Wait a minute. You're asking us to put our faith in a people, in a government that doesn't even recognize our right to exist?" Isn't that the posture of the Hamas government and the Palestinian territories?

JIMMY CARTER: Well, we were there – the Carter Center was there, and we monitored the election in January when Hamas did win a victory. They won 42 [actually, 44] percent of the vote. It was an open, free, fair, safe election, as certified by the Carter Center, and National Democratic Institute, and the European Union observers. Nobody questioned the integrity

of it.

That was an expression of will by the Palestinian people on whom they wanted to serve in their parliament. Well, at that time, I thought that this would be a matter of a unity government. But immediately, the United States and Israel said, "We will not accept a government that has Hamas leaders in it."

And so, as a result of that, all financial aid to the entire population of Palestine was cut off just because they expressed their will in a free vote. And as a matter of fact, Hamas, whom everyone criticizes – the fact is that Hamas, since August of 2004, has not committed a single act of terrorism that cost an Israeli life, not a single one. **[As if the cross-border raid of June did not happen and as if two Israeli civilians were not killed in Sderot in the past weeks.]**

JUDY WOODRUFF: I think many Americans would be surprised to hear that.

JIMMY CARTER: I know. They would be surprised, but it's an actual fact. And Hamas...

A majority of Israelis, in every public opinion poll that's been done since 1967, have favored exchanging the confiscated Palestinian land for peace.

JUDY WOODRUFF: But what about not recognizing Israel's right to exist?

JIMMY CARTER: The day after the election, I went and met with Mahmoud Abbas, who is the leader of the Palestinians. He's their president. He's the head of the PLO, which is the only organization, by the way, that the United States or Israel recognizes, the PLO, in which there's not a single Hamas member...

And after I met with Abbas to talk about a unity government, which he rejected, then I met with a Hamas leader. He's a medical doctor who was elected. He's now in prison, by the way. But he said – when I insisted that they recognize Israel, he said, "Mr. President, which Israel are you talking about? Are you talking about the Israel that's occupying our land? Are you talking about the Israel that has built a wall around our people? Are you talking about an Israel that deprives us of basic human rights to move from one place to another in our own land?" He said, "We can't recognize that Israel."

But later, the prime minister of the Hamas government, Haniyeh, said, "We are strongly in favor of direct talks between Mahmoud Abbas, the head of the PLO and the head of the government, and the prime minister of Israel, Olmert." And he said, "If they reach an agreement in their discussions that's acceptable to the Palestinian people, we will accept it, also. Hamas will." Those things are not even known in this country; they're a matter of record.

JUDY WOODRUFF: And you're saying that, if the U.S. doesn't get involved, then...

JIMMY CARTER: Then there won't be much progress. You know, it's been proven in the past that some outside group needs to get involved. And in 1978 and '79, I got involved and negotiated a peace treaty between Israel and its only formidable opponent, that is Egypt.

In 2003, the Norwegians concluded an agreement, the Oslo Agreement. In both cases, the Israeli leaders won the Nobel Peace Prize for adopting the principles that Israel would withdraw from the territory in order to get peace. That has been abandoned now under the last three leaders of Israel. **[This last point was true of Sharon, but both Netanyahu and Barak, as prime ministers, negotiated on the basis of land for peace; in fact, the last successful negotiated withdrawal– from most of Hebron in 1997– was implemented under Netanyahu.]**

And as I said earlier, a majority of Israelis, in every public opinion poll that's been done since 1967, have favored exchanging the confiscated Palestinian land for peace. But there's a small minority in Israel, a substantial minority, that says we would prefer the land, and we will not relinquish it in order to get peace....

JUDY WOODRUFF: [A] Very quick final question about Iraq. Can you have peace in Iraq without fixing the Israeli-Palestinian problem, or is it vice versa? Do you must – you first need to fix Iraq?

JIMMY CARTER: There is no way to separate the two. President Bush is over there now trying to harness supporters among the moderate Arabs. He just was in Jordan, and in Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, and others that I need not name right now.

To get them to support us enthusiastically in Iraq means that he's going to have to alleviate their deep concern and their animosity – with less than five percent of Jordanians and Egyptians looking with favor on our government – because the main obstacle for their full support of the United States now in Iraq and other places is because we have not shown any interest for the last six years in alleviating the horrible plight of the Palestinians. **[This is an exaggeration. US diplomacy is complicated by the ongoing conflict with the Palestinians, and it surely helps in Jihadist recruitment efforts, but there is no way that peace with the Palestinians is going to end the conflict in Iraq.]**

We've made no effort in the last six years to bring peace to Israel or to their adjacent neighbors, the Palestinians.... **[I agree with Carter on this final point.]**