

# Carter's Book Is a Disservice to Peace

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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## Articles & Testimony

**T**his article was reprinted by the San Francisco Chronicle on December 20, 2006, under the headline, “Carter's Polemic Will Not Help the Palestinians.”

Former President Jimmy Carter has spent much of his adult life championing Palestinian rights. However, his most recent book will not help the Palestinians.

Some Palestinians may listen to Carter. Therefore, his book is a squandered opportunity. Instead of dispelling the myths that enable them to avoid making key decisions and moving forward, Carter perpetuates the fictions that have helped create the current state of affairs: demonization of Israel, distortion of history, and an overall sense of victimhood that puts no premium on Palestinian accountability.

The demonization of Israel begins with the book's title, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*. Carter's use of such a charged word seems aimed at delegitimizing Israel as a South Africa-type state. Carter mentions in a single, brief sentence on Page 189 that Israel is not a racist state like South Africa but does not elaborate. Had he taken the time to explain, he would have had to mention that Israel has airlifted many tens of thousands of black Ethiopian Jews from misery into new homes. He would also have had to mention that Arabs have Israeli citizenship, vote, and hold office.

Israel has clearly made major mistakes since the 1967 war, but Carter conveniently puts virtually the entire onus for the ongoing conflict on Israel's shoulders. This is completely unfair. Yes, Israel's settlement enterprise has been misguided, with tragic consequences for both peoples, but this is only part of the picture. In the aftermath of that war, Israel faced classic Arab rejectionism and, more recently, growing Islamism, with groups like Hamas, Hezbollah, and Islamic Jihad receiving funding from Iran.

Carter's book bathes Arab leaders in a very positive light and takes Arab statements at face value but casts the Israelis as often being disingenuous. His depiction of Yasser Arafat after becoming head of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in the late '60s emphasizes that he spent much of his “attention to raising funds for the care and support of the refugees and inspiring worldwide contribution to their cause.”

Really? In fact, his group was engaged in the early '70s in a bloody civil war in Jordan, cross-border attacks against Israelis from Lebanon including civilian terror attacks, maintaining a shadowy link to the Munich massacre at the

1972 Olympics, and killing the U.S. ambassador to the Sudan.

Carter allows a statement made by Arafat to him at their first meeting in 1990 to stand without challenge in the book. Carter cites (Page 62) Arafat as telling him, “The PLO has never advocated the annihilation of Israel.” In fact, the charter of Arafat’s PLO states (Article 22) that “the liberation of Palestine will destroy the Zionist and imperialist presence.” The Washington Post cited Arafat as saying on March 29, 1970: “Peace for us is the destruction of Israel and nothing else.”

If the issue were only about land, the problem would have already been solved. At the 2000 Camp David summit, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak was willing to confront the settlement enterprise and yield more than 90 percent of the West Bank. President Bill Clinton sweetened the offer to 95 percent, Barak concurred, and both agreed to offsetting territorial swaps to deal with the remaining land.

Carter, however, ignores the views of participant Clinton, who publicly said it was Arafat who missed that opportunity for peace.

Carter often minimizes terrorism. He falsely claims that Hamas has not been involved in terror since 2004. In reality, Hamas has directly claimed responsibility for several attacks since then, including blowing up part of the Karni crossing, a border point through which Palestinians were able to export goods to the outside world. Moreover, Hamas members are involved in the Popular Resistance Committees, which have fired more than 1,000 rockets from Gaza this year alone with Hamas-led security forces not lifting a finger to stop them. This came after Israel confronted its settler constituency and withdrew from Gaza in 2005.

Carter apparently minimizes terrorism in order to make it possible to blame Israel for malevolence. But his arguments don’t hold water. For example, after 35 years without security barriers, why would Israel suddenly begin building a fence in 2002? Carter would have us believe that ill will on Israel’s part led to that initiative, but in fact it was Hamas and other Palestinian factions that effectively built the barrier by killing an estimated 1,000 Israelis by suicide bombings and other means between 2000 and 2004. After the barrier was built, the amount of suicide attacks dramatically decreased.

Moreover, it has not precluded a two-state solution. In fact, the barrier’s route is very close to the borders that Clinton envisioned at the end of his presidency. And the Israelis have regularly adjusted the barrier’s route on their own accord, so it shrinks the amount it dips into the West Bank.

Terrorism prevention aside, the wider implications of the barrier’s route are obvious, and contrary to what Carter repeatedly alleges. The stage is set for a historic two-state agreement. There is still room for land swaps on both sides to complete the picture, if the parties agree in the future that the goal is to give the Palestinians the territorial equivalent of 100 percent of the West Bank. However, this is an option, not a requirement. Contrary to Carter’s assertion, diplomats from many countries who negotiated every word and voted for U.N. Security Council Resolution 242 after the 1967 war have said that the measure did not mandate such a 100 percent return.

The Carter of the late ’70s, who was a vital peacemaker in bringing about the historic Egypt-Israel accord, knew the goal of peacemaking is to get each side to abandon their myths as they move toward coexistence. Sadly, Carter the polemicist of today has made this work much harder.

David Makovsky is a senior fellow of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. He has written a [study \(templateC04.php?CID=17\)](#) on the demography and geography of the West Bank in relation to Israel’s security barrier. ❖

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