

Book Review

Excerpt from the book

Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid

By Jimmy Carter, former President of the United States
and winner of the 2002 Nobel Peace Prize

Editor – in Chief’s Note:

Jimmy Carter, the former U.S President and a Nobel Laureate for peace is known for his value-oriented international socio-political order. One may differ with his findings and recommendations, but one can hardly doubt his sincerity and commitment to justice and fair-play. It maybe recalled that Jimmy Carter was the principal architect of Camp David Accords which brought a sigh of relief to two warring nations, i.e., Egypt and Israel. It may not be missed however, that peace accord weakened the Arab world as Egypt was detached and isolated from the rest of the Arab world. By the same token, it strengthened Israel and made it even more adamant in its policies towards the Palestinians in particular and the Middle East in general. Nonetheless, this incomplete peace accord, especially the Palestine issue, remained one of Carter’s life, long concerns. He is indeed deeply moved by the brutal Israeli atrocities, virtual genocide of the Palestinians and recommends that an even-handed policies of the U.S (and a diplomatic pressure of the world community) can help resolve this lingering dispute and bring peace to the troubled Middle East. His recent book: Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid is an excellent attempt for a fair settlement of this dispute. Excerpt from the same book are reproduced verbatim for your close examination. It is our expectation that if his recommendations are popularized, maybe they will exert some moral pressure on Israel and force it to change its policies to the Palestine problem.

Summary

Since the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty was signed in 1979, much blood has been shed unnecessarily and repeated efforts for a negotiated peace between Israel and her neighbors have failed. Despite its criticism from some Arab sources, this treaty stands as proof that diplomacy can bring lasting peace between ancient adversaries. Although disparities among them are often emphasized, the 1974 Israeli-Syrian withdrawal agreement, the 1978 Camp David Accords, the Reagan statement of 1982, the 1993 Oslo Agreement, the treaty between Israel and Jordan in 1994, the Arab peace proposal of 2002, the 2003 Geneva Initiative, and the International Quartet's Roadmap all contain key common elements that can be consolidated if pursued in good faith.

There are two interrelated obstacles to permanent peace in the Middle East:

1. Some Israelis believe they have the right to confiscate and colonize Palestinian land and try to justify the sustained subjugation and persecution of increasingly hopeless and aggravated Palestinians; and
2. Some Palestinians react by honoring suicide bombers as martyrs to be rewarded in heaven and consider the killing of Israelis as victories.

In turn, Israel responds with retribution and oppression, and militant Palestinians refuse to recognize the legitimacy of Israel and vow to destroy the nation. The cycle of distrust and violence is sustained, and efforts for peace are frustrated. Casualties have been high as the occupying forces impose ever tighter controls. From September 2000 until March 2006, 3,982 Palestinians and 1,084 Israelis were killed in the

second intifada, and these numbers include many children: 708 Palestinians and 123 Israelis. As indicated earlier, there was an ever-rising toll of dead and wounded from the latest outbreak of violence in Gaza and Lebanon.

The only rational response to this continuing tragedy is to revitalize the peace process through negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians, but the United States has, in effect, abandoned this effort. It may be that one of the periodic escalations in violence will lead to strong influence being exerted from the International Quartet to implement its Roadmap for Peace. These are the key requirements:

a. The security of Israel must be guaranteed. The Arabs must acknowledge openly and specifically that Israel is a reality and has a right to exist in peace, behind secure and recognized borders, and with a firm Arab pledge to terminate any further acts of violence against the legally constituted nation of Israel.

b. The internal debate within Israel must be resolved in order to define Israel's permanent legal boundary. The unwavering official policy of the United States since Israel became a state has been that its borders must coincide with those prevailing from 1949 until 1967 (unless modified by mutually agreeable land swaps), specified in the unanimously adopted U.N. Resolution 242, which mandates Israel's withdrawal from occupied territories. This obligation was reconfirmed by Israel's leaders in agreements negotiated in 1978 at Camp David and in 1993 at Oslo, for which they received the Nobel Peace Prize, and both of these commitments were officially ratified by the Israeli government. Also, as

a member of the International Quartet that includes Russia, the United Nations, and the European Union, America supports the Roadmap for Peace, which espouses exactly the same requirements. Palestinian leaders unequivocally accepted this proposal, but Israel has officially rejected its key provisions with unacceptable caveats and prerequisites.

Despite these recent developments, it is encouraging that Israel has made previous commitments to peace as confirmed by the Camp David Accords, the withdrawal of its forces from the Sinai, the more recent movement of settlers from Gaza, and its official endorsement of pertinent U.N. resolutions establishing its legal borders. After the Six-Day War in 1967, Israeli military forces occupied all of the territory indicated on Map 4, but joined the United States and other nations in supporting United Nations Resolution 242, which is still the binding law that condemns the acquisition of land by force and requires Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories.

c. The sovereignty of all Middle East nations and sanctity of international borders must be honored. There is little doubt that accommodation with Palestinians can bring full Arab recognition of Israel and its right to live in peace, with an Arab commitment to restrain further violence initiated by extremist Palestinians.

The overriding problem is that, for more than a quarter century, the actions of some Israeli leaders have been in direct conflict with the official policies of the United States, the international community, and their own negotiated agreements. Regardless of whether Palestinians had no formalized government, one headed by Yasir Arafat or Mahmoud

Abbas, or one with Abbas as president and Hamas controlling the parliament and cabinet, Israel's continued control and colonization of Palestinian land have been the primary obstacles to a comprehensive peace agreement in the Holy Land. In order to perpetuate the occupation, Israeli forces have deprived their unwilling subjects of basic human rights. No objective person could personally observe existing conditions in the West Bank and dispute these statements.

Two other interrelated factors have contributed to the perpetuation of violence and regional upheaval: the condoning of illegal Israeli actions from a submissive White House and U.S. Congress during recent years, and the deference with which other international leaders permit this unofficial U.S. policy in the Middle East to prevail. 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 United States, Israeli government decisions are rarely questioned or condemned, voices from Jerusalem dominate in our media, and most American citizens are unaware of circumstances in the occupied territories. At the same time, political leaders and news media in Europe are highly critical of Israeli policies, affecting public attitudes. Americans were surprised and angered by an opinion poll, published by the International Herald Tribune in October 2003, of 7,500 citizens in fifteen European nations, indicating that Israel was considered to be the top threat to world peace, ahead of North Korea, Iran, or Afghanistan.

The United States has used its U.N. Security Council veto more than forty times to block resolutions critical of Israel. Some of these vetoes

have brought international discredit on the United States, and there is little doubt that the lack of a persistent effort to resolve the Palestinian issue is a major source of anti-American sentiment and terrorist activity throughout the Middle East and the Islamic world. A new factor in the region is that the Palestinian election of January 2006 gave Hamas members control of the parliament and a cabinet headed by the prime minister. Israel and the United States reacted by announcing a policy of isolating and destabilizing the new government. Elected officials are denied travel permits to participate in parliamentary affairs, Gaza is effectively isolated, and every effort is made to block humanitarian funds to Palestinians, to prevent their right to employment or commercial trade, and to deny them access to Israel and the outside world.

In order to achieve its goals, Israel has decided to avoid any peace negotiations and to escape even the mild restraints of the United States by taking unilateral action, called "convergence" or "realignment," to carve out for itself the choice portions of the West Bank, leaving Palestinians destitute within a small and fragmented remnant of their own land. The holding of almost 10,000 Arab prisoners and the destructive military response to the capture of three Israeli soldiers have aroused global concern about the hair-trigger possibility of a regional war being launched.

Despite these immediate challenges, we must not assume that the future is hopeless. *Down through the years I have seen despair and frustration evolve into optimism and progress and, even now, we must not abandon efforts to achieve permanent peace for Israelis and freedom and justice for Palestinians.* There are some positive factors on which we may rely.

As I said in a 1979 speech to the Israeli Knesset, "*The people support a settlement. Political leaders are the obstacles to peace.*" Over the years, public opinion surveys have consistently shown that a majority of Israelis favor withdrawing from Palestinian territory in exchange for peace ("swapping land for peace"), and recent polls show that 80 percent of Palestinians still want a two-state peace agreement with Israel, with nearly 70 percent supporting the moderate Mahmoud Abbas as their president and spokesman.

There have been some other encouraging developments over the years. Along with the awareness among most Israelis that a solution to the Palestinian question is critical if there is ever to be a comprehensive settlement, there is a growing recognition in the Arab world that Israel is an unchanging reality. Most Palestinians and other Arabs maintain that the proposal made by Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah, a proposal approved at the Arab summit in 2002 (Appendix 6), is a public acknowledgment of Israel's right to exist within its legal borders and shows willingness to work out disputes that have so far not been addressed directly. The Delphic wording of this statement was deliberate, in Arabic as well as in Hebrew and English, but the Arabs defend it by saying it is there to be explored by the Israelis and others and that, in any case, it is a more positive and clear commitment to international law than anything now coming from Israel.

Furthermore, the remaining differences and their potential resolution are clearly defined. Both Israel and the Arab countries have endorsed the crucial and unavoidable U.N. Resolutions 242 and 338, under which peace agreements have already been evolved.

Here are two voices, one Palestinian and the other Israeli, with remarkably similar assessments of what needs to be done.

Jonathan Kuttab, Palestinian human rights lawyer: "Everybody knows what it will take to achieve a permanent and lasting peace that addresses the basic interests of both sides: It's a two-state solution. It's withdrawal to 1967 borders. It's dismantlement of the settlements. It's some kind of shared status for a united Jerusalem, the capital of both parties. The West Bank and Gaza would have to be demilitarized to remove any security threats to Israel. Some kind of solution would have to be reached for the refugee problem, some qualified right of return, with compensation. Everyone knows the solution; the question is: Is there political will to implement it?"

Dr. Naomi Chazan, professor at Hebrew University and former deputy speaker of the Israeli Knesset: "I don't think any difference now remains between the majority of Israelis and Palestinians in understanding that there has to be some kind of accommodation between both people. There are two possibilities on how to do it. To acknowledge and then to implement the Palestine right to self-determination, and to make sure that the two-state solution is a just and fair solution, allowing for the creation of a viable state alongside Israel on the 1967 boundaries, and if there are any changes, they are by agreement on a swap basis. And on the Israeli side, there is the need to maintain a democratic state with a Jewish majority, which can only be achieved through the creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel."

An important fact to remember is that President Mahmoud Abbas retains all presidential authority that was exercised by Yasir Arafat when he negotiated the Oslo Agreement, and the Hamas prime minister has stated that his government supports peace talks between Israel and Abbas. He added that Hamas would modify its rejection of Israel if there is a negotiated agreement that Palestinians can approve (as specified in the Camp David Accords). It is imperative that the general Arab community and all significant Palestinian groups make it clear that they will end the suicide bombings and other acts of terrorism when international laws and the ultimate goals of the Roadmap for Peace are accepted by Israel.

One promising development came in May 2006 when Marwan Barghouti, the most popular and influential leader of Fatah, joined forces in an Israeli prison with Abed al-Halak Natashe, a trusted spokesman for Hamas, in endorsing a two-state proposal that could unite the two Palestinian factions. Their influence is enormous. The prisoners' proposal called for a unity government with Hamas joining the PLO, the release of all political prisoners, acceptance of Israel as a neighbor within its legal borders, and an end to violent acts within Israel (but not in Palestinian territory). It endorsed the key U.N. resolutions regarding legal borders and the right of return.

With public opinion polls indicating a 77 percent rate of approval, President Abbas first proposed a referendum among Palestinians on the prisoners' proposal, and then both Hamas and Fatah accepted its provisions.

Although a clear majority of Israelis are persistently willing to accept terms that are tolerable to most of their Arab neighbors, it is clear that none of the options is attractive for all Israelis:

A forcible annexation of Palestine and its legal absorption into Israel, which could give large numbers of non-Jewish citizens the right to vote and live as equals under the law. This would directly violate international standards and the Camp David Accords, which are the basis for peace with Egypt. At the same time, non-Jewish citizens would make up a powerful swing vote if other Israelis were divided and would ultimately constitute an outright majority in the new Greater Israel. Israel would be further isolated and condemned by the international community, with no remaining chance to end hostilities with any appreciable part of the Arab world.

A system of apartheid, with two peoples occupying the same land but completely separated from each other, with Israelis totally dominant and suppressing violence by depriving Palestinians of their basic human rights. This is the policy now being followed, although many citizens of Israel deride the racist connotation of prescribing permanent second-class status for the Palestinians. As one prominent Israeli stated, "I am afraid that we are moving toward a government like that of South Africa, with a dual society of Jewish rulers and Arab subjects with few rights of citizenship. The West Bank is not worth it." An unacceptable modification of this choice, now being proposed, is the taking of *substantial portions of the occupied territory, with the remaining Palestinians completely surrounded by walls, fences, and Israeli checkpoints, living as prisoners within the small portion of land left to them.*

Withdrawal to the 1967 border as specified in U.N. Resolution 242 and as promised in the Camp David Accords and the Oslo Agreement and prescribed in the Roadmap of the International Quartet. This is the most attractive option and the only one that can ultimately be acceptable as a basis for peace. Good-faith negotiations can lead to mutually agreeable exchanges of land, perhaps permitting a significant number of Israeli settlers to remain in their present homes near Jerusalem. One version of this choice was spelled out in the Geneva Initiative.

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 Roadmap for Peace, with official American policy, with the wishes of a majority of its own citizens? and honor its own previous commitments? by accepting its legal borders. All Arab neighbors must pledge to honor Israel's right to live in peace under these conditions. The United States is squandering international prestige and goodwill and intensifying global anti-American terrorism by unofficially condoning or abetting the Israeli confiscation and colonization of Palestinian territories.

It will be a tragedy - for the Israelis, the Palestinians, and the world - if peace is rejected and a system of oppression, apartheid, and sustained violence is permitted to prevail.