

His warnings must be heeded

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Published: Sunday, 01/14/07



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Jimmy Carter's book on the Arab-Israeli dispute, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, has generated tremendous debate since its release last November. Carter argues that there are two Israels — one defined by morality and scripture and another by an apartheid system that ignores international law and Arab rights. In his eyes, the latter Israel is the chief impediment to reaching Middle East peace. Carter also faults the lack of recent American support for Arab-Israeli negotiations and the ability of pro-Israeli groups to shape public discussion about Israel in the United States.

Critics charge that Carter's book demonizes Israel, perpetuates myths about Jewish power, overlooks key facts and aims to unite Christians and Muslims against Jews. Some believe the title — which ties Israel to the racist system South Africa imposed on its black majority — suggests that Carter is anti-Semitic. Some Palestinians contend that Carter's criticisms of Israel should have also touched on Israel's treatment of its Arab citizens.

Carter argues that he is not anti-Semitic and that his book accounts for the complex role that religion and the daily suffering of the Palestinians play in the Arab-Israeli conflict. He has won the support of Shulamit Aloni, a leading leftist Israeli, and Rabbi Michael Lerner, who edits the American magazine *Tikkun*. Lerner characterized Carter's critique as indicative of a man who loves Israel, and Aloni wrote in an Israeli newspaper that apartheid already exists in Israel. Importantly, Lerner and Aloni represent a meaningful number of Israelis and American Jews.

Still, for a book purporting to explain the causes of the Arab-Israeli conflict, there are a surprising number of omissions. Carter does not discuss the important fact that the Al-Aqsa mosque, the third holiest site in Islam, is located in Jerusalem; nor does he mention Theodore Herzl, whose ideas paved the way for Israel, or Avigdor Lieberman. Lieberman is a rising star in Israeli politics and advocates expelling Israel's Arab citizens and protecting Israel's Jewish identity above all else. For Lieberman, Israel has already chosen apartheid.

In Carter's eyes, there is still time to choose another path, and his book warns of the possible consequences should Israel continue its current policies in the Palestinian territories. He emphasizes this point when he cites an unnamed, prominent Israeli: "I am afraid that we are moving towards a government like South Africa, with a dual society of Jewish rulers and Arab subjects with few rights of citizenship." In this Israeli's mind, maintaining Israeli control of the Palestinian territories is not worth sacrificing the country's democratic values.

Nor is Carter the first to issue such a warning. Former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin warned Israelis in the 1990s that they faced three futures: a non-Jewish state in which they would live in a society dominated by Palestinian Arabs; an apartheid-like existence that would destroy the moral basis of Israel; or a negotiated co-existence. Rabin preferred negotiated co-existence because it permitted Israelis to retain their communal and moral identities. He was assassinated — a fact that suggests the deeply serious nature of the problem.

Let's hope that Americans and Israelis heed Carter's warning.