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On Jimmy Carter's False Apartheid Analogy

By Gil Troy

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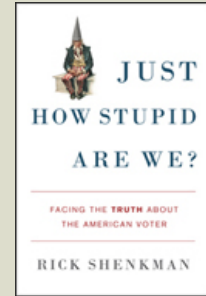
Jimmy Carter has appeared on "Meet the Press," Larry King, Charlie Rose, and elsewhere making his latest book, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, a best-seller. Apparently, Carter's publisher postponed the publication date until mid-November so as not to distract Democrats with a campaign controversy about their ex-President's anti-Israel prejudices. By alleging that Israel practices Apartheid, Jimmy Carter's title reflects a sloppy and nasty form of historical analogizing seeking to delegitimize Israel and Zionism, perpetuated by pro-Palestinian groups on campuses and elsewhere.

Carter has defended his title, by using "Apartheid" as a synonym for "apartness" and saying the division is economic not racial. But he has repeated the South African analogy to drive home his rhetorical point. Using the "Apartheid" label without seeking to impute racism, would be akin to calling Carter a redneck and claiming it only has to do with his tanning habits. If Carter is so innocent as to be unaware of the resonance that term has, he is not the expert on the Middle East or world affairs he purports to be.

This unconscionable, inaccurate label insults anyone who supports the modern Jewish state of Israel as well as everyone who suffered under South Africa's evil Apartheid system. Apartheid was a racist legal system the Afrikaner Nationalists dominating South Africa's government imposed after World War II. The Afrikaners' discriminatory apartness began with their racist revulsion for blacks, reflected in early laws in 1949 and 1950 prohibiting marriages and sexual relations between whites and non-whites. Apartheid quickly developed into a brutal system that tried to dehumanize South Africa's majority nonwhite population.

Beyond the historical definition, international law emphasizes that Apartheid involves intentional, mandated racism. In 1973 the United Nations General Assembly defined Apartheid as "the purpose of establishing and maintaining domination by one racial group of persons over any other racial group of persons and systematically oppressing them." The fact that Israel's Declaration of Independence – and founding document – promises to "uphold the full social and political equality of all its citizens, without distinction of race, creed or sex," proves that Israel rejects racism and by definition cannot be accused of Apartheid.

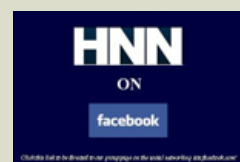
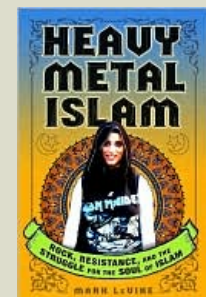
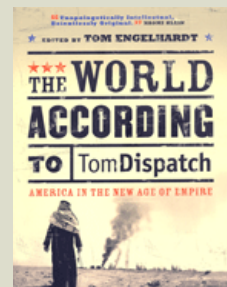
Injecting "racism" into the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is absurd. It is a sloppy attempt to slander Israel with the accusation du jour, a statement as trendy and ahistorical as equating Zionism

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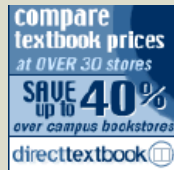
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with European colonialism, another folly given Jews' historic ties to the land of Israel. Since the Nazi attempt to annihilate Jews as a "race," the Jewish world has recoiled against defining Jews as a "race." Zionism talks about Judaism, the Jewish people, the Jewish state. The Arab-Israeli conflict is a nationalist clash with religious overtones. The rainbow of colors among Israelis and Palestinians, with black Ethiopian Jews, and white Christian Palestinians, proves that both national communities are diverse.

Sadly, Israeli and Palestinians do not enjoy the kind of harmony the Israeli Declaration of Independence envisioned. Carter and his comrades use "Apartheid" as shorthand to condemn some of the security measures improvised recently, especially since Carter's late friend Yasir Arafat unleashed the latest wave of terrorism in September 2000. Israel built a security fence to protect its citizens and separate Palestinian enclaves from Israeli cities. Ironically, that barrier marks Israel's most dramatic recognition of Palestinian aspirations to independence since Israel signed the Oslo Accords in 1993.

By accusing Israel of practicing Apartheid, Jimmy Carter has endorsed the latest Arab attempt to demonize Israel. In a world organized by nation states, singling out Jewish nationalism, meaning Zionism, as racist was so ridiculous even the United Nations ultimately rescinded its 1974 resolution. Applying the Apartheid label tries to ostracize Israel by misrepresenting some of the difficult decisions Israel has felt forced to make in fighting Palestinian terror. Israel's opponents are trying to transfer onto Israel the civilized world's justifiable contempt for South African oppression. This charge is particularly ironic coming from so many Arab states, which perpetuate discriminatory citizenship policies against Christians, women, and even other Arabs from different regions.

No country is perfect or above criticism. But the one-sided zeal of critics like Carter, singling out Israel in inflammatory ways, raises doubts about the critics more than the criticized. Many seem all too eager for Israel to fail, happily pouncing on any Israeli mistake, while blindly ignoring crimes others perpetuate systematically, especially Israel's Arab neighbors.

Jimmy Carter's decision to use such a loaded, misleading, sloppy term is especially suspicious given his denunciation of those who "choose certain emotional issues for demagoguery" in foreign policy and his willingness to befriend dictators around the world. Not only has Carter palled around with Yasir Arafat, Kim Jong II, Fidel Castro, and the Chinese oligarchs, he has always bristled at those who dared label his buddies "terrorists" or "dictators."

Historians of all political stripes should warn against the dangers of promiscuous and ahistorical analogizing, which tends to distort the past and inflame the present. In fact, in his 2002 Nobel Peace Prize Lecture, Jimmy Carter condemned the human tendency "to dehumanize our opponents," for "Once we characterize our adversaries as beyond the scope of God's mercy and grace, their lives lose all value." In branding Israel with such an intemperate, counterproductive, dehumanizing label, the man who parades around as the world's most charitable mediator has given a green light to Palestinian terrorism and extremism. He and the others perpetuating this ahistorical, immoral lie owe blacks and Jews, Africans and Israelis, historians and other thinking souls, an apology.

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