

"Carter aims a stink-bomb at Israel"  
by Tom Teepen, Cox News Service  
RALEIGH NEWS AND OBSERVER  
January 19, 2007

ATLANTA - Jimmy Carter, as president, brokered the Camp David Accords, with their crucial Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty, and he has tracked the Israeli-Palestinian issue closely ever since, but his new book, "Palestine Peace not Apartheid," is a bitter disappointment. Its agenda seems less the peace that the title proclaims than an effort to anathematize Israel.

Carter dodges, ignores or even twists history to serve that agenda. The book is an act of cynicism toward its readers, presuming on Carter's confidence that most will lack the detailed knowledge needed to see through him.

Israel is not all saint. Its settlements in Gaza and the inner West Bank after Israel thwarted a multilateral attack in 1967 were a mistake, and their expansion was an easy way to placate a small but noisy domestic constituency that has compounded the error. Israel has sometimes slighted opportunities to bolster Palestinian moderates when it had the chance. It overreached and overstayed in Lebanon.

But to read Carter is to wander into a weird landscape of evasions and distortions.

In Carter's Mideast, wars against Israel apparently are spontaneous combustions. No one starts any. They just happen, when in fact Arabs or Palestinians started each.

Israel, in Carterworld, has a right to exist and be secure but not specifically, at least not by Carter's own words, as a Jewish state.

Carter's entirely proper concern for Palestinian refugees ignores Arab culpability in their plight. He repeatedly says the refugees were forced out of Israel. Many were, but Carter fails to note that others fled on their own, often at the urging of Arab capitals that promised a quick, vindicating return. Nor does Carter call much attention to the fact that Jews fled and were chased out of Arab countries in nearly equal number. Israel absorbed its refugees. Most Arab states kept theirs in wretched camps as an incitement against Israel.

Carter takes every pacific Arab utterance at face value, although the rhetoric notoriously says one thing to the West and quite another, in Arabic, for internal consumption.

He charges that Israel never allowed the Palestinian territories autonomy, but it did. The local officials were intimidated, terrorized and even murdered by other Palestinians as "collaborators."

Tracking Carter can be tricky work. As president, he had the United States vote for U.N. resolution 465, condemning Israeli settlements and demanding the return of East Jerusalem and a restoration of the 1967 borders. Within days, Carter recanted the U.S. vote -- but now cites Israel's refusal to comply as evidence of perfidy.

Indeed, add up Carter's references to Israelis as acquisitive, duplicitous and devious and you get -- Fagin! Maybe Carter isn't consciously appealing to latent anti-Semitism to push his case.

Israel's unilateral withdrawals from Lebanon and Gaza are noted but not credited, and Carter's resort to charging Israel with apartheid -- when the very point of the Gaza withdrawal was as a first step to forestalling such an eventuality -- is a smear.

The Camp David Accords called for specific steps toward a broad Arab-Israeli peace. Those didn't occur, and Carter has always blamed Menachem Begin, the Israeli prime minister, whom he did not like, rather than the Egyptian president, Anwar Sadat, whom he did like.

But with their treaty, both men had achieved what they wanted and had taken all the political risks they dared to take at the time. Begin had removed the threat of another two-front war of the sort that had almost overcome Israel in 1973. Sadat had freed Egypt from being cannon-fodder-on-call every time the Arab states wanted to go after Israel.

During his presidency and after, in his 1985 book "The Blood of Abraham" and at three high-level consultations on the Middle East at his Carter Presidential Center in Atlanta, Jimmy Carter's humanitarian concerns for the region have helped to deepen public understanding of the issues and even have nudged the ever-tenuous peace process forward here and there. This newest book seems more likely to mislead and inflame than to inform and heal.

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