

Carter's Peace Mission: There's way out of this mess that doesn't involve slaughtering each others children

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In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

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Jimmy Carter arrived in Syria today in an effort to restart peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians. He is scheduled to meet with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Hamas political leader Khaled Meshal. Carter has been severely criticized in the western media for meeting with Hamas and was snubbed by Israeli leaders during his stay in Israel. Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Defense Minister Ehud Barak, Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, and opposition leader Binyamin Netanyahu, all refused to meet with the former president. They believe that Carter's trip undermines Israel's current policy towards the Palestinians and will force them to negotiate with a group they think is a terrorist organization.

Carter won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002 and has devoted his life to spreading democracy, human rights, and ending poverty. He has no interest in upstaging the Bush or Olmert. His only interest is stopping the bloodshed and ensuring security for both Israelis and Palestinians.

Carter has been a good friend to Israel and doesn't deserve the chilly treatment he received. In 1978 Carter brought Egypt's President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin to Camp David for negotiations which ended in a historic treaty. When negotiations stalled, Carter rushed to Cairo and helped Sadat and Begin work out a compromise. That ended the state of war between Egypt and Israel and led to the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Sinai Peninsula. The treaty has endured for 30 years. Israel is a safer place because of Jimmy Carter.

The official Israeli policy towards the Palestinians is both brutal and irrational. Hamas won in elections that were monitored by the international community and were declared "free and fair". They are the legitimate government in the occupied territories. Israel needs to accept that fact and move on. The real reason that Israel does not want to negotiate with Hamas has nothing to do with terrorism. Olmert has made this clear in an interview he gave as Minister of Industry and Trade in 2003:

"We are approaching the point where more and more Palestinians will say: we have been won over. We agree with [National Union leader Avigdor] Lieberman. There is no room for two states between the Jordan and the sea. All that we want is the right to vote. The day they do that, is the day we lose everything. Even when they carry out terror, it is very difficult for us to persuade the world of the justice of our cause. We see this on a daily basis. All the more so when there is only one demand: an equal right to vote....The thought that the struggle against us will be headed by liberal Jewish organizations who shouldered the

burden of the struggle against apartheid in South Africa scares me.”

Olmert makes important point, that Israel feels that its future as a Jewish state is threatened by a “demographic time-bomb”; that if they fail to impose their own unilateral settlement on the Palestinians—by seizing land and creating de facto borders—Jews will eventually become a minority in Israel. This’s the fear that’s driving the policy, not racism or terrorism.

Olmert adds:

“Had I believed that there is a real chance of reaching an agreement, I would have recommended making an effort. But that is not the case. The choice we will be facing will be between less than a Geneva Accord — which means a return to the 1967 border, the crushing of Jerusalem, and a struggle to our last breath to ward off the international pressure to absorb hundreds of thousands of refugees into the shrinking State of Israel — and a comprehensive unilateral move, and I stress the word comprehensive. Through such a move we will define our borders, which under no circumstances will be identical to the Green Line and will include Jerusalem as a united city under our sovereignty.”

Olmert is merely implementing Ariel Sharon’s policy of “disengagement” which cuts off all real dialog with the Palestinians and imposes a unilateral settlement. That’s why Carter has been treated so brusquely; his trip just draws attention to the intransigence of Israeli policy.

On Friday, [the Washington Post published an op-ed by Hamas Foreign Minister, Mahmoud al-Zahar](#) which clearly articulates the position of Hamas. It is well worth reading in its entirety. Al Zahar, whose 21 year old son, Hussam, was tragically killed three months ago in an Israeli air-strike, was studying finance and planned to become an accountant. Al Zahar lost another son and a son in law in 2003.

Al Zahar: “President Jimmy Carter’s sensible plan to visit the Hamas leadership this week brings honesty and pragmatism to the Middle East while underscoring the fact that American policy has reached its dead end. Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice acts as if a few alterations here and there would make the hideous straitjacket of apartheid fit better. While Rice persuades Israeli occupation forces to cut a few dozen meaningless roadblocks from among the more than 500 West Bank control points, these forces simultaneously choke off fuel supplies to Gaza; blockade its 1.5 million people; approve illegal housing projects on West Bank land; and attack Gaza City with F-16’s, killing men, women and children. Sadly, this is “business as usual” for the Palestinians.

Last week’s attack on the Nahal Oz fuel depot should not surprise critics in the West. Palestinians are fighting a total war waged on us by a nation that mobilizes against our people with every means at its disposal — from its high-tech military to its economic stranglehold, from its falsified history to its judiciary that “legalizes” the infrastructure of apartheid. Resistance remains our only option. Sixty-five years ago, the courageous Jews of the Warsaw ghetto rose in defense of their people. We Gazans, living in the world’s largest open-air prison, can do no less.

Al Zahar claims that Israel has tried to negate the results of what was called “the fairest election ever held in the Arab Middle East” and used it to wage a new war against the people of Gaza; a war that was approved by the Bush White House.

“Now, finally, we have the welcome tonic of Carter saying what any independent, uncorrupted thinker should conclude: that no “peace plan,” “road map” or “legacy” can succeed unless we are sitting at the negotiating table and without any preconditions.”

Al-Zahar then presents a litany of Palestinian grievances mixing in a bit of the conflict’s bitter history:

“Our movement fights on because we cannot allow the foundational crime at the core of the Jewish state — the violent expulsion from our lands and villages that made us refugees — to slip out of world consciousness, forgotten or negotiated away. Judaism — which gave so much to human culture in the contributions of its ancient lawgivers and modern proponents of tikkun olam — has corrupted itself in the detour into Zionism, nationalism and apartheid.”

A “peace process” with Palestinians cannot take even its first tiny step until Israel first withdraws to the borders of 1967; dismantles all settlements; removes all soldiers from Gaza and the West Bank; repudiates its illegal annexation of Jerusalem; releases all prisoners; and ends its blockade of our international borders, our coastline and our airspace permanently. This would provide the starting point for just negotiations and would lay the groundwork for the return of millions of refugees. Given what we have lost, it is the only basis by which we can start to be whole again.” (Washington Post)

These are difficult issues and will require intensive negotiations before they can be resolved. But the present policy provides no path for resolution or reconciliation; just more animosity and bloodshed. The Bush-Olmert plan is a failure; the killing has only increased.

Carter’s trip is a reminder that there’s still a way out of this mess that doesn’t involve slaughtering each others children

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