

Carter's Middle East mission: All parties required for Mideast peace

by [James M. Wall](#) in the [May 20, 2008](#) issue

An editorial in the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* (April 15) sharply criticized Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert for Israel's "boycott" of Jimmy Carter during the former president's recent trip to the Middle East. Olmert refused to meet with Carter; Israeli security personnel were not available to assist Carter's Secret Service detail. Editors of *Ha'aretz* wrote, "The boycott will not be remembered as a glorious moment in this government's history."

From the moment he took office as president in 1977, Carter was determined to achieve peace between Israel and Egypt. Working "incessantly toward that goal," Carter concluded the 1979 peace agreement for which, *Ha'aretz* concludes, he deserves "the respect reserved for royalty for the rest of his life."

Such high praise rarely appears in U.S. media. Most Americans have forgotten, if they ever knew, that 30 years ago, in a peace agreement with Egypt, Israel agreed to full autonomy for the occupied territories, and also agreed not to permit Jewish settlements there. These promises have been forgotten by Israel, which continues to build and expand settlements in the West Bank.

But Carter hasn't forgotten, and his memory may be a factor in the hostility toward him—a man who remembers prods the conscience of those who want to forget.

Israel is deeply indebted to Carter for its peace accord with Egypt. Not only did the agreement remove a major threat to Israel's security, but it also started the flow of billions of U.S. tax dollars into the Israeli economy, a subsidy now militantly defended annually by Israel's supporters in the U.S. Congress.

But this is also the man who wrote *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid* and whose references to apartheid and critical view of Israeli policies have outraged many. Reflecting on the controversy evoked by the book, the *Ha'aretz* editorial states:

Israel is not ready for such comparisons, even though the situation begs it. It is doubtful whether it is possible to complain when an outside observer, especially a former U.S. president who is well versed in international affairs, sees in the system of separate roads for Jews and Arabs, the lack of freedom of movement, Israel's control over Palestinian lands and their confiscation, and especially the continued settlement activity, which contravenes all promises Israel made and signed, a matter that cannot be accepted.

Jewish journalist Tony Karon, who lived with apartheid in South Africa before moving to New York, writes on his blog, *Rootless Cosmopolitan*, that Carter may have been "tempting fate" by meeting with Hamas. After all, says Karon,

his entirely appropriate evocation of apartheid in reference to the regime Israel has created on the West Bank earned him the label "Holocaust-denier" from the more demented end of the American Zionist spectrum. But Carter . . . [is] making the rather straightforward adult argument that has eluded so much of the U.S. political mainstream that the only way to achieve peace is to talk to all of those whose consent it requires.

Hamas leader Mahmoud al-Zahar wrote in the *Washington Post*: "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."

In the same issue, however, the *Post* repudiated its guest columnist, saying that the article by al-Zahar "drips with hatred for Israel, and with praise for former president Jimmy Carter."

Carter maintains that Hamas is worthy to be included in peace talks not because its leaders are paragons of virtue, but for the obvious reason that there can be no peace between Israel and the Palestinians that does not include all of the involved political parties. It is that reality that led *Ha'aretz* to conclude that "Carter's method, which says that it is necessary to talk with every one, has still not proven to be any less successful than the method that calls for boycotts and air strikes. In terms of results, at the end of the day, Carter beats out any of those who ostracize him."