



WOMEN FOR PALESTINE  
MELBOURNE - AUSTRALIA

*Of Walls and Bantustans*

## Apartheid By Any Other Name

by Ronald Bruce St John

Counterpunch  
2 February 2007

---

**F**ormer President Jimmy Carter's latest book, *Palestine Peace Not Apartheid*, has generated considerable comment, most of it negative. Articles and reviews run a narrow gamut from circumspect criticism to personal attacks on the author. Virtually no one has addressed the core argument of the book: that Israeli policy toward the Palestinian population in the West Bank is akin to South African policy toward the non-White majority during the apartheid era. A reasoned discussion of this question has serious implications for any attempt to restart Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations.

## **The Practice of Apartheid**

The term "apartheid" is of Dutch-Afrikaans origin and translates literally as "apartness." Apartheid was a system of racial segregation enforced in South Africa from 1948 to 1994 to provide a legal framework for perpetual economic, political, and social dominance by people of European descent. The creation of *bantustans*, tribal reserves for the indigenous Black inhabitants of South Africa and South-West Africa, was an integral part of the apartheid's racial segregation policies. The White minority in South Africa considered the 10 *bantustans* as "homelands" -- nominally sovereign nations -- for the Black majority. Actually, they operated more like the Indian reservations in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

To the casual visitor, apartheid could appear to be a relatively benign system. In practice, however, it was a brutal regime in which a minority employed the full resources of the state to control, dominate, and oppress the majority.

Resident in South Africa in 1983-85, I experienced apartheid first hand. It was a system in which White people lived in large houses with swimming pools, and Black people lived in shacks, often made from flattened tin cans. White people drove fancy cars, like a Mercedes Benz or BMW. Black people walked long distances to work or to return to their "homeland." In a restaurant, no Black server would dare to look a White customer in the eye. If a Black server spilled a dish or broke a plate, he was often cashiered on the spot. "After all," one White restaurant owner once told me, "there are plenty more where he came from."

## **Israeli Policy in the Occupied Territories**

In *Palestine Peace Not Apartheid*, Jimmy Carter portrays the dramatic growth in Israeli settlements over the last three decades, together with the road system and utilities built to support them. Outside East Jerusalem, there were some 7,000 settlers in the Occupied Territory in 1977. Today, 260,000 settlers live in the West Bank along with 2.5 million Palestinians. Exact figures are difficult to obtain, but it would appear that the more than 200 Israeli settlements on the West Bank occupy less than 10% of the land. But because their footprint does not reflect land set aside for security barriers, roads, and utilities, the settlements control more than 40% of the land.

This settlement process has regularly deprived Palestinians of basic human rights and freedoms, including the right to life and liberty of person, the right to work, and the right to freedom of movement. Palestinians are prohibited from using or even crossing many of the key roads connecting the settlements with each other and with Israel itself. And dozens of Israeli checkpoints are in place on roads the Palestinians can use, inhibiting vehicular and pedestrian traffic. The impact on Palestinians of this spider web of barriers, restrictions, and controls became clear when I worked in early 2002 with the Adam Smith Institute in London to develop parameters for a future land corridor, linking the Gaza Strip and West Bank in an independent Palestinian state.

In mid-November 2006, Peace Now, an Israeli group advocating Palestinian self-determination in the West Bank, leaked official information that documented widespread land theft by Israel. The data showed that Palestinians privately owned 39% of the land held by Israeli settlements in the West Bank, including large blocs Israel planned to keep in any future peace agreement. Nevertheless, settlement construction has continued in the West Bank. In early September 2006, the Housing Ministry issued tenders for the construction of 690 new housing units in the West Bank. In late December 2006, Israel announced plans to construct a Jewish settlement at Maskiot, the first new settlement in the West Bank in 10 years. While Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was visiting Israel in mid-January 2007, the Ministry of Construction and Housing, issued a tender for the construction of 44 new housing units in the settlement city of Ma'aleh Adumim.

Construction of the so-called security fence, what Carter terms the "imprisonment wall," accentuates the impact of new and expanded settlements in the West Bank. The fence weaves in and out, sometimes following the pre-1967 boundary, more often not. Largely built on Palestinian land, it separates Palestinians from Palestinians, dividing and compartmentalizing them. Javier Solana, the European Union foreign policy chief, said he was "shocked" when he visited Israel in late January 2007 and saw the extent to which the combination of Jewish settlement and security fence construction was cutting into land Palestinians wanted - and needed - for a two-state solution. He urged the Israelis to freeze West Bank settlements and stop construction of the security fence.

### **Critics Abound**

Jimmy Carter is many things -- an ex-president, Nobel laureate, humanist, and author -- but he is not an academician or scholar, something he readily admits. His book includes numerous quotes, with

no footnotes, and it contains errors of fact that greater documentation would likely have corrected. It also includes controversial interpretations, based on his intimate knowledge of the region and its leaders, that a more disciplined approach could have strengthened. Unapologetic, Carter has defended his work with the exception of a single sentence on page 213 that implies Palestinians would not have to end their suicide bombings and other acts of terrorism until Israel accepts international law and the goals of the 2003 roadmap for peace. Carter has admitted his phraseology here was faulty and told his publishers to remove the sentence from subsequent editions.

The controversy Carter's book has raised, primarily among American Jews and a few Middle East experts, is surprising. An early critic, Emory University professor Kenneth W. Stein, resigned in protest from the Carter Center, charging Carter with factual errors, omissions, and plagiarism in the book. The Simon Wiesenthal Center, which describes itself as "one of the largest international Jewish human rights organizations," issued a press release claiming that Carter had abandoned all objectivity, unabashedly acting as a "virtual spokesman for the Palestinian cause." Dennis Ross, long-time Middle East envoy, claimed Carter used maps in the book that Ross had created, mislabeling them in the process. Carter denied the charge.

Other commentators have traveled a lower road. Alan M. Dershowitz, a Harvard law professor, first described Carter's use of the word apartheid as "outrageous." In a more recent article, "Ex-President for Sale," he charged that Carter had "been bought and paid for by Arab money." In an article in the English language edition of the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, journalist Shmuel Rosner asked rhetorically if Carter was anti-Semitic, suggesting in a circumspect conclusion that he was not as anti-Semitic as some people but any trace of anti-Semitism in a former president "is much more important." An unidentified guest on a recent *Fox News* talk show spent over five minutes criticizing the book because its timeline did not mention the holocaust, suggesting that was sufficient reason to consign it to the trash bin. Finally, an anonymous columnist for *Asia Times*, writing under the *nom de plume* Spengler, described Carter as "the most egregious dork in US politics" and the Palestinians as "the exemplar of a self-exterminating people in the modern world."

These attacks and many others demonstrate that the commentary to date has centered on almost every aspect of the book and its author except the important issue it raises. Have successive Israeli governments pursued a settlement policy in the West Bank intentionally designed to thwart the creation of an economically and politically viable Palestinian state with secure, contiguous borders? Does Israeli policy in this regard constitute apartheid?

## Is Israeli Policy Apartheid?

In 1973, the UN General Assembly adopted the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of *Apartheid*. In Article III, it defined the "crime of apartheid" as applying to "inhuman acts committed for the purpose of establishing and maintaining domination by one racial group over another racial group and systematically oppressing them." Based on this definition, Israeli policy in the West Bank cannot technically be defined as apartheid because it lacks the racial component.

This is not to say racism is not an issue in Israel. Consider the public statements of Avigdor Lieberman, the most recent member of Ehud Olmert's governing coalition. Lieberman's most provocative plan calls for dividing Arabs and Jews into two homogenous states, a policy Arab Israeli critics describe as racist. When Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice hastened to meet with Lieberman during her mid-January 2007 visit to Israel, a *Haaretz* editorial entitled "Down with Racism" commented: "Rice's meeting with Lieberman was like giving a stamp of approval to the racist policies he and his party have adopted."

About the same time, a clandestine videotape appearing on Israeli television showed a Jewish settler in Hebron confronting, cursing, and spitting on an Arab neighbor. In a mid-January 2007 op-ed in the *Jerusalem Post*, Yosef (Tommy) Lapid, a former deputy prime minister and justice minister under Ariel Sharon, expressed the thinking of many Israelis: "there is no reason or justification for the thuggery of the kind demonstrated time after time by the residents of the Jewish settlement in Hebron toward their Arab neighbors." While the video was news, the behavior it captured was not new. I witnessed something similar 30 years ago during my first visit to Hebron.

Article 7 of the 2002 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court lists apartheid as one of several "crimes against humanity." In so doing, it sheds new light on the Israeli case. The crime of apartheid is defined as inhumane acts such as torture, imprisonment, or the persecution of an identifiable group on political, racial, national, ethnic, cultural, religious, or other grounds "committed in the context of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over any racial group or groups and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime." When the emphasis shifts to an identifiable national, ethnic or cultural group, as opposed to a racial group, Israeli policy in the West Bank clearly constitutes a form of apartheid with an effect on the Palestinian people much the same as apartheid had on the non-White population in South Africa.

In any case, the media storm in the United States over Carter's use of the word apartheid remains difficult to understand since Israelis themselves have long used the word to describe Israeli policy in the Occupied Territory. This helps explain why the book has drawn so little attention in Israel. As one example, Shulamit Aloni, a former education minister under Yitzhak Rabin, in early January 2007 published an article, "Yes, There is Apartheid in Israel," in which she candidly acknowledged "the government of Israel practices a brutal form of Apartheid in the territory it occupies. Its army has turned every Palestinian village and town into a fenced-in, or blocked-in, detention camp."

Some critics go further in applying the term apartheid beyond the occupied territories. UCLA professor Saree Makdisi, in a mid-December op-ed in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, criticized Carter's book because the author limited his discussion of apartheid to the West Bank. Makdisi argued the concept of apartheid was equally applicable to Jewish and non-Jewish citizens within Israel itself. On that score, the Arab Center for Alternative Planning in mid-January 2007 revealed the results of a recent poll that showed that per capita Gross Domestic Product in the Israeli Jewish sector was three times that of the Israeli Arab sector.

### **What Next?**

That which we call apartheid, to echo Shakespeare, by any other name would smell as rotten. Israeli policy in the West Bank is a form of apartheid in intent and implementation. Ethnic-based, as opposed to race-based, it shares an important characteristic with the South African model. Both have their genesis in the desire by the minority to control land occupied by the majority. To achieve this result, the Israelis have imposed a legal framework on the Palestinians in the West Bank that ensures perpetual economic, political, and social dominance.

Guarded optimism surrounds the proposed resurrection of stalled Mideast peace talks with members of the international quartet, the European Union, UN, United States, and Russia. Negotiators propose to leapfrog the moribund road map and move the parties toward direct negotiations aimed at a final resolution of the conflict. In so doing, the Bush administration talks of increasing Palestinian confidence in a two-state solution, thereby elevating those Palestinians who advocate such a solution and undermining those who reject a permanent peace. To progress toward this result, the first step must be to separate myth from reality. The West Bank has become a place of *bantustans*, isolated

cantons, that divide and constrict, often illegally, historic Arab lands. If not dismantled, Jewish settlements and the security fence under construction collectively will doom any chance for a durable peace based on a two-state solution between Israel and the Palestinians.

---

**Ronald Bruce St John**, an analyst for “*Foreign Policy in Focus*” has published extensively on Middle East issues for almost three decades. His recent publications include the “*Historical Dictionary of Libya*” (1991, 1998, 2006) and “*Libya and the United States: Two Centuries of Strife*” (2002).

**Web link**

<http://www.counterpunch.org/stjohn02022007.html>