

## [Jimmy Carter Warned Us About Israeli Apartheid](#)

***The late President wrote in a controversial 2006 book that Israel was on its way to apartheid towards Palestinians.***

The late President Jimmy Carter was not a particularly progressive President, but his exemplary service as a peacemaker and humanitarian since leaving office has resulted in an [outpouring](#) of [heartfelt](#) tributes following his death at the age of 100 on December 28. During his final years, however, the Nobel Peace Laureate was met with intense criticism for insisting that standards of peace, human rights, and international law should apply not just to countries hostile to U.S. interests, but to U.S. allies like Israel as well. Particularly controversial was Carter's 2006 book, [Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid](#), which went on to be a *New York Times* bestseller, in which he argued against Israel's ongoing occupation of the West Bank, the Palestinian territory seized during the 1967 war the international community had hoped would form the basis for the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel. Carter was a liberal Christian Zionist who believed [passionately](#) in Israel's right to exist as a secure homeland for the Jewish people. Like many left and liberal Jewish Zionists, however, he argued that the continued occupation and colonization of the West Bank would make a viable two-state solution impossible, and that Israel would be forced to choose between allowing for democratic governance in all the areas they controlled—meaning Jews would thereby be a minority, and Israel would no longer be a Jewish state—or imposing an apartheid system akin to one instituted in South Africa prior to its democratic transition in 1994.

Carter was falsely [accused](#) of referring to Israel as an apartheid state, when he had explicitly stated otherwise. He was referring only to the Israeli-occupied West Bank, where the establishment of Jewish-only roads, Jewish-only settlements, and other strict segregation policies do [resemble](#) the old South African system.

In reality, the main objection of Carter's critics was that he dared criticize the Israeli government, a [recipient](#) of tens of billions of dollars' worth of unconditional taxpayer-funded military equipment from U.S. arms manufacturers.

*Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid* received overwhelmingly negative media coverage following its release. *The Washington Post* [accused](#) Carter of harboring a "hostility to Israel" in part for allegedly failing to note, according to reviewer Jeffrey Goldberg, that the Israeli government "dearly wants to give up the bulk of its West Bank settlements." In reality, the illegal settlements have [continued](#) to expand since 2006, and the Israeli government has [reiterated](#) that they are there to stay.

An article in *The New York Times* about the reaction to the book [included a number of quotes](#) from pro-Israel organizations attacking it, while failing to quote a single Palestinian or Palestinian American source.

The Democratic Party leadership was also hostile to the book. In a rare rebuke by another former President of the same party, [Bill Clinton](#), ignoring Carter's frequent trips to and extensive knowledge of Israel and Palestine, wrote "I don't know where his information (or conclusions) came from" and [insisted](#) "it's not factually correct and it's not fair."

Howard Dean, then chair of the Democratic National Committee, also [voiced his disagreement](#) with Carter's analysis. Representative Nancy Pelosi, who was about to become Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives,

[declared](#), “It is wrong to suggest that the Jewish people would support a government in Israel or anywhere else that institutionalizes ethnically based oppression, and Democrats reject that allegation vigorously.” She added, “We stand with Israel now and we stand with Israel forever.”

Former Presidents have almost always been granted an opportunity to speak at their party’s subsequent conventions, but in [apparent reaction](#) to the book, Carter’s appearance at the 2008 Democratic National Convention was limited to a video clip speaking in praise of nominee Barack Obama and interviewing survivors of Hurricane Katrina. Carter also only appeared in short video clips at the 2012 and 2016 conventions.

In 2022, Joe Biden named Emory University professor Deborah Lipstadt to be the U.S. Special Envoy for Monitoring and Combating Antisemitism. Lipstadt had previously [accused](#) Carter of engaging in “traditional antisemitic canards” and compared him to the notorious antisemite and Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke.

But while the Democratic Party has mostly maintained its pro-Israel stance since the publication of the book, Carter’s words now appear quite prescient and reflect a growing international consensus. In 2022, Amnesty International [published](#) a 281-page report making a compelling case that Israel practices a form of apartheid towards the Palestinians. Human Rights Watch [published](#) a similarly detailed study the previous year reaching the same conclusion. B’Tselem, Israel’s leading human rights organization, also [released](#) an extensive report documenting the Israeli government’s imposition of apartheid. [Similar conclusions](#) have been reached by the United Nations Special Rapporteur for the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories. This past July, the International Court of Justice, in an advisory opinion, also [found](#) that Israel’s ongoing and multiple violations of international humanitarian law constitute apartheid.

A number of Carter’s former critics, including a board member of the Carter Center who resigned in protest following the publication of the book, have since [apologized](#) and acknowledged that the former President was correct. No one in the Democratic Party leadership has yet done so.

Indeed, very few of Carter’s critics have been willing to demand an end to Israel’s settlements and segregation policies in the West Bank or acknowledge that these colonial outposts in the occupied territories constitute a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention and a [series](#) of unanimous U.N. Security Council resolutions.

Since Carter wrote *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid* eighteen years ago, the [number](#) of Israeli settlers in the occupied territories has [more than doubled](#), most of them surrounding Palestinian cities and towns in a manner that would make the establishment of a viable contiguous Palestinian state impossible.

As a result, many Palestinians and others who once supported a two-state solution have [concluded](#) it is too late and are now demanding a single democratic state with equal rights for both peoples between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. Similarly, increasing numbers of Jewish people in the United States and elsewhere now believe that the Zionist movement has become hopelessly dominated by overt racists, and have [renounced](#) Zionism altogether.

Carter warned that the choice before Israel was “peace or apartheid.” The Israeli government and its backers in Washington have chosen apartheid—but people across the world have not given up on the peace Carter envisioned.