

**Editorial****Harper's Blatant Support for Israeli Apartheid**

In words reminiscent of the attempts by anti-Semites to prevent Jewish immigration to Canada in the years before, during and after the Second World War, Alan Baker, the Israeli ambassador to Canada, in a show of blatant and inappropriate interference in the internal affairs of Canada, stated last week that the growing numbers of Muslims coming to Canada are threatening Canadian values and institutions. In particular, Mr. Baker cited the demonstrations by Muslim students and “others” against himself and other spokespersons for the Israeli state as being in violation of freedom of speech. He also referred to the growing political influence of Muslim Canadians as a threat to Canada’s traditional support for the state of Israel.

Mr. Baker did not elaborate on his “solution” to the problem, but there is a limited range of options if

one goes down the path being advocated by the Israeli ambassador. The first would be to violate the freedom of speech of the Muslims and “others” who oppose Israel by banning demonstrations in opposition to Israel. Various supporters of Israel have indeed proposed such bans over the past few years and a number of universities have actually taken such measures.

However, banning anti-Israel demonstrations would not address Mr. Baker’s more fundamental lament about the growing political influence of Muslims in Canada. Those concerns can only be addressed in two ways – limit Muslim immigration to Canada and/or limit the political rights of Muslim Canadians once they are here. Mr. Baker wisely did not vocalize those positions, but his words clearly

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**The Middle East Welcomes Back Carter**

Jimmy Carter, former president of the United States, recently visited the Middle East in the capacity of an elder statesman. His self-appointed mission in the region has been to promote peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians. For his efforts, Carter has been pilloried by Israeli officials and the more rabid supporters of Israel on this side of the Atlantic. The Israeli ambassador to the United Nations, Dan Gillerman, even went so far as to call the former president a bigot.

Carter’s involvement in the Middle East dates to his term as U.S. president when he facilitated a peace treaty between Israel and Egypt which led to the return of the Israeli-occupied Sinai Peninsula to Egypt in 1978. More recently Carter wrote a book called *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, in which he commented on the situation in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. Published in late

2006, according to Carter the book was intended to stimulate the “peace process” in Palestine.

On his recent visit, Carter was snubbed by the Israeli government when he arrived in Israel. His plane was met by foreign ministry officials rather than senior government leaders, as would normally have been the case for a former U.S. president. Indeed, Israeli leaders, with the apparent approval of Washington, are treating Carter as a hostile force, no doubt for daring to use the word “apartheid” in connection with Israeli treatment of Palestinians in the occupied territories.

However, Israel’s brutal occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and the separation of Palestinians from Jewish-only settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem are very similar to the suppression of non-whites in apartheid-era South Africa. Thus, the

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apartheid label is quite apt, although unacceptable to the Israelis as it draws attention to the racist nature of the Israeli state.

The second reason Carter was met with hostility during the visit was his plan to meet Khaled Meshal, the leader of Hamas, in the Syrian capital Damascus where the Meshal is in exile. The Israeli government had earlier prevented the former president from entering Gaza to meet with Hamas leaders there. Carter's speaking to Hamas is considered both in official Washington and official Israel as an equally great betrayal as calling Israel an apartheid state.

Hamas enjoys much support among Palestinians, particularly those living in Gaza, because it has functioned as a social support and economic relief agency providing assistance to Palestinians living in the occupied territories. It took on this role in response to the failures of a largely corrupt and dysfunctional Palestinian Authority (PA) in the years following the conclusion of the Oslo Accords in 1993. The Accords created an interim self-governing authority in the occupied Palestinian lands; this was run by the Fatah Party, led by Yasser Arafat until his death in 2004. The PA was almost completely destroyed by the Israeli occupation forces in the early years of this decade following the start of the second Intifada in 2000.

After Arafat's death, his place at the head of the PA and Fatah was taken by Mahmoud Abbas whose main qualification was that he was acceptable to Washington and Tel Aviv. The chief characteristic of his leadership of the PA has been its abject and conciliatory behaviour in the face of the on-going expansion of Jewish settlements in the occupied territories, the assassination of Palestinian leaders and militants by Israel and the collective punishment visited on ordinary Palestinians by Israeli occupation forces.

It was therefore not surprising that in the 2006 PA elections Abbas's Fatah party was defeated by Hamas. It is interesting to note that these elections were supervised by an international observer group led by former President Carter. Although Hamas won the elections convincingly - which were considered by the international observers to have been fair and open - Israeli, American and European governments refused to accept the results and have since boycotted the elected Hamas administration calling it a terrorist organization. Furthermore, in summer 2007, at the instigation of the U.S. and Israel, Abbas attempted to destroy Hamas militarily using the Fatah militia.

However, when the fighting ended, Hamas was left in more or less complete control of Gaza while Abbas and his Fatah organization remained in power in the West Bank.

Israel's reaction was to boycott not just Hamas but the entire Gaza strip. In an effort to reduce support for Hamas among Palestinians in Gaza Israel imposed an embargo on food, fuel, and water that has reduced the population of 1.4 million to misery and near starvation. However, while none of this has undermined the support Hamas enjoys among the residents of Gaza, it has focused the world attention on the plight of the Palestinians in Gaza and shone a light on the on-going brutality of Israel's continued occupation and control of Gaza.

The situation in Gaza has created a crisis for the American administration as well. It is faced with an ugly humanitarian disaster and a complete impasse between the Palestinians and the Israeli government. Washington and Tel Aviv will not speak to or have any dealings with Hamas. They insist on dealing only with Mahmoud Abbas who has little or no credibility with a majority of the Palestinian people. His strategy of making endless concessions to Israel in negotiations has produced nothing but more negotiations while Israel continues to expand its settlements, murder Palestinian leaders and exact collective punishment on the civilian population. Hamas, by contrast, has refused to bow to constant Israeli terror and intimidation.

In this context, Carter's trip can be seen as an attempt to overcome the crisis that the Israeli violence and aggression has created for U.S. imperial interests in the Middle East, and more generally in the Muslim world. The U.S. is bogged down in two unpopular and losing occupations of Muslim lands which have undermined its position in the region. More importantly, the weakening of the U.S. weakens its client states in the area. The U.S. desperately needs at least the appearance of progress on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

Carter has a long history of pulling the chestnuts out of the fire for U.S. imperialism. In 1994 he saved the Clinton administration from a potentially disastrous confrontation with North Korea, brokering a deal which saw the North Koreans mothball their heavy-water nuclear power plants in exchange for a U.S. promise to build light-water reactors in their place. Although the U.S. later reneged on its promises, Carter's intervention allowed Clinton to back off from

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## The World Food Crisis

Food prices over the last year have been soaring. From March 2007 to March 2008, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) estimates the world price for foods including cereals, dairy, produce, meat, sugar and oils rose by 57 percent. The price of rice, a staple in most of Asia, increased by 68 percent between January 1 and April 15 of this year. The impact of these cost increases has been immense, particularly in poorer countries, in which most people spend between 50 and 60 percent of their income on food. There have been demonstrations against high food prices throughout Africa and South Asia and protests in Haiti in February, March and April ended with the resignation of the government.

Several international institutions, including the UN, the World Bank and dozens of NGOs have warned that millions face hunger over the next 12 to 18 months unless food prices come down and the FAO has identified 37 countries facing the risk of serious humanitarian crises related to hunger.

According to the head of the UN's development assistance agency, part of the problem has been the shift away from agricultural self-sufficiency in many of the world's poorest nations. Aid to support agriculture has dropped dramatically in recent decades, Supachai Panitchpakdi, the head of UNCTAD, told reporters in April. Between 2003 and 2005, \$1.3 billion in development aid was spent on "governance initiatives" in the world's poorest countries, compared to just \$12 million on agricultural development. "We will be jumping from one crisis to another unless the international community can address [this] major issue," he said. With less emphasis on agriculture, more of the world's poorest countries have become dependent on food imports, and increasingly vulnerable to world price fluctuations. What isn't clear, from the flood of media reports on the world food crisis, is what is behind it all?

Certainly supply plays some part. In 2006 and 2007, there were production problems in some of the major food exporting nations of the world – drought in Australia and parts of the EU and former Soviet Union sharply reduced the amount of wheat, corn and barley available in the world. World wheat stocks are currently at their lowest level in over 25 years, with wheat stocks in the U.S. down to levels not seen since the Second World War.

Production problems within major importing countries, such as China and India, also had an impact,

and the cyclone in Burma, which exports 20 percent of the rice consumed in Asia, will also be felt. However, despite these production problems, there was still enough grain and cereal produced in 2006 and 2007 to meet human consumption demand.

The two biggest factors contributing to increased food prices in the U.S., which is the largest grains exporter in the world, are the shift to production of grains for ethanol and increasing speculation in agricultural commodities on U.S. stock markets.

According to U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates, between one quarter and one third of all corn produced in the U.S. is now being used in ethanol production. Corn plantings in the U.S. have also increased by over 30 percent in the last five years. This is no accident but the result of deliberate government policy – the American ethanol industry has been supported through massive subsidies and tax incentives, under the guise of creating energy security for the U.S. by lessening its dependence on foreign oil imports. The chief beneficiary of the U.S. policies supporting ethanol production is the largest agricultural multinational in the world, Archer Daniels Midlands (ADM), which is also the world's leading producer of ethanol.

As well, commodity markets in the U.S. have increasingly become attractive to capital. Futures trading in agricultural commodities has spiked – open interest in wheat on the Chicago wheat exchange, for example, surged by 230 percent between February 2005 and February 2008. Soft red winter wheat is traded on the Chicago exchange, but there was no significant increase of soft red winter wheat production during this same period. Instead, this increase is due to the increasing participation of the large speculative hedge and index funds. With the sub-prime mortgage crisis in the U.S., these funds have increasingly turned to commodity markets as a source for speculative investment.

Despite the soaring food prices, average farmers have seen very few benefits. In Canada, for example, where wheat prices have doubled in the last year, farmers' input costs (fuel, fertilizer, chemicals) have increased by between 30 and 80 percent. Subsistence farmers in poorer countries have been the hardest hit by price increases, as production problems have meant they haven't been able to sell any of their produce for higher prices and they are reliant on extremely expensive imports to feed themselves and their families.

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imply support for such measures. In other words, Mr. Baker would like Canada to adopt the anti-Muslim measures that have been implemented in Israel for the past 60 years. These can be summed up as: prevention of Arab immigration to Israel and encouraging Arab citizens of Israel to leave, as well as restrictions on the political, civil and human rights of Muslims both inside the borders of Israel and within the Occupied Territories. Many commentators, including former U.S. president Jimmy Carter, have labelled such measures “apartheid”.

Spokespersons for the opposition parties condemned Ambassador Baker’s remarks as unwarranted and unacceptable. However, Prime Minister Stephen Harper spoke in defence of the Israeli ambassador at a function celebrating the sixtieth anniversary of the establishment of the Israeli state. Harper stated: “Those who threaten Israel also threaten Canada...because they hate Israel, just as they hate the Jewish people.” He went on to reassure those present that Canada’s support for Israel was unshakable.

Like the Israeli ambassador, Harper did not elaborate on what he proposes to do about those who “threaten Israel and Canada”, but again the options are limited and, in many cases, already being implemented. Ethnic profiling of Arabs and other Muslims by the police and intelligence agencies has become institutionalized. The RCMP and CSIS have sent false information on Canadian citizens to the U.S., Syria, Egypt and other countries with the intent of having those Canadians subjected to detention and torture.

The Canadian state, like the Israeli state, has a long history of implementing apartheid policies. In fact, the policies of the South African racist regime, which became known as apartheid, were based partially on the Canadian system of reserves for First Nations people as well as on the racist treatment of Black people in the southern United States. During both world wars, the Canadian state singled out citizens of particular ethnic backgrounds (Ukrainians, Germans and Japanese, in particular) for special treatment, including incarceration and confiscation of their property.

Is Harper suggesting that Canada should employ

similar measures once again to ensure that opposition to the racist apartheid policies of Israel is suppressed in Canada? That is certainly the door that is opened if prime ministers and ambassadors are allowed to muse unopposed about the “dangers” posed to Canada and Canadian institutions by those opposing the racist policies of a foreign state.

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the brink of war while saving face. In 2002 when the U.S. Bush administration was threatening to invade Cuba over allegations that it was producing biological warfare weapons, Carter travelled to Cuba to investigate the claims. After visiting several Cuban facilities Carter reported that he had found no evidence of biological weapons research. The fact that the Bush administration subsequently dropped the claims without even questioning Carter’s expertise on the subject indicates that it was using Carter to extricate itself from a predicament created by its own bellicose rhetoric.

Similarly, Carter’s meeting with Hamas is a statement that the refusal of the U.S. and Israel to talk to Hamas has been counterproductive and inimical to U.S. interests in the Middle East. Carter’s courting and promotion of Hamas as a participant in the “peace” process has very little to do with Hamas or the interests of the Palestinian people. Rather it is an indication of the bankruptcy of American policy in the Middle East and a call to change direction in the face of impending disaster. It is an attempt to save U.S. imperialism from itself and to stave off the complete collapse of its Middle East policies.

## **Modern Communism**

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