

American Democracy and Freedom of Speech

Mohamed Rabie

Reactions to the publication of President Carter's book, "Palestine: Peace not Apartheid," have raised many question in the minds or people who still believe that America is the bastion of democracy, where all people enjoy freedom of speech and have equal rights. President Carter was harshly criticized by many Americans for using the world apartheid in the title of his book; they were mainly Jewish Americans who claim to defend others' rights and freedoms of expression. Israel's friends and a horde of other Jewish-American professors, activists, neoconservatives, media personalities and members of Congress have subjected Mr. Carter to much abuse and insults. People committed to doing what it takes to protect Israel's image in America, have accused Mr. Carter of anti-Semitism, ill-intentions and even treason. The unforgivable crime that Mr. Carter committed to deserve all these insults, was to practice his freedom of speech and present some of the facts related to Israel's settlement polices and daily practices in occupied Palestine, to advocate the revitalization of the moribund peace process, and to suggest a path to peace on the basis of UN resolutions and internationally-sanctioned plans and proposals.

People who are doing everything to protect Israel's image, while stifling discussion of its policies in Palestine, are doing so at the expense of justice, world peace and the future of young Israelis and Arabs alike. They are, in fact, not doing Israel, the United States or any other state a favor. Diehard American promoters of Israel and supporters of its colonial policies in Palestine are, unwittingly, protecting it from saving itself; and by so doing, they are hastening its demise, as will be explained later.

While Israel's friends in the United States have every right to promote and defend their beloved political pet, they are not entitled and should not be granted the right to prevent others from expressing their views regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict. It is a burning issue that

has claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of Arabs and Jews over the last 60 years, cost the United States over a \$100 billion in direct financial and military aid, and continues to destabilize the entire Middle East region. And consequently, It remains an issue of major concern to the world community at large, and has serious implications for world peace, justice, human rights, democracy and political, social and economic development in the Middle East.

On December 8, 2006, President Carter wrote in the L.A Times, “The many controversial issues concerning Palestine and the path to peace for Israel are intensely debated among Israelis and throughout other nations – but not in the United States. For the last 30 years, I have witnessed and experienced the severe restraints on any free and balance discussion of the facts... It would be almost politically suicidal for members of Congress to espouse a balanced position between Israel and Palestine, to suggest that Israel comply with international law or speak in defense of justice or human rights for Palestinians. What is even more difficult to comprehend is why the editorial pages of the major newspapers and magazines in the United States exercise similar self-restraint... My most troubling experience has been the rejection of my efforts to speak, for free, about the book on university campuses with high Jewish enrollment and to answer questions from students and professors.”

While the title of the president’s book was called “indecent” by a Harvard Jewish-American professor, Mr. Carter was accused, in a review of his book in both the New York Times and the Washington Post, of having been an anti-Semite all his life; others, meanwhile, have suggested that Carter should be tried for treason. And if this is how an American president is treated for daring to criticize Israel’s settlement polices in Palestine, and express his views regarding peace in the Holy Land, one must imagine how would a Palestinian-American be treated by the same people for publicizing the plight of his own people and promoting a political settlement that calls for sharing the land of Palestine between Arabs and Jews.

In light of this incident, one must wonder if American democracy still functions as before, and if there is anything left of the freedom of speech in America. American universities, as this case clearly demonstrates, seem to have decided to toe the line drawn by the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), and abandon their traditional commitment to academic

freedom, freedom of speech and human rights. We must acknowledged that AIPAC is the most effective lobbying organization in history; it has been able to secure unquestioned and unlimited American support for Israel, suppress dissent within the United States and thus undermine American democracy, prevent open debate of all issues related to Israel and Palestine and the political and human rights of the Palestinian people, and intimidate all those who espouse a different viewpoint that deviates from the one promoted by the Israeli government.

However, to understand what has happened to American democracy and freedom of speech, and why members of Congress are all ears when it comes to Israeli demands and viewpoint; and are completely blinded and totally deaf when it comes to Palestinians cries for help and justice, we need to go back to 1948, the year when the Jewish state was created.

In 1948 leaders of the Zionist Organization in Palestine declared independence and the State of Israel became a reality. But to reach this point, vicious acts of terrorism were committed by the paramilitary forces of the Jewish organizations against the Palestinian people to drive them out of their homes and clear a good portion of the Palestinian territory for Jewish settlers. Within months, about eight hundred thousand Palestinians were transformed from owners of land on which they lived for countless generation into refugees living in abject poverty in squalid camps run by the United Nations. In the process, Israel and its Zionist leaders introduced, for the first time, ethnic cleansing to the Middle East.

Nevertheless, hours after the declaration of independence, President Harry S. Truman extended US diplomatic recognition to the newly created Jewish state. The president's almost instantaneous recognition of Israel, however, was not approved or even recommended by any of his closest advisors. Virtually all the president's foreign affairs advisors, including the secretaries of state and defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, opposed the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine from the stand point of the American national interests. Secretary of State George C. Marshall, for example, opposed the decision so strongly that he bluntly told Truman soon after his recognition announcement that if the elections were held the next day he would not vote for him.

In justifying his unjustified political move, President Truman said; “I am sorry gentlemen, but I have to answer to hundreds of thousands who are anxious for the success of Zionism. I do not have hundreds of thousands of Arabs in my constituency.” Nevertheless, President Truman had initially expressed opposition to the idea of creating a Jewish state in Palestine. Zionist, fearing the consequences of such an attitude, intensified their lobbying efforts and threatened to muster Jewish votes against him in the 1948 presidential elections. Other pressure tactics were employed by American-Jewish leaders to force Truman to abandon his principles and national commitment for the sake of personal political gains. Advertising ads, designed to use the public outrage over the Holocaust, were bought in newspaper to provoke popular support for the establishment of a homeland for European Jews in Palestine.

By the time Israel was created in 1948, and hostilities came to an end in 1949, the Israeli army had already captured a larger portion of the Palestinian land than the UN Partition Plan of 1947 had provided. While the UN plan had given 56% of the land to a Jewish minority that represented one third of the population and owned only 6% of the land of Palestine, Israel had brought 78% of the land under its control. As a consequence, the US recognition of Israel represented, in effect, an American decision to sanction Israeli expansionism and annexation of Arab land. A few days later, the Truman administration gave Israel a \$100 million loan, while the displaced and disposed Palestinians, who were made refugees in their homeland and in other surrounding Arab states, were given neither immediate economic assistance nor moral or political support. Years later, the decision to recognize Israel without challenging its grab of Palestinian land was transformed into an official US policy that continues to favor Israel at the expense of Palestinian political, historical and human rights.

The president’s words and deeds, which gave Zionism and its expansionist policy a monumental victory, have served to legitimize the practice of putting the political ambitions and personal interests of US elected officials ahead of the American national interest. In addition, a precedent was established allowing religious and national minorities to form political lobbies with the intention of exerting influence over the formation and implementation of US foreign policy.

The example set by President Truman was soon followed by members of the US Congress, causing the American national interest to gradually lose its role as the organizing principle of US foreign policy. The Jewish lobby, meanwhile, was emboldened and its ability to control the political agenda in Washington was strengthened. As a consequence, American democracy was undermined, freedom of speech suffered, and America began to lose its political will to protect its interests and advance its values. A system of government held captive to special interests and foreign lobbies caused the United States to slowly emerge as the mother of most political ills and democratic sins in our times.

In 1967, Israel occupied what had been left of Palestine (the West Bank and Gaza) and moved quickly to settle the Occupied Territories. In defiance of international law and UN resolutions, Israel settled about 500,000 of its Jewish population in the territories it occupied in 1967. Jewish settlers and Israeli soldiers protecting them and enforcing an apartheid system of rights and privileges in the Occupied Territories have continued to harass or kill Palestinians, bulldoze their homes, uproot their olive and orange trees, confiscate their land, destroy their towns and infrastructure like water and electricity grids, close their schools and universities, kidnap and murder their political leaders, and deny them freedom of movement in their homeland. And to make life unbearable for Palestinians, Israel erected 450 check points in the Occupied Territories, preventing employees from going to work, students from going to schools, and patients from getting the medical attention they need.

Since the establishment of the Jewish state in Palestine, the US government has used its veto power in the UN Security Council to block demands that Israeli should implement UN resolutions and protect it from condemnation due to its unlawful practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. In July 2006, the United States vetoed a resolution that called for the unconditional release of captured Palestinian officials detained by Israel and Israeli withdrawal for Gaza. In fact, the US government has used its veto in the UNSC more than all other states that have veto power combined, almost all of them to protect Israel from international criticism and to advance its expansionist interests in Palestine. Meanwhile, the UN General Assembly, where no state has a veto power has by 2010 condemned Israel 321 times.

In 1988, I published my first academic book in English under the title, "The Politics of Foreign Aid: US Foreign Assistance an Aid to Israel." Praeger Publishers, one of the most respected academic publishers at the time published the book, which were the first and the last one of its kind. The book analyzes the US foreign assistance program and the rationale behind it, and describes in a chronological order the magnitude of American economic and military support to Israel. In addition, the book provided the most factual information about the activities of the Israeli lobby and how it affected American policy in the Middle East. All sources, with the exception of a minor one, were official US documents, books and newspapers and magazines articles published in the United States, AIPAC documents and brochures, Israeli official documents and books and articles published in Israel. Since all lobbying activities on behalf of foreign powers are intended to serve the interests of foreigners at the expense of nationals, I concluded that all foreign lobbies should be outlawed.

After the manuscript was accepted by the publisher, an editor was assigned to work with me to prepare the book publishing. While the editors and I were supposed to work together as one team to finalize the product, my editors refused to reveal his or her identity to me; I still do not know if my editor was a man or a women or a mere ghost sent an Israeli angel to force me to quit writing books. In fact, I had to fight with my mysterious editor over every single word and line and to him or her with a copy the reference used. The Politics of Foreign Aid remains until today the only reference on the subject of foreign aid in general and US aid to Israel in particular, And the reason for this, I believe, is the that no one can write a similar book, but because no one seems to dare to write such a book. While the book received little attention from the press, its author was placed on the screen of the Israeli lobby.

I arrived in the United States in 1965 as a student who wished to study in America and use his knowledge and experience to serve the cause of peace and development in the world, and help his own people in their struggle for freedom and justice. In 1970, I left the United States to teach at Kuwait University, to be invited by Georgetown University six years later to spend a year as a scholar-in-residence. In fact, I initially declined the offer because I wanted to settle in

Jordan, but several months later I felt the need to accept it to escape lack of freedom and oppression in Arab states.

After a pleasant first semester at Georgetown University, I was denied the opportunity to teach any courses in the second semester; and to balance my residency there, an Israeli professor was invited. The agony of my life journey in the United States is too long and too painful to be told in details in this essay; therefore, I will concentrate on certain parts of it that are relevant to the issues of censorship, academic discrimination and denial of free speech.

In 1985, due to my close connection to the PLO leadership, I was approached by a Jewish-American peace activist to meet with a few Israeli and Jewish-American journalists to discuss chances for an Israeli-Palestinian dialogue; she implied that the Israeli Labor Party was interested in initiating such a dialogue. The meeting was held at the home of a Jewish couple in Bethesda, Maryland, just a five-minute drive from my home. On the way to the home of my hosts, I gave myself three assignments; to prove to the people I was going to meet with that I am as smart as anyone of them; that I do understand the issues of the conflict, and I am keenly aware of the Israelis fears and intentions; and explain why the Palestinians people are sincerely interested in making peace with their Jewish neighbors. Eight people attended the meeting, all of whom were Jewish with the exception of Mr. Samuel Lewis and me. Mr. Lewis had served two terms as US ambassador to Israel, and upon his return to Washington, he acquired a reputation of being "Israel's unofficial ambassador to the United States." Two of the others were prominent Jewish-American journalists, John Goshko of the Washington Post and Marvin Kalb of NBC News.

The most prominent member of the group I met that night was Ms. Ora Namir, then a member of the Israeli Knesset and later a member of the Rabin cabinet. After a long and exhausting review of the issues, the two Jewish-American journalists, John Goshko and Marvin Kalb, expressed their astonishment of what I had to say that night; they said that they were hearing about certain facts and incidents that they never knew existed or took place. I could not help it but to say to them, if you do not know these facts, then why do not you ask people who know before writing and airing your news stories; you are in fact substituting your biased

opinions for facts. They promised to call to listen to me and learn more about the intricate issues of the conflict; they may have called my grandmother in her grave, but never called me.

During the discussion, we talked about several issues of mutual interest and intellectual curiosity, one of which was American aid to poor countries. Since development economics was the subject of my graduate studies and the field I have been most interested in, I made certain remarks and provided in depth analysis of one of the questions raised. Ambassador Samuel Lewis had difficulty comprehending what I had to say, not because it was difficult to understand, but because the facts I presented were hard to believe. Weeks later, Mr. Lewis called me to say that I was right, and began telling people in Washington that I was one of the smartest people he had ever met.

Before everyone headed home, I made a modest proposal that would have initiated a serious Israeli-PLO dialogue; I proposed to Ms Namir to try to convince Mr. Shimon Peres, who was then Israel's prime minister, to select two of his closest and most trusted aids to meet with PLO representatives, promising that I will do the same with Mr. Arafat. Ms. Namir was enthusiastic and everyone else got excited. Nevertheless, few days later I received a phone call from Israel to inform me that Mr. Peres, whom I believe, is the most opportunistic and dishonest politician of the twentieth century, refused to let Ms. Namir complete her presentation; thus causing a well-intended opportunity to initiate contact with the enemy, with whom a deal must ultimately be made, to be wasted.

In 1989 I wrote a lengthy paper, "A Vision for the Transformation of the Middle East," in which I developed a realistic and humane plan to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict: the vision, which the paper articulated in clear terms, intended to transform the entire Middle East region through the creation of a web of political, security and economic arrangements between Israel, its Arab neighbors and other Muslim states in the region. Several months later, I sent President Carter a letter, accompanied with a copy of the proposal, which by then had been published in a booklet form, suggesting the holding of a meeting for a small group of distinguished Israelis and Palestinians to review the proposal, amend it and endorse it as a basis for a comprehensive

settlement. About two weeks later, I received a letter written by one of Carter's Jewish-American aids acknowledging my letter but ignoring everything it had to say or suggest.

Dr. Rabie is a professor of International Political Economy. He has lived and studied in 4 continents, published 40 books and more than 60 scholarly articles. He has also taught and lectured at more than 60 universities worldwide, and participated in over 70 conferences throughout the world. His writings, interests and associations reflect a deep commitment to peace, freedom, human development, and dialogue among different peoples and cultures.

rabiem@hotmail.com

www.yazour.com