

Unilateral proposal: Isolating Palestine

by [James M. Wall](#) in the [June 13, 2006](#) issue

Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert traveled to Washington in late May to tell President Bush about his plans for Israel's future. There is no indication that those plans offer a viable solution to the humanitarian crisis in the Palestinian territories caused by the cutoff of funds to the Hamas government. Olmert blames Hamas for the crisis. Former president Jimmy Carter disagrees. In a column in the *International Herald Tribune* (May 7), Carter wrote:

Innocent Palestinian people are being treated like animals, with the presumption that they are guilty of some crime. Because they voted for candidates who are members of Hamas, the United States government has become the driving force behind an apparently effective scheme of depriving the general [Palestinian] public of income, access to the outside world and the necessities of life.

A Hamas pledge against the use of violence against Israel civilians has been in place for more than 18 months, yet both Israel and the U.S. continue to describe Hamas as a terrorist organization and refuse to talk with Hamas until it accepts Israel's "right to exist"—a diplomatic demand that Virginia Tilley, professor of political science and international relations at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, finds less than compelling.

In the online newsletter *Counterpunch* (May 12), Tilley identifies a logical flaw in the "right to exist" demand that has led to the international isolation of Hamas.

"Diplomatic recognition of a state routinely requires one bit of vital information: 'right to exist' *where*? Israel's borders are not set. Even its *plans* for those borders are not known; with impressive brashness, Mr. Olmert has announced that we will not know until 2010."

Hamas and the international community have a right, as well as an obligation to all the people affected, to demand specificity about the borders within which Israel plans to exist. "Otherwise," says Tilley, "recognizing Israel's 'right to exist' could be construed to mean that Israel has a 'right to exist' within whatever borders it chooses in coming years."

On May 15, President Carter harshly criticized Olmert's unilateral proposal in *USA Today*:

The Olmert plan would leave the remnant of the Palestinian West Bank with the same unacceptable characteristics. Deep intrusions would effectively divide it into three portions. The prime minister has also announced that Israeli soldiers will likely remain in the Palestinian territory, which will be completely encapsulated by Israel's control of its eastern border in the Jordan River valley. It is inconceivable that any Palestinian, Arab leader, or any objective member of the international community could accept this illegal action as a permanent solution to the continuing altercation in the Middle East.

Because Hamas will not grant Israel the right to exist, Israel refuses to accept Hamas's right to govern the Palestinian Authority. By forcing this standoff, Israel presents itself to President Bush as a reluctant victim forced to determine its own borders without regard to international law or UN agreements. In this flawed logic, Palestinian suffering is viewed as self-inflicted. The international community knows this ploy is a sham, but an Israeli-friendly American Congress and national media shamelessly embrace it.

In the May 19 issue of the *Guardian*, Ronnie Kasrils, South Africa's intelligence minister, and journalist Victoria Brittain accuse Israel of using "collective punishment, an economic siege and starvation as political weapons" to force Hamas to accept its terms and conditions. "Never in the long struggle for freedom in apartheid South Africa was there a situation as dramatic as in Palestine today."

Brittain and Kasrils conclude that though the Palestinians are having sanctions imposed on them, it is Israel, which is "creating new facts on the ground to prevent the emergence of a viable Palestinian state," that should be facing UN sanctions.

Why is such criticism rarely heard in the U.S.? In the *London Independent* (April 27), Robert Fisk interviewed Stephen Walt of Harvard about a report on the Israel lobby that Walt coauthored with John Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago. “We are not saying there is a conspiracy, or a cabal,” said Walt. “The Israeli lobby has every right to carry on its work—all Americans like to lobby. What we are saying is that this lobby has a negative influence on U.S. national interests and that this should be discussed.”

Fisk found that “across the United States, there is growing evidence that the Israeli and neoconservative lobbies are acquiring ever greater power.” As one example, he cites the sudden cancellation by a New York theater company of a successful London play, *My Name Is Rachel Corrie*.

Corrie is the young American woman who was crushed to death by an Israeli bulldozer in Gaza in 2003. Her death remains unexamined at the highest levels in Israel and the U.S.—the same two nations that continue to punish the Palestinian people for choosing Hamas.