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Jimmy Carter's Crusade against Israel

Set-up:

For decades Jimmy Carter has prided himself for his role in brokering the historic Camp David Peace Accords between Israel and Egypt in the late 1970's. Based on the reaction to his new and controversial book entitled "Palestine Peace Not Apartheid" it seems that whatever status he may have had as a fair broker in the region has now come under question. While many support Carter's claims that Israel systematically violates the basic human rights of the Palestinians, a vocal minority protests the book entirely claiming it to be part of a greater conspiracy to destroy Israel by intentionally shifting American public opinion towards the Palestinians and rewriting history.

Through my research I hope to identify the interpretive community which believes and promotes criticism of Carter's book. Once found, I will separate the "rational" content based claims from the "paranoid" which allege intentionality and promote conspiracy theories. I will examine the similarities and differences between the two groups in an effort to understand why Carter's book has received such harsh criticism from specific interpretive communities while other similar ones remain largely quiet. I will also examine how the two main strands of the conspiracy theory trace their roots back to long established communal fears and examine how such ancient fears affect the interpretive community's contemporary self-image.

Through the initial stages of my research I have been able to conclude that communal fears and experiences of persecution reinforce the fears of the individual. It is by studying the synthesis of the individual and communal experiences (“experiential synthesis”) that I hope to contribute to the field of conspiracy theories studies. While conspiracy theories often emerge to explain the growing rift between the individual and the community, my research hopes to examine how the two occasionally act to reinforce shared beliefs.

Synthesis of the Object of Inquiry:

As noted, criticism of Carter’s new book falls into two categories: 1). that which criticizes content (typically promoted by recognized scholars and academics in news journals or personal blogs), and 2). that which alleges intention (typically circulated by unknown individuals through hi-tech mediums such as Facebook, blogs, and internet postings). Narratives of the second group tend to discount Carter’s book as illegitimate and allege it to be part of a greater plot to demonize and eventually destroy Israel. Yet, despite the differences in medium and author, the two types of criticism do not stand in opposition to one another. Rather, the “paranoid” often seeks to add onto the “rational” in an effort to use it as a basis for legitimacy.

One strand of the “Carter” conspiracy theory alleges Christian replacement theology, which views Christians as the successors to the Jewish tradition, to be the source of Carter’s alleged anti-Semitism. Carter’s book is thus perceived as an active attempt to correct the seeming contradiction of a Christian nation that replaced the Jews, though Jews continue to exist and flourish. Another dominant strand of the conspiracy

theory alleges that Carter is acting on behalf of Muslim nations (particularly Iran and Saudi Arabia) willingly or as a pawn. Some strands even meld the two into one all encompassing narrative in which Carter aids Muslim states precisely because of his belief in replacement theology.

While both dominant strands of this conspiracy theory place the root of Carter's alleged anti-Semitism in different sources, they both reinforce collective memories of persecution by traditional enemies recognizable to the interpretive community. Based on my research, I am lead to believe that total dismissal of Carter's book acts as a coping mechanism which the interpretive community enacts to protect their dual-identity as both Americans and Jews. By dismissing Carter's book as part of yet "another plot", American-Jews who subscribe to the "paranoid" school of thought need not question whether the Jewish State which they actively support is committing heinous acts that violate their American notions of equality and civil liberties.

Analytical Description/Interpretation of Sample Sources:

In a recent book review of "Palestine Peace Not Apartheid" published in the "Official Jewish Defense League Blog" Fern Sidman writes: "Being a former President does not give one a unique privilege to invent information..." (SOURCE). What distinguishes this sentence from other critiques of Carter's book is that it is not Sidman who wrote it, but rather it is a direct quote from Professor Kenneth Stein, former director of The Carter Center (an organization dedicated to advancing human rights across the world, founded and run by Jimmy Carter).

Harvard Professor Alan Dershowitz who publicly states “I like Jimmy Carter” (SOURCE) echoed these same sentiments when he wrote: “I don’t know why Jimmy Carter, who is usually a careful man, allowed so many errors and omissions to blemish his book.” (SOURCE). Yet though these two academics restrict their criticism to the content of Carter’s book, criticizing its inaccuracies while refusing to attach to them any greater plan of malice intent, other lesser known critics are not as restrained.

While criticism over Carter’s book may have started with an academic dispute over facts, through the internet it quickly turned into a first class mud slinging contest complete with conspiracy theories and all. Several Facebook sites have been created that attack Carter personally using rhetoric that can be categorized as less than kind. Such sites include “Jimmy Carter is a racist Douche!” (24 members), and “JIMMY CARTER IS A LYING SACK OF HARA” (Hebrew for feces, 103 members). Beyond the blatant difference in their treatment of Carter himself, the latter set of sources also makes no attempt to restrain theories explaining Carter’s possible *intentions* for including such alleged factual inaccuracies in his book.

While “rational” critics try to isolate Carter’s book and view it in a vacuum, “paranoid” critics try something equally as flawed when they attempt to draw connections where they simply don’t exist. As such, a middle ground is created as both sources are often brought together. The “paranoid” cites the “rational” for legitimacy, while the “rational” cites a clear anti-Israel bias¹ without delving into its root cause. As long as both sources retain their extreme approaches the need to support each other remains.

¹ “His bias against Israel shows by his selection of the books title: ‘Palestine: Peace not Apartheid.’ The suggestion that without peace Israel is an apartheid state analogous to South Africa is simply wrong.” (SOURCE)

Internet conspiracy theorists allege Carter's motivation for writing his book in sources ranging from liberal tendencies which favor the underdog, to being a Muslim agent and aiding terrorism. As "john, nz" posted in response to an article on www.ynetnews.com: "Mohammad Carter is under Iran's Payroll" (**SOURCE**). While in my research I have found no evidence to support this claim, the significance of it should not be overlooked.

By linking Carter to Iran, "john, nz" and others who promote a similar message seem to go far beyond common sense and into the realm of the extreme, yet there reasoning is not too hard to understand. Conspiracy theorists often make connections where none exist under the rationale "my enemy and my enemy are each other's friends". If Carter is out to discredit and eradicate Israel by shifting public opinion, as the rationale goes, then surely he must be aligned with other Israel-hating leaders such as Iran's Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Supporters of Israel such as Pastor John Hagee, founder of Christians United for Israel, go even farther in their elaborate constructs used to explain their enemy's motives by linking them to communal memories and beliefs. As John Hagee declared before thousands of attendees at this year's AIPAC Policy Conference:

When Haman threatened the Jews in Persia in modern-day Iran he and his sons hung from the gallows that he built for the Jews. Mr. Ahmadinejad's threats against Israel have a way of becoming self-fulfilling prophecy. (**SOURCE**) Pastor Hagee's words represent a synthesis of past and present collective narratives. The importance of examining the connection between Pastor Hagee's rhetorical move and relevant conspiracy theories cannot be overstated. Theorists who allege Carter to be motivated by anti-Semitism look not only at President Carter and other modern-day aggregated enemies, but rather they look towards their own *collective* history of

persecution for parallels similar to the above. Seen in this context, Carter's book is not motivated solely out of perceived personal hatred but rather is part of a long line of anti-Semitism where he is just the most recent leader.

Similarly, on his radio show "The Savage Nation" Michael Savage linked Carter's book to a whole string of collective aggregated enemies, both past and present:

Jimmy Carter is a Jew-hater through and through. Jimmy Carter is who caused worldwide Islamic terrorism to proliferate around the globe...Jimmy Carter is a war criminal...Jimmy Carter is like Hitler with the double talk on top of it all.
(SOURCE)

Interestingly, Savage compares Carter to Hitler for his "double talk", yet surely there exist better and more contemporary examples of double talkers than Hitler. The reason for this seemingly clumsy comparison lies in its embedded meaning. Though there may exist more contemporary examples of double talkers than Hitler, Savage's true goal seems to be to draw a comparison between Carter and Hitler in order to demonize and discredit Carter further. Not only is Carter linked to *current* perceived enemies of the Jews, rather Savage positions him in a perceived historical context as well.

While conspiracy theorists often link Carter to Iran and Muslim extremism, this still does not explain his alleged interest in helping them. Many conspiracy theorists such as "Yacov, Ashkelon" who also posted in response to an article on www.ynetnews.com claim that Carter's anti-Semitism is fueled by Christian replacement theology: "Carter believes Jews should be punished and dispersed around the world because he believes they killed J---s X. He...is now out of the closet as an Xtian Replacement Theologist."
(SOURCE) To "Yacov, Ashkelon" Carter's book is more than just an attempt to slander Israel and the Jews to settle a millennia old grudge, rather it is part four of an elaborate plan upon which "Yacov, Ashkelon" elaborates:

“His (Carter’s) plan for the destruction of Israel began when he was US President and continues to today: 1) Turn Iran over to radical Islamists...2) Manipulate Israel into giving back our defensive buffer of the Sinai...3) Obtain hudna (ceasefire) from Egypt to build up her army...for an eventual attack on Israel 4) Conduct worldwide propaganda campaign against Israel and Jews as he has begun with his book and public appearances. (SOURCE)

In “Yacov Ashkelon”’s analysis we witness the conspiracy theory grow increasingly more elaborate. No longer is the publication of Carter’s book the entire conspiracy, but rather it is the culmination of a plan decades in the making.

There do exist other strands of this conspiracy theory that do not explain Carter’s anti-Semitism through Christian replacement theology, but rather as motivated by the morals of the Democratic Party (SOURCE) My research into the American-Jewish interpretive community though, leads me to believe that this strand is at best a mixture between the American-Jewish interpretive community and the “far-right” interpretive community. As such, it is beyond the scope of my research.

The fact that the two dominant strands of this theory within the American-Jewish interpretive community revolve around an alliance between radical Islam and “traditional” Christianity leads me to believe that there is more to this theory than simply recent outrage over Jimmy Carter’s new book. Rather, traditional and perhaps currently non-existent enemies are portrayed as active participants aggregated into one entity that together plot against Israel and the Jewish people.

Analytical Description of the People and Groups Circulating these Stories:

Due to the freshness of this conspiracy theory most texts intended to promote it can be found online, since the internet is the most widely accessible mode of mass communication commonly available. Within the American-Jewish interpretive

community those who tend to promote conspiratorial accounts of why Carter wrote his new book seem to have strong bi-national identities. In addition to spreading through Facebook groups, much of the online postings are posted on the websites of right-leaning English language Israeli newspapers such as www.ynetnews.com or www.jpost.com, and Israel related blogs written by American-Jews. This strengthens my belief that “paranoid” accounts are proliferated and consumed by Jews with strong bi-national ties for reasons to be discussed in the next section.

Evidence that the people involved are American-Jews can be seen most easily through their names, common interests (for Facebook), and rhetoric. For example, the creator of the Facebook group “Jimmy Carter is a racist Douche” lists his name as “Dan ‘the Hebrew Hammer’ Sanders and the related groups featured are: “I Support Israel in the War Against Terrorism”, “The’ Top Ten Reasons why I support Israel”, “I.D.F.-support our brothers”, “Advocates for Israel”, and “Go Israel! Protect Yourself and Fight in Lebanon and Gaza!”. Similarly, those who posted on internet newspaper sites often had Hebrew names and commonly referred to the Jews as “us”. “Hebrew Girl, USA” for example posted a title on www.ynetnews.com called “Are *we* still wasting time on this guy?” (**SOURCE**) Her post-name and title leave no doubt as to her identification.

A small but considerable faction of right-leaning Jews and non-Jews alike seem to have latched onto this theory as a way to bash liberals. Interestingly, though prominent outspoken critics of the “rational” school such as Alan Dershowitz and Ken Stein are of the liberal mindset, those who produce and consume “paranoid” criticism seem to be rather conservative. On his blog www.mererhetoric.com, an Israeli-American named Omri Ceren writes: “The Democratic Party is driven by viciously anti-Semitic activists

and dominated by celebrated anti-Semitic veterans.” (SOURCE) Timothy of San Antonio whose profile symbol is a shield with the word “crusader” written through it (most likely a non-Jew), expressed similar right-wing sentiments in reaction to a blog posting regarding Carter advocating dialogue with Iran: “That’s Sad. I don’t know how you could side with the terrorists. Hatred of Jews maybe?”. (SOURCE) Particularly of interest in this last quote is how quickly a presumed non-Jewish guy from Texas links Carter’s liberal outlook directly to anti-Semitism.

Important Background Information about the Moment(s) in which These Texts are Circulating:

In order to fully understand why the interpretive community of American-Jews with strong bi-national ties is so vocal in its opposition to Carter’s book, one must first understand the *greater* history of the community and the significance which Israel plays for it. While the “Carter” conspiracy theory is new, as previously discussed, it has its thematic roots in the history of the Jewish people. The fears of a state official singling out the Jewish people, declaring them a national threat due to alleged dual-loyalties, or the potential threat posed by their growing population is nothing new to the Jews. Indeed, many Jewish holidays including Passover, Hanukah, and Purim emphasize the theme of survival in similar circumstances. The Holocaust of recent memory also serves as a reminder to Jews to always take such threats heard from the mouths of government officials seriously.

Throughout its history the Jewish people have been persecuted and oppressed, left to wander from country to country and seek shelter in foreign Christian and Muslim ruled

lands. In the late 19th century Judaism changed dramatically with the creation of the Zionist movement which advocated a modern Jewish state that would act as a refuge to persecuted Jews and strengthen the Jewish identity of Jews living in “emancipated” lands (places like America and places in Western Europe which granted Jews equal rights as citizens).

At the same time as the Jews returned to their native land after thousands of years in the Diaspora, American-Jews were gaining increasing acceptance into American society and were thus unwilling to leave and live in the fledgling Jewish State. Instead, many American-Jews saw it as their job to support the state and donate money. As such, the State of Israel became the embodiment and epicenter of both religious and secular Judaism worldwide, the source of Jewish identity in the Modern age.

With Israel acting as the source of Jewish identity for many American-Jews, any attack on Israel by a prominent American leader is a perceived attack on their carefully constructed and balanced dual-identity. Though this may seem to be a threat to the individual American-Jew, it is fueled by collective fears of persecution reinforced by historical fact. As important as the history of the interpretive community is in understanding their concerns, the currently increasing threat of a nuclear Iran poses an additional factor to the understanding the “moment” in which these theories take place. The perceived Iranian threat to Israel and America from abroad coupled with the perceived “Carter” threat from within, pulls the interpretive community at both ends and intensifies their feelings of paranoia.

Presentation and Discussion of Tentative Conclusions:

In review, Carter's new book "Palestine Peace not Apartheid" is perceived by many as overly critical of Israeli policy. It has received much criticism for alleged factual inaccuracies and a fear has developed that it will become part of a revisionist account of Middle East history. Two responses have developed to Carter's book, one which criticizes its content, and another which alleges intentionality in supposed factual inaccuracies.

Much of the criticism of these two groups comes from Americans who also identify strongly as Jews. Different from assimilated Jews who emphasize their "Americanness", and ultra-Orthodox Jews who emphasize their "Jewishness", Jews who identify strongly as both American and Jewish are caught in a battle of conflicting values. Carter's book alleges Israeli apartheid and cruel treatment of the Palestinians. For American-Jews who see Israel as a symbol of their Jewish identity, they are faced with a situation in which American values of freedom and civil liberty are presented as incompatible with their Jewish identity.

Claims that Carter's book is factually inaccurate alleviate the potential conflict between the two identities. For, if the book is wrong, then there does not need to be any conflict between the two identities. Though it may not seem like a big deal, conflict over being accepted into mainstream society is at the heart of the Jewish collective experience. Jewish history has shown that even when Jews have felt most at home in a place, its leaders have at times isolated them as threats for allegedly being loyal to the Jewish nation and not the one in which they live. In the past, the whole concept of dual-nationalism has been used as a ploy to persecute the Jews.

Aware of their own history, Jews of the “paranoid” style view Carter’s criticism as solely illegitimate and part of some greater ongoing plot to eradicate the Jews and destroy Israel. These conspiracy theorists allege Carter’s motivations and accomplices to be the traditional enemies of radical Islam and Christian anti-Semitism fueled by replacement theology. As such collective fears rooted in historical fact reinforce individual fears of persecution due to conflicts of interest caused by bi-nationalism. The fears of the individual and the community meld to become one narrative, a process which I call “experiential synthesis”.

Just as the fears of the individual and the community meld together, so too do all perceived enemies of the people aggregate into one giant plot against the Jews. Though it is doubtful that Carter has a high opinion of Hitler or Ahmadinejad, all three are seen as co-conspirators in an age old plot against the Jewish people. Interestingly, this conspiracy theory promoted by Jews perfectly compliments age old conspiracy theories against Jews. While in the past gentile leaders have alleged that the Jews sought to control the world, this conspiracy theory answers back saying that the true conspiracy is on the part of the gentile nations who are out to demonize and destroy the Jews. Individual fears of not fitting into mainstream society because of their personal affiliation as both American’s and Jews are viewed in the historical context of the nation’s narrative.

Based on my research, I am lead to believe that there exists an alternative to “agency panic”, the difference in perception between the individual and society which leads to “paranoia” and conspiracy theories. My model examines the friction that occurs when an individual belongs to *two* interpretive communities that are portrayed as opposing one another. The individual is then not split between his account and society’s,

but rather between two differing communal accounts. In the case of the “Carter” conspiracy at least, the individual latches onto one communal narrative to act as a guide to the other.

Discussion of Relevant Secondary Sources from the Field of Conspiracy Theory

Studies:

Based on my research so far I believe that Daniel Pipes and Timothy Melley would both be interested and challenged by work, though in different ways. For Pipes, the interest would be that my theory falls into his line of study- Middle Eastern/Anti-Israel conspiracies. I feel that he would be challenged by my work because based on my reading of Pipe’s book “Conspiracy” (unfortunately not available for quoting as I write this paper), I am lead to believe that Pipes would be considered a conspiracy theorist by my study. As such, I can’t imagine that he would be too pleased with the results of my study which don’t examine the “truth” of the matter in the way he likes to, so much as why some (including himself) believe what they do.

For Melley’s part, I feel that he would be interested (and hopefully challenged) by my research because it elaborates and reexamines his own research and conclusions. In his essay entitled “Agency Panic and the Culture of Conspiracy” Melley writes:

The importance of agency panic lies in the way it attempts to conserve a long-standing model of personhood- a view of the individual as a rational, motivated agent with a protected interior core of beliefs, desires, and memories”. (SOURCE)

While my research does not attempt to discount Melley’s findings, my conclusions examine what happens when the individual is not caught between his beliefs and society’s, but rather the beliefs of two communities to which he subscribes are caught at

odds with one another. In such a case, the two distinct society's "core of beliefs, desires, and memories" are locked in a battle over the individual. The question then becomes, how does the individual cope with this contradiction?

Implications of this Report for Further Research:

After examining my findings and comparing them to those of Melley, my most pressing question is whether individuals caught in similar situations to the one described in the "Carter" theory resolve them in the same manner exhibited in my research. That is to say, when faced with two contradicting interpretive communities, what other alternatives are chosen other than discounting the contradiction? This however is beyond the scope of my research.

I feel that to make a better case for my conclusions about the plight of the individual I would need to know more about him, and since much of the conspiracy theory postings are done anonymously, this proves a daunting task. One of the key limitations to my study is one which is self-imposed. I have chosen to minimize the analysis of Carter's book itself and the "rational" criticism regarding it, in favor of examining "paranoid" criticism of it and why the interpretive community is so quick to believe.