

# Reflections on Jimmy Carter

By Bruce Bawer

*And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men.*

– Matthew 6:5

When word came that Jimmy Carter, age 98, was entering hospice care, the predictable plaudits began to pour in. Calling Carter “an inspiration,” Maria Shriver gushed that he “moves humanity forward every single day.” Sen. Raphael Warnock (D-GA) described Carter as having always “walked with God.” Roker Nils Lofgren called him “[a]s fine a man and soul as I’ve ever seen.” And Steve Martin tweeted: “We’ve seen few humans this devoted and humble...Quietly continuing his mission, which was to do good. If you must leave us go gently . Leave your heart and bravery so we might learn.”



All of which is testimony to the power of hype.

I was nineteen years old during most of Jimmy Carter’s 1976 presidential campaign. You might have expected me to support him. Three years earlier, after all, I’d been every bit as addicted to the Watergate hearings on afternoon TV as my

mother was to *As the World Turns*. I was besotted by the movie *All the President's Men*, released a few months before the 1976 election. At the time of the election, I was a student on a college campus dominated by lefties who, purportedly jaded and alienated by politics in those post-Watergate days, embraced Carter as a breath of fresh air, a magnanimous soul uniquely equipped to make America, once again, a City on a Hill, noble in its character and great in its deeds. As Carter put it himself, "I can give you a government that's honest and that's filled with love, competence, and compassion."

I didn't trust the son of a bitch as far as I could throw him.

Yes, Nixon, aside from being a brilliant statesman, had been a wily character. The Watergate tapes had revealed his salty side. He was no saint, but then again he didn't sell himself as a saint. What politician is a saint? What mattered was that Nixon was brilliant. He was a terrific president. He knew his stuff cold. He loved America. He hated Communism. Yes, he was often characterized as being awkward in his own body and very uncomfortable about interacting with voters on the campaign trail – which to me meant that, well, at least he wasn't slick.

Carter was slick. Boy, was he slick. His big, toothy smile was the phoniest thing I'd ever seen. He insisted that his name appear on the ballot as "Jimmy," not "James." And he talked a lot more about his religion than any other presidential candidate in my lifetime had ever done. I'd never heard such sanctimony from a politician. It was while listening to him that I heard the term "born again" for the first time. Although plainly trolling for evangelical votes, he acted as if he was far too virtuous to think of doing such a thing.

I voted for Ford, but Carter won anyway. He was an absolutely horrible Commander in Chief. At home, he gave us high inflation, high unemployment, and an energy crisis that led to

long lines at gas stations. And abroad? He treated allies shabbily. His posture toward adversaries was one of reflexive appeasement. He seemed to equate passivity in the face of provocation with Christian virtue.

Oh, and he banned liquor from the White House. Though Trump has never taken a drop –because he fears becoming an alcoholic like his late brother – he wouldn't dream of denying a guest a drink. But when you're *morally* opposed to evil rum, as Carter was, the real fun is denying it to others.

After Carter left office, Daniel Patrick Moynihan summed up his presidency. For Carter, wrote Moynihan, the sole impediment to world peace was – incredibly fatuous though it may seem – American aggression. Presumably thinking he was serving the cause of peace, Carter halted aid to anti-Communists in El Salvador while funding the Sandinistas in Nicaragua; to the same apparent end, he cut diplomatic ties with Taiwan and began official relations with Red China.

And just as Biden's weakness on the world stage would encourage Putin, decades later, to invade Ukraine, Carter's weakness led to the Iranian hostage crisis.

"I will never lie to you," Carter promised. But he didn't just lie, as all politicians lie – he proved to be one of the most duplicitous men ever to sit in the Oval Office. And one of the most opportunistic, too, with precious few core convictions. Long a hard-core segregationist, he'd turned on a dime to become the face of the liberal "New South"; running for president as an anti-Communist who promised to invite Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn to the White House, he congratulated his fellow Americans, after he took office, for overcoming their "inordinate fear of Communism"; until 1976 he showed little interest in "human rights," but when he decided it would be a winning platform, he made it the core of his campaign, and indeed of his personal identity.

His utter incompetence in the White House handed Reagan a spectacular landslide victory.

Leaving office at the age of 66, he spent 32 years as an ex-president. Yes, he picked up hammers and nails and built houses for poor people. He also taught Sunday school. He should have stuck to that. Unfortunately, he also involved himself in international affairs – often through the Carter Center, which over the years received millions of dollars in support from Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. They got their money's worth. For decades, as the disaster of his presidency faded into history and a compliant worldwide media helped burnish his image as a good and simple carpenter – like Jesus! – those countries' corrupt leaders benefited immensely from their coziness with him.

Sometimes, to be sure, those relations were *too* cozy. Indeed, more than a few of his post-presidential dealings with foreign governments amounted to outright treason. If he'd been a Republican, he'd – well, but he *wasn't* a Republican, was he?

All the while he postured as an uncompromising hero of human rights – and as a plain-spoken man driven by a deep Christian belief. (Two of his many books are entitled *Living Faith* and *Sources of Strength: Meditations on Scripture for a Living Faith*.) But while he loved to hold forth piously about the oppression of people living in right-wing dictatorships, he repeatedly acted as an apologist for the Chinese Communist Party. Decades later, Trump might boast about getting along famously with Xi and Kim, but Carter went far beyond that, extolling any number of left-wing tyrants in terms that sounded thoroughly sincere.

He heaped praise, for example, on Syrian strongman Bashar al-Assad. Shortly before the ayatollah's revolution, he said that Iran was an "island of stability" because of its people's "love" for the shah. He parroted Castro's ludicrous claim that Cuba's education and health services were superior to

America's, and in 2011 referred to the dictator as an "old friend."

He apologized to the Haitian dictator Raoul Cédras for America's treatment of his country; he celebrated Tito and Ceausescu as heroes of human rights; he commended the Saudi royals for preserving their people's "religious commitment." Lauding Kim Il Sung as "vigorous" and "intelligent," he rejected the proposition that North Korea was "an outlaw nation" and denied that its people were starving. When Hugo Chávez died in 2013, Carter spoke warmly of the caudillo's "commitment" to his people's welfare.

Perhaps most appalling of all, Carter didn't just applaud the bloodthirsty hate-filled embezzler Yasir Arafat; they became close chums. Carter actually saw this war-crazy monster as a peace-lover. When they first met in 1990, Jimmy and Rosalynn laughed it up with Yasir, bonding obscenely over their contempt for Ronald Reagan. Carter even sat down at his computer afterwards and wrote up some helpful pointers for a speech in which Arafat would bash the Israelis as child-killers and present himself as a protector of children.

Indeed, it wasn't until his post-presidency that it became entirely clear just how much Carter hated Jews and was prepared to act as an apologist for Islam – even Islam at its very worst. He vilified Israel as an apartheid state – even worse than South Africa, mind you – and blamed it entirely for the continued lack of peace in the Mideast. Meanwhile he cozied up to – and repeatedly whitewashed – Hamas, despite its charter's call for Jewish genocide.

In 2006-7, Ken Stein, the first director of the Carter Center, and fourteen members of its board, resigned in response to Carter's vicious and mendacious stance on Israel, as spelled out in his reprehensible book *Palestine: Peace, Not Apartheid*. In it, he presented Arafat as having disavowed terrorism and claimed that the purpose of Israel's separation

barrier wasn't to protect its people from suicide bombers but to grab territory. The book, charged Stein, "is replete with factual errors, copied materials not cited, superficialities, glaring omissions, and simply invented segments."

Over the years, if anything, Carter just got worse. In 2014, Alan Dershowitz called him "an all-out cheerleader for Hamas." In 2016, he wrote a supremely dishonest *New York Times* op-ed calling for the U.S. to recognize Palestine. In 2018, the Carter Center was accused of funneling taxpayer money to Hamas and other terrorist groups.

Yes, he won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002. As with Obama seven years later, the GOP-hating Norwegian elites gave it to him for one reason and one reason alone: he wasn't George W. Bush.

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