

Carter's Foreign Policy

MAIN Idea Carter attempted to reestablish the United States as a moral force for good on the international stage but had few successes.

HISTORY AND YOU Do you think a leader's personal morality should shape policy? Read how Carter applied his moral code to foreign policy.

In contrast to his uncertain leadership at home, Carter's foreign policy was more clearly defined. A man of strong religious beliefs, Carter argued that the United States must try to be "right and honest and truthful and decent" in dealing with other nations. Yet it was on the international front that Carter suffered one of his most devastating defeats.

Morality in Foreign Policy

President Carter set the tone for his foreign policy in his inaugural speech, when he said, "Our commitment to human rights must be absolute. . . . The powerful must not persecute the weak, and human dignity must be enhanced." Along with his foreign policy team—which included Andrew Young, the first African American ambassador to the United Nations—Carter strove to achieve these goals.

The president put his principles into practice in Latin America. To remove a major symbol of U.S. interventionism, he agreed to give Panama control of the Panama Canal which the United States had built and operated for over 60 years. In 1978 the Senate ratified two Panama Canal treaties, which transferred control of the canal to Panama on December 31, 1999.

PRIMARY SOURCE

Jimmy Carter and the Middle East

During his administration, Jimmy Carter faced a number of challenges in the Middle East. His foreign policy there met with mixed success.



▲ The Camp David Accords

In 1978, Carter helped negotiate a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel. Above, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, Carter, and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin sign the accords.

Analyzing VISUALS

- 1. Specifying** What was Carter's major success in foreign policy?
- 2. Assessing** What was the long-term effect of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan?



▲ The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan shattered detente. Carter responded by imposing a grain embargo, but it did not force the Soviets to pull back.

▼ The Iranian Hostage Crisis

The Ayatollah Khomeini (right) led a revolution in Iran in 1979. Fifty-two Americans were taken hostage. Carter's inability to negotiate their release hurt his reelection campaign.



Section 3 REVIEW

Most dramatically, Carter singled out the Soviet Union as a violator of human rights. He strongly condemned, for example, the Soviet practice of imprisoning those who protested against the government. Relations between the two superpowers suffered a further setback when Soviet troops invaded the Central Asian nation of Afghanistan in December 1979. Carter responded by imposing an embargo on the sale of grain to the Soviet Union and boycotting the 1980 Summer Olympic Games in Moscow. Under the Carter administration, détente eroded further.

Triumph and Failure in the Middle East

It was in the volatile Middle East that President Carter met both his greatest foreign policy triumph and his greatest failure. In 1978 Carter helped broker a historic peace treaty, known as the **Camp David Accords**, between Israel and Egypt—two nations that had been bitter enemies for decades. The treaty was formally signed in 1979. Most other Arab nations in the region opposed the treaty, but it marked a first step to achieving peace in the Middle East.

Just months after the Camp David Accords, Carter had to deal with a crisis in Iran. The United States had long supported Iran's monarch, the Shah, because Iran was a major oil supplier and a buffer against Soviet expansion in the Middle East. The Shah, however, had grown increasingly unpopular in Iran. He was a repressive ruler and had introduced Westernizing reforms to Iranian society. The Islamic clergy fiercely opposed the Shah's reforms. Opposition to the Shah grew, and in January 1979 protesters forced him to flee. An Islamic republic was then declared.

The new regime, led by religious leader Ayatollah Khomeini, distrusted the United States because of its support of the Shah. In November 1979, revolutionaries stormed the American embassy in Tehran and took 52 Americans hostage. The militants threatened to kill the hostages or try them as spies.

The Carter administration tried unsuccessfully to negotiate for the hostages' release. In April 1980, as pressure mounted, Carter approved a daring rescue attempt. To the nation's dismay, the rescue mission failed when several helicopters malfunctioned and one crashed in the desert. Eight servicemen died in the accident. Hamilton Jordan, President Carter's chief of staff, described the atmosphere in the White House the day after the crash. The president "looked exhausted and careworn. . . . The mood at the senior staff meeting was somber and awkward. I sensed that we were all uncomfortable, like when a loved one dies and friends don't know quite what to say."

The crisis continued into the fall of 1980. Every night, news programs reminded viewers how many days the hostages had been held. The president's inability to free them cost him support in the 1980 election. Negotiations continued right up to Carter's last day in office. On January 20, 1981, the day Carter left office, Iran released the Americans, ending their 444 days in captivity.

Reading Check **Summarizing** What was President Carter's main foreign policy theme?

Vocabulary

1. Explain the significance of: inflation, OPEC, embargo, stagflation, Helsinki Accords, Department of Energy, Camp David Accords.

Main Ideas

- 2. Describing** How did the OPEC embargo affect the U.S. economy?
- 3. Specifying** What were two ingredients in Carter's failure to achieve success in his domestic policy?
- 4. Identifying** What foreign policy crisis was during the Carter administration?

Critical Thinking

- 5. Big Ideas** How did Carter attempt to deal with the nation's energy crisis?
- 6. Organizing** Complete a graphic organizer by listing the ways in which President Carter applied his human rights ideas to his foreign policy.



- 7. Analyzing Visuals** Study the photograph of the hostages on page 950. What effect do you think images such as this one had on Americans who were living or traveling in other countries?

Writing About History

- 8. Expository Writing** Write an essay identifying what you believe to be Carter's most important foreign policy achievement. Explain your choice.

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