

## Video & Source: [Was the Great Jimmy Carter Really a Peacemaker?](#)

### Summary:

US President Jimmy Carter's recent passing has led many to reflect on his administration and praise his post-presidential humanitarian work. Carter earned the Nobel Peace Prize for his post-presidency work, but while in office, he was no peacemaker. Carter's foreign policy compromised his morals, supported autocratic regimes and failed to combat human rights violations.

The recent passing of former US President Jimmy Carter on December 29, 2024, has prompted widespread praise for his post-presidency humanitarian work. His efforts have rightfully earned him recognition as a peacemaker and global advocate for human rights. Carter's efforts after leaving office [earned](#) him the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002. Democrats and Republicans alike have lauded them.

However, this acclaim should not obscure Carter's presidency itself. Despite Carter's declaredly moral stance, his administration was marred by contradictory foreign policy decisions.

### Carter's successes in and out of office

Carter's presidency did have several positive achievements. His human rights policies resulted in the release of political prisoners in several countries. His administration pushed for nuclear arms control, notably through the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks II (SALT II) [treaty](#); although it was never ratified by the Senate, it represented a significant step in reducing the threat of nuclear war. Carter also worked to [improve relations](#) with China, successfully [negotiated](#) the Panama Canal Treaty of 1977 and avoided military conflict during the Iranian [hostage crisis](#). Considering the tensions of the period, the latter was a remarkable feat. In 1978, he helped broker the Camp David [Accords](#) between Egypt and Israel.

After leaving the White House in 1981, Carter embarked on a path of active diplomacy, engaging in peace talks and humanitarian projects around the world. He facilitated efforts to eradicate the horrific Guinea worm [disease](#) in West Africa and spoke out against human rights violations wherever they occurred. His efforts to [build](#) affordable housing through Habitat for Humanity also demonstrated his long-standing commitment to social justice. This post-presidential work remains a cornerstone of his public legacy.

### Carter's moral compromises as president

Despite his achievements, Carter's actions abroad during his presidency present a stark contrast to the ideals he later championed. His tenure from 1977 to 1981 was defined by a series of decisions that, though well-intentioned, often contradicted the principles of peace, international law and human rights.

Despite his moral rhetoric, his administration engaged in policies that enabled authoritarian governments and military dictatorships. Carter's decision to increase military aid to [Indonesia](#) in 1977, for instance, is a glaring contradiction. Indonesia had invaded and annexed East Timor, and the Indonesian military was responsible for numerous human rights atrocities. Under Carter, US military aid to the Indonesian regime increased by 80%, with the provision of OV-10 Bronco counterinsurgency aircraft that killed tens of thousands of East Timorese civilians.

Similarly, Carter's [support](#) for Morocco's illegal annexation of Western Sahara and his efforts to [restore](#) military aid to Turkey after its 1974 invasion of the Republic of Cyprus stand out as decisions that were in direct defiance of international law and United Nations resolutions.

In addition to supporting authoritarian regimes, Carter's administration failed to act on numerous human rights abuses happening around the world. One notable example is his administration's stance on apartheid-era South Africa. Despite [public condemnation](#) of the regime's racial policies, Carter [vetoed](#) multiple UN resolutions that sought to impose sanctions on the apartheid government. This failure to take meaningful action against South Africa's occupation of Namibia and its apartheid system was a significant shortcoming of Carter's foreign policy. It was only after Ronald Reagan succeeded Carter that the US government shifted to a more robust [stance](#) against apartheid. The move gained broad bipartisan support in Congress.

Carter's [handling](#) of the Palestine issue further exemplifies the tension between his stated principles and his actual policies. Although he publicly supported the idea of a Palestinian homeland, he failed to openly support an independent Palestinian state and refused to even meet with Palestinian leaders. He failed to pressure Israel to stop expanding illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank, even after the Israeli government violated the terms of the Camp David Accords.

Instead, Carter's administration dramatically increased military aid to Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin's right-wing government. He dismissed calls for stronger action against Israeli occupation. In a particularly controversial move, Carter [fired](#) his ambassador to the UN, former Congressman and Civil Rights leader Andrew Young, after Young met with a Palestinian representative at the UN.

Carter's policy toward Central America also reveals a troubling disregard for human rights. In El Salvador, the military junta waged a brutal campaign against leftist insurgents and civilians. Carter continued to provide [military aid](#) to the Salvadoran government despite widespread reports of human rights violations, including the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero. Carter's failure to recognize the severity of the situation and his continued support for the Salvadoran regime drew sharp criticism from human rights advocates.

Carter also authorized military aid to General Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq in [Pakistan](#), King Fahd in [Saudi Arabia](#) and Ferdinand Marcos in the [Philippines](#). Moreover, Carter's covert support for the mujahideen in Afghanistan, designed to counter Soviet influence, contributed to the rise of [Islamist extremism](#) and laid the groundwork for decades of instability in the region.

As we reflect on his legacy, we should remember both the shortcomings of Carter's presidency and the extraordinary contributions he made to global peace and justice in his later years.