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President Carter's Rebuttal

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## President Carter's Rebuttal

**A**LTHOUGH I HAVE REFRAINED from responding to gratuitous and incorrect analyses of my foreign policy, I feel compelled to comment on Walter Russell Mead's cover story ("The Carter Syndrome," January/February 2010), which the editors apparently accepted without checking the author's facts or giving me a chance to comment. I won't criticize or correct his cute and erroneous oversimplistic distortions of presidential biographies and history except when he refers specifically to me. I resent Mead's use of such phrases as "in the worst scenario, turn him [Obama] into a new Jimmy Carter," "weakness and indecision," and "incoherence and reversals" to describe my service. An especially aggravating error is his claiming, "by the end of his tenure he was supporting the resistance to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, increasing the defense budget, and laying the groundwork for an expanded U.S. presence in the Middle East." None of these were late decisions based on a tardy realization of my earlier errors and misjudgments.

Except for obviously unpredictable developments like the fall of the shah, Iraq's invasion of Iran, and the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, all the actions described below were planned and announced even before I took the oath of office. These included energetic moves regarding China, the Middle East, Panama, nuclear arms control, defense budgets, Rhodesia, and human rights.

To ensure clear and continued top-down direction of U.S. foreign policy, I regularly reviewed a comprehensive agenda of international issues with my key advisors. These included the vice president, the secretaries of defense and state, the national security advisor, the chief of staff, and often the director of intelligence services. My decisions were recorded by National Security Advisor



Zbigniew Brzezinski and quickly shared with others, and when necessary, he convened a meeting of the two secretaries during the following week to ensure compliance with my directives.

It should be remembered that I served as president during the latter years of the Cold War, when mutual assured destruction from a nuclear exchange was an overriding factor in our dealings with the Soviet Union. To avoid a potentially catastrophic military confrontation, we engaged with the Soviets, from a position of

strength, in negotiating SALT II in order to ensure constraints and shared reductions in our arsenals.

I also commissioned comprehensive reviews of comparative U.S. and Soviet military and nonmilitary capabilities (undertaken by Brzezinski and Professor Samuel Huntington). On this basis, I decided to modernize our deterrent capabilities, knowing that the United States had great advantages over the Soviet Union in non-military competition. Accordingly, I decided to exploit these Soviet vulnerabilities, peacefully and quietly. One by one, we reached out to nonaligned nations, with the help of Ambassador to the United Nations Andrew Young and others, promoting the attractive appeal of peace, freedom, democracy, and human rights. In these places, where U.S. leaders of previous administrations had not been welcome, we established close and binding friendships, thereby weakening the Soviets.

Often over the objection of our European allies, we publicly and privately condemned the Soviet leaders' mistreatment of their own citizens, especially Jews and human rights activists. This aggressive policy bore rich dividends, as internal challenges to the regime were greatly strengthened and the annual out-migration of Russian Jews increased from a few dozen to more than 5,000. We actively supported the Solidarity movement in Poland, and reacted firmly and also mobilized the support of key allies in response to the threat of Soviet military intervention.

Following 30 years of diplomatic relations with Taiwan as "the One China," I negotiated persistently with Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping for more than a year and was successful in reaching agreement in December 1978. This led to full relations with the People's Republic of China the following month—while still continuing proper treatment of Taiwan. This was a strategic turning point in U.S.-China relations that my predecessors had not been willing or

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able to consummate. As China's global influence increased, the Soviet Union's was diminished. This was, perhaps, the most serious challenge to the global status of the Soviet Union. In addition, Moscow's enormous influence with Arab leaders in the Middle East was severely attenuated by our successful peace efforts. Defense Secretary Robert Gates, in his writings, has given this overall policy of challenging the Soviet Union more public credit than have I for its ultimate demise.

There was no pressure on me to launch a peace initiative in the Middle East, but I did so from my first days in office. I realized that there had been four wars against Israel during the preceding quarter-century, with Egypt being the only Arab force that was strong enough to be a real threat. At Camp David and during the following weeks, we negotiated a resolution to the Palestinian issue and a treaty of peace early in 1979 between Egypt and Israel. Although written commitments to the Palestinians have not been honored, not a word of the peace treaty has been broken. Tragically, there has been little if any real progress since that time.

As part of our global emphasis on human rights, a high priority for me was the end of the apartheid regimes in Africa. We began in Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, assisted by Britain and other European allies and by President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, and other black African leaders. This effort was condoned, after much persuasion, even by apartheid South Africa. We persisted in demanding the end of their own oppressive regime, calling for "one man, one vote," which may have had a beneficial impact in later years.

Perhaps the most important and certainly the most difficult political challenge for me was the negotiation and then Senate ratification of the Panama Canal treaties. This extremely unpopular but requisite task had been promised since the time of President Lyndon Johnson but delayed because of the

obvious negative political consequences. For instance, among the 20 brave men who faced re-election in 1978 after supporting this action, only seven returned to the Senate. This decision strengthened greatly our nation's ties with the people of Latin America and many others within the Non-Aligned Movement who had former ties with the Soviet Union.

**I could have ordered massive destruction in Iran but this would have resulted in the deaths of thousands of innocent Iranians.**

Our support of human rights and the people who espoused them had a far-reaching beneficial effect in many nations. Most of the countries in South America, for instance, were governed by personal despots or military juntas when I took office. We abandoned the long-standing U.S. policy of supporting and protecting these friendly dictators in the face of human rights

and indigenous movements, and within four years a large number of them had initiated procedures or pledged to permit democratic elections, prodded by us and the heroes brave enough to challenge the oppressive regimes. Soon, all of them became democracies.

**N**ATO was strengthened, U.S. military budgets steadily increased (despite my spending levels being somewhat reduced by Congress), and many technical innovations were introduced under Defense Secretary Harold Brown, a noted physicist and former president of the California Institute of Technology. This included precision bombs, seminal improvements in ground- and air-launched cruise missiles, and development of stealth aircraft.

We had no hesitation in providing weapons to the Afghan resistance after the Soviet invasion in December 1979, and I made it clear in my speech to Congress a month later that I condemned this action and had informed the Soviets that any further aggression would be construed as a direct threat to our nation's security and I would respond accordingly, not necessarily limiting ourselves to the use of conventional weapons.

Our policy in Iran was to make it possible for the shah to retain his leadership by urging him to adopt political reforms while preventing fanatical extremists from seizing power, but ultimately that could only be accomplished by the Iranians themselves. The unwarranted capture and holding of U.S. diplomats by militants was the major cause of my defeat for re-election, but my decision to refrain from military action—unless they harmed a hostage—proved to be well-advised. I could have ordered massive destruction in Iran with our mighty military power, but this would have resulted in the deaths of thousands of innocent Iranians, and it is certain that our hostages would have been assassinated.

Instead, we persisted with patience, exhausting every possible mediation avenue that might have been helpful. Finally, with the assistance of the Algerians and others, I negotiated around the clock for the last three days I was in office, while President-elect Ronald Reagan and his advisors chose not to be involved or even informed about progress. The hostages were on a plane and waiting for takeoff several hours before the midday inauguration, and they were finally permitted to depart immediately after I was no longer in office—all of them safe and free.

Although it is true that we did not become involved in military combat during my presidency, I do not consider this a sign of weakness or reason for apology. While maintaining the peace, for ourselves and many others, we greatly expanded our global influence and also protected the security, strength, ideals, and integrity of the United States.

**Jimmy Carter**

39th President of the United States  
Atlanta, Ga.

Walter Russell Mead's appraisal of President Barack Obama's foreign policy was gratuitously titled "The Carter Syndrome" even though it contained no analysis of President Jimmy Carter's foreign policy. Nonetheless, its message was that in "the worst scenario" Obama could turn out to be like

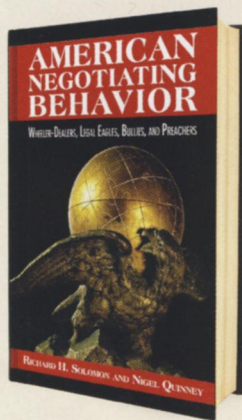


# AMERICAN NEGOTIATING BEHAVIOR

Wheeler-Dealers,  
Legal Eagles, Bullies,  
and Preachers

RICHARD H. SOLOMON  
and NIGEL QUINNEY

Forewords by  
MADELEINE ALBRIGHT  
and CONDOLEEZZA RICE



"American Negotiating Behavior may well become the definitive primer on the art of effective cross-cultural negotiating. It should be an important part of the education of U.S. diplomats, as well as anyone engaged in international transactions."

—Henry A. Kissinger,  
U.S. Secretary of State 1973–1977

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## Letters

Carter, whose presidency Mead associates with "weakness and indecision."

Since Mead provides no examples, here are a few geopolitical accomplishments of Carter's four years:

- He reconnected the United States with the quest for human rights in both the communist states and those under right-wing dictatorships, in sharp contrast to his predecessor.
- Confronting an initially hostile Congress, he pushed through the treaties that resolved the Panama Canal issue, which was threatening to poison U.S. relations with Latin America.
- He tackled the Middle Eastern conundrum, personally achieving the first peace treaty ever between Israel and an Arab neighbor.
- He not only managed to normalize relations with China, but in the process fashioned a quiet partnership against the Soviet Union.
- He actively supported the Solidarity movement in Poland and secretly assisted the national aspirations of the non-Russian peoples of the Soviet Union.
- He promoted the modernization of U.S. strategic forces and approved the deployment of the MX missile and the development of the Rapid Deployment Force.
- He initiated a command and a support structure for a U.S. military capability in the Persian Gulf.
- Through prolonged but determined negotiations, he reached the SALT II agreement with the Soviet Union (subsequently not submitted for congressional ratification because of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan).
- Following that invasion, under his leadership the United States took the initiative in organizing a cooperative effort of a number of leading European, Middle Eastern, and East Asian states in providing military aid to the Afghan resistance, and that resistance contributed to the internal crisis that eventually broke up the Soviet Union.

His major geopolitical setback, in my view, was in Iran, but ultimately Iran was not America's alone to save. If after four years—as I truly hope—Obama has to his credit contemporary equivalents for every one of the above, Mead will be justified in bestowing on him the praise for *firmness and decisiveness* which he so casually denies to Carter.

**Zbigniew Brzezinski**

Counselor and Trustee

Center for Strategic and International Studies

National Security Advisor to President Carter

Washington, D.C.

**Walter Russell Mead replies:**

*It's an honor that President Jimmy Carter chose to respond to my article with an impassioned and eloquent defense of his presidential stewardship. I cast my first presidential ballot for Carter's re-election in 1980 and continue to regard him with great respect. I am also a great admirer of Zbigniew Brzezinski; reviewing one of his recent books, I wrote that "no statesman of his generation is in his league" when it comes to the study of U.S. foreign policy against the background of the deeper movements of world history.*

*That said, my recent FOREIGN POLICY article was not really about Carter or his administration. It was about the current U.S. president and the intellectual, cultural, and political challenges he faces, so the treatment of past presidents was necessarily less detailed and nuanced. In that context, I referred to some of the difficulties that Carter encountered in managing the U.S. relationship with the Soviet Union. I have attended meetings at which high-ranking officials from both the Soviet Union and the Carter administration have clearly stated that Carter's support for human rights was seen from the Soviet side as a repudiation of détente and a return to Cold War hostility—and that, especially in the beginning, Carter did not fully grasp the tension between his two goals of détente with the Soviets and the promotion of human rights. Obama faces, potentially, a similar tradeoff between the promotion of human rights and the development of stable relations with countries such as China and Iran; he is likely to find it as difficult to manage the tension between those goals as Carter once did.*

*Someday I hope to write a more systematically historical account of U.S. foreign policy than the essentially thematic treatment I gave it in Special Providence. When I do, I will endeavor to do full justice to Carter, a man who is justifiably unhappy that his presidency's complex story is so rarely treated with the respect and sympathy that it deserves.*

## Sitting in Limbo

After spending only a few days in our country, Graeme Wood ("Limbo World," January/February 2010) dismissed Abkhazia as a "fake" country filled with "functionaries in neckties" whose language is a "linguistic freak show." Wood's flippant tone shows a lack of respect for our people and history. His misrepresentation of Abkhazia, past and present, is disappointing and discouraging.

On Dec. 12, in a turnout of 73 per-