

# Former US President Jimmy Carter blasts Bush and Blair over Iraq

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In a pair of back-to-back interviews, former US President Jimmy Carter delivered a blistering critique of George W. Bush—declaring his administration the “worst administration in history”—and Tony Blair, describing the British prime minister’s support for US foreign policy “abominable.”

The harshness of the critique was virtually unprecedented for an ex-president commenting on the performance of a successor, not to mention a key US ally. It was all the more unusual since it was directed against a sitting president.

In an interview published Saturday in the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, Carter declared: “I think as far as the adverse impact on the nation around the world, this administration has been the worst in history. The overt reversal of America’s basic values as expressed by previous administrations, including George H.W. Bush and Ronald Reagan and Richard Nixon and others, has been the most disturbing to me.”

Carter, in particular, denounced the Bush administration’s adoption of a policy of “pre-emptive war.” He said, “We have a new policy now on war. We now have endorsed the concept of pre-emptive war where we go to war with another nation militarily, even though our own security is not directly threatened, if we want to change the regime there or if we fear that some time in the future our security might be endangered.” He described this as “a radical departure from all previous administration policies.”

Carter also condemned the administration’s Middle East policy. The former president was given the Nobel Peace Prize largely for negotiating the Camp David treaty between Egypt and Israel—a deal that served to isolate the Palestinian people’s struggle for liberation. He was vilified by pro-Israeli circles for his recent book *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*.

“For the first time since Israel was founded, we’ve had zero peace talks to try to bring a resolution of differences in the Middle East” he said. “That’s a radical departure from the past.”

He also called the administration’s nuclear weapons policy a “radical departure,” charging it with having “abandoned or directly refuted every nuclear arms control agreement ever negotiated down through history.”

Turning to domestic policy, the former president denounced the Bush White House for having jettisoned “almost every previous administration’s policy on environmental quality,” including those of Republicans like Richard Nixon.

Carter, a devout Baptist, was particularly caustic in condemning the Bush administration’s cementing of ties with the religious right through the promotion of government-funded “faith-based” programs, a practice he described as “quite disturbing.”

Citing programs that have allowed churches to funnel taxpayers’ money exclusively to their own members, Carter charged the administration with violating the constitutional principle of separation of church and state. He declared that he had upheld this principle while in office, adding, “And so have all other presidents, I might say, except this one.”

In relation to Blair, Carter gave an interview to the British Broadcasting Corporation Saturday, as the British prime minister was in Baghdad and just after his farewell stop at the Bush White House. Asked to describe Blair’s support for Bush, the former president replied, “Abominable. Loyal. Blind. Apparently subservient.”

He added, “I think the almost undeviating support by Great Britain for the ill-advised policies of President Bush in Iraq have been a major tragedy for the world.”

Carter suggested that had the Blair government not aligned itself with Washington in the Iraq war and instead opposed the invasion, the war might have been avoided or the occupation ended.

"I can't say it would have made a definitive difference, but it would certainly have assuaged the problems that arose lately," he said. "One of the defenses of the Bush administration, in the American public and on a worldwide basis—and it's not been successful in my opinion—has been that, OK, we must be more correct in our actions than the world thinks because Great Britain is backing us."

The national press largely buried their reports of Carter's extraordinary statements. What clearly constituted major news justifying front-page coverage—a former president's blunt denunciation of the Iraq war and the foreign and domestic policy of the current president—was treated as a second-rate item and relegated to the inside pages of both the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*.

Carter's interviews came as part of a promotion campaign he is conducting for a new audio-book series entitled "Sunday Mornings in Plains," which consists of recordings of weekly Bible lessons he delivered at the Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains, Georgia. Carter told the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* that the sermons were given at the time of the US invasion of Iraq and that they "interrelate my condemnation and criticism of this unnecessary invasion with the ministry of Christ as the prince of peace."

Whatever his religious beliefs, Carter as president was no pacifist and as president (1977-1981) presided over a number of policies that helped prepare the present wars in both Afghanistan and Iraq. These included covert CIA support for Islamic fundamentalist guerrillas against the Soviet-backed government in Afghanistan, a venture in which Washington ultimately invested some \$5 billion in money and arms—some of them funneled through Osama bin Laden—and that cost an estimated 1.5 million lives.

Likewise, after his support for the hated dictatorship of the Shah failed to prevent the Shah's overthrow in the 1979 Iranian revolution, Carter proclaimed a new US militarist policy in the region aimed at maintaining US hegemony over its vast oil wealth.

Dubbed the Carter Doctrine, this policy decreed that an attempt by any other power to gain control of the oil

resources of the Persian Gulf region would be "regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America" and that Washington would oppose it "by any means necessary, including military force." To back up this threat, his administration established the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force (RDJTF), consisting of some 200,000 US military personnel prepared for intervention in the Persian Gulf.

These preparations and the Carter Doctrine itself helped pave the way for the eruption of US militarism in a more aggressive and violent form in the US invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003 as well as in the present war threats against Iran.

In the final analysis, Carter's denunciations of the Bush administration's policies flow not from the Sunday sermons in Plains; rather, they reflect the extreme tensions and recriminations that are roiling the US ruling establishment as a result of the debacle that has been created by US policy in Iraq.



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