

## Human Rights and American Foreign Policy

As President, Jimmy Carter sought to center America's foreign policy on human rights rather than on anticommunism. Carter outlined his views in 1977:

“For too many years, we’ve been willing to adopt the flawed and erroneous principles and tactics of our adversaries, sometimes abandoning our own values for theirs. We’ve fought fire with fire, never thinking that fire is better quenched with water. . . . [I] believe that it is a mistake to undervalue the power of words and of the ideas that words embody.”

—President Jimmy Carter, Commencement Address at Notre Dame University, 1977

▲ President Carter and Panama's leader General Omar Torrijos in 1978

# Foreign Policy Troubles

## Objectives

- Compare the policies of Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter toward the Soviet Union.
- Discuss changing U.S. foreign policy in the developing world.
- Identify the successes and failures of Carter's foreign policy in the Middle East.

## Terms and People

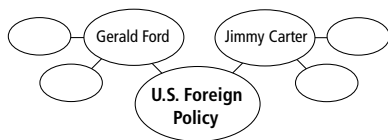
Helsinki Accords  
human rights  
SALT II  
boat people

sanctions  
developing world  
Camp David Accords  
Ayatollah Khomeini

## NoteTaking

### Reading Skill: Identify Supporting Details

Use a concept web like the one below to record the main ideas and details about the foreign policies of presidents Ford and Carter.



**Why It Matters** The ordeal of the Vietnam War led many to question the direction of American foreign policy. They asked: Why was the United States so concerned with fighting communism that it ended up supporting oppressive anticommunist governments? Should the United States continue to pursue détente with the Soviets? Or should it instead demand that the Soviet government grant its people more freedoms? The echoes of these debates continue to be heard today. **Section Focus Question:** What were the goals of American foreign policy during the Ford and Carter years, and how successful were Ford's and Carter's policies?

## Ford Continues Nixon's Foreign Policies

Relations with the Soviet Union remained central to U.S. foreign policy during the Ford and Carter administrations. Upon assuming the presidency, Gerald Ford made clear that his foreign policy would differ little from that of Richard Nixon's. Ford retained Henry Kissinger as his Secretary of State and continued to pursue détente with the Soviet Union and China.

**Pursuing Détente** Ford and Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev met in late 1974 and again the next year, when the two leaders endorsed the **Helsinki Accords**. This document put the nations of Europe on record in favor of **human rights**, or the basic rights that every human being is entitled to have. Some thought that President Ford



### Vietnamese Boat People

These Vietnamese refugees wait in their rickety boat in Hong Kong's harbor in September 1979, having survived the voyage from Vietnam.

would try to compel the Soviet Union to allow more political freedoms, but Ford decided to put arms control ahead of human rights. At his direction, the United States continued disarmament talks with the Soviets. These talks led to an agreement known as **SALT II**, in which the two nations pledged to limit nuclear arms production.

**Trouble in Southeast Asia** Under Ford, the United States sought to put the turmoil of the Vietnam War behind it. When the communist Khmer Rouge government of Cambodia began a genocidal slaughter of civilians, killing about

1.5 million people between 1975 and 1979, the United States did not intervene. The main exception to this policy of noninvolvement came in May 1975, when the Khmer Rouge seized an American merchant ship, the *Mayaguez*, which had been steaming just outside Cambodian waters. Ford responded by sending in some United States Marines, who freed the ship.

During Ford's presidency, South Vietnam fell to North Vietnam. As the communists took over, hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese, many of whom had worked with the United States, tried to escape. Many refugees took to the seas in rickety, unseaworthy boats. These **boat people** represented the largest mass migration of humanity by sea in modern history. Over a 20-year period, more than one million men, women, and children braved storms, pirates, and starvation in search of refuge abroad. Their immediate destinations were in other nations of Southeast Asia, but many eventually found that refuge in the United States and Canada.

✔ **Checkpoint** How did Ford approach foreign policy challenges during his presidency?

## Carter Changes Course

Early in his presidency, Jimmy Carter proclaimed that as much as possible, American foreign policy would be guided by a concern for human rights. Carter hoped to make his foreign policy into a tool to end acts of political repression such as torture, murder, and imprisonment without trial. This policy direction helped reaffirm the position of the United States as a nation of freedom and justice. However, it undercut the goal of better relations with the Soviet Union.

**Relations With the Soviet Union Cool** At first, Carter continued Nixon's and Ford's policies toward the Soviet Union. He worked to achieve détente. He continued efforts at arms control, meeting with Leonid Brezhnev in June 1979 and signing the SALT II treaty.

However, relations between the two superpowers soon took a decidedly frosty turn. The SALT II treaty was bitterly debated in the United States Senate, where its opponents argued that it put the national security of the United States in jeopardy. Then, in December 1979, the Soviet Union invaded the neighboring country of Afghanistan to prop up a tottering communist government. Carter responded by withdrawing the SALT II treaty from Senate consideration and by imposing **sanctions**, or penalties, on the Soviets. The sanctions included a U.S. boycott of the 1980 Summer Olympic Games held in Moscow as well as a suspension of grain sales to the Soviet Union.

### Vocabulary Builder

**repression**—(rih PREHSH uhn) *n.*  
the act of suppressing or keeping down

**Carter Supports Human Rights in the Developing World** Since the end of World War II, American Presidents had tended to see the **developing world**—the poor nations of Asia, Africa, and Latin America—as another stage for the Cold War. Carter broke with that approach and insisted that foreign policy toward the developing world should revolve around the expansion of human rights. Carter believed that U.S. relations with foreign countries should be determined by how a country treated its citizens.

Carter's emphasis on human rights led him to alter the U.S. relationship with a number of dictators. In Nicaragua, the Somoza family had ruled the country with an iron grip since the mid-1930s, most of the time with the support of the United States. In 1978, a leftist group known as the Sandinistas began a rebellion against the country's ruler, General Anastasio Somoza. His brutal response to the rebellion helped convince Carter to withdraw U.S. support. Without U.S. aid, General Somoza had to flee Nicaragua, and the Sandinistas came to power.

**Carter's Policies Get Mixed Results in Latin America** The Carter administration briefly sought to improve relations with Cuba, ruled by communist Fidel Castro since 1959. However, U.S.-Cuban relations soured in 1980 when Castro announced that any Cuban could leave the island from the port of Mariel for the United States. However, Castro insisted that any boats headed to the United States would also have to take criminals from the island's prisons. Because of this condition, the Mariel boatlift developed a bad reputation in the eyes of many Americans. Fewer than 20 percent of the people transported had spent time in prison, and many of those were political prisoners. Still, Americans were repelled by Castro's lack of concern for the welfare of the emigrants and by the idea that he would send criminals to the United States.

Carter's most controversial foreign policy move involved his decision to return the Panama Canal Zone to Panama. You will recall that Panama had given the United States control of a wide strip of land across the middle of the country in 1903 that later became the site of the Panama Canal. In 1977, Carter negotiated a set of treaties to return the Canal Zone to Panama by 1999. Many Americans worried that the loss of control over the canal would threaten American shipping and security. Nonetheless, the United States Senate narrowly ratified the treaties in 1978, and all control of the canal was ultimately turned over to Panama.

✓ **Checkpoint** In what ways did President Carter's policies differ from those of Ford?

## Success and Setback in the Middle East

Carter's greatest achievement in foreign policy came in the region that also saw his greatest setback. He helped negotiate a historic peace agreement between Israel and Egypt, but he failed to win the release of Americans held hostage by Iranian radicals.

**Israel and Egypt Agree to Peace** Egypt had opposed Israel's existence since Israel's founding in 1948. As recently as 1973, the two nations had fought a bitter war. By 1977, eager to improve relations, Egyptian President Anwar el-Sadat and Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin met in Jerusalem to negotiate a peace agreement. To help continue the negotiations, Carter invited the two leaders to Camp David, the presidential retreat. For

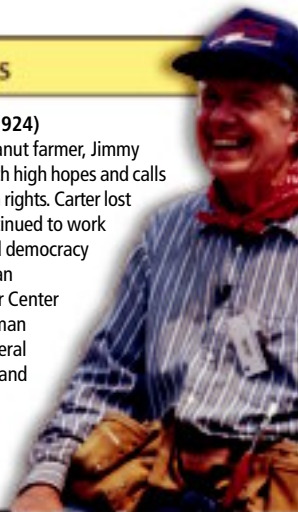
### Vocabulary Builder

emphasis—(EHM fuh sihs) *n.*  
special attention

### HISTORY MAKERS

#### Jimmy Carter (born 1924)

A former navy officer and peanut farmer, Jimmy Carter's presidency began with high hopes and calls for a new emphasis on human rights. Carter lost his bid for reelection but continued to work to promote human rights and democracy around the world. He set up an organization called the Carter Center that promotes peace and human rights, and he has helped several countries' efforts to hold free and fair elections. He even joined Habitat for Humanity to help poor people build and afford new homes.



# IRAN HOSTAGE CRISIS

The Iranian Revolution, which toppled the Shah and brought the Ayatollah Khomeini to power in 1979, had a strong anti-American component. The United States had supported Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, Iran's Shah, to secure a firm ally against communism in the region. However, the Shah's rule grew more oppressive after 1953, when the CIA had helped him control a challenge to his power. Resentment over political interference and foreign involvement in Iran's oil industry boiled over when the deposed Shah entered the United States for medical treatment. Outraged Iranians seized 66 American hostages and held 52 of them for 444 days.

▲ The Ayatollah Khomeini

## The Crisis Unfolds

- **January 1979** The Iranian Revolution forces the Shah into exile.
- **February 1979** Ayatollah Khomeini returns to Iran after 15 years in exile.
- **April 1979** Khomeini takes power.
- **October 1979** The Shah enters the United States.
- **November 1979** Militant students take 66 Americans hostage. Carter halts oil imports and freezes Iranian assets in the United States.
- **April 1980** Carter severs diplomatic relations with Iran and imposes an economic embargo. A military mission to free the hostages ends in disaster.
- **January 1981** On the day of Reagan's inauguration, the hostages are released in exchange for \$8 billion in frozen assets and a promise to lift trade sanctions against Iran.

A blindfolded American ▶ hostage is shown to the press.

nearly two weeks, the three leaders carried on the difficult negotiations that produced what is known as the **Camp David Accords**. These agreements provided the framework for a peace treaty in which Egypt formally recognized the nation of Israel, becoming the first Arab nation to do so. In return, Israel withdrew its troops from the Sinai Peninsula, which it had occupied since the 1967 war. The preamble to the Accords states:

### Primary Source

“After four wars during 30 years, despite intensive human efforts, the Middle East, which is the cradle of civilization and the birthplace of three great religions, does not enjoy the blessings of peace. . . . [Israel and Egypt] recognize that for peace to endure, it must involve all those who have been most deeply affected by the conflict. They therefore agree that this framework, as appropriate, is intended by them to constitute a basis for peace not only between Egypt and Israel, but also between Israel and each of its other neighbors. . . .”

—Camp David Accords, September 19, 1978

**Iran Seizes American Hostages** Carter hoped that the Camp David Accords would usher in a new era of cooperation in the Middle East. Yet, events in Iran showed that troubles in the region were far from over. Since the 1950s, the United States had supported the rule of the Shah, or emperor, of Iran. In the 1970s, however, opposition to the Shah began to grow within Iran.

Dying of cancer, the Shah fled from Iran in January 1979. Fundamentalist Islamic clerics, led by the **Ayatollah Khomeini** (i yuh TOH loh koh MAYN ee), took power. Carter allowed the Shah to enter the United States to seek medical treatment. Enraged Iranian radical students invaded the U.S. Embassy and took 66 Americans as hostages. The Khomeini government then took control of both the embassy and the hostages to defy the United States.

The hostage crisis consumed the attention of Carter during the last year of his presidency. To many Americans, Carter's failure to win all of the hostages' release was evidence of American weakness. As Peter Bourne put it in his biography of



◀ Iranian students burn an American flag at the U.S. embassy in Tehran; protesters call for the CIA to stop interfering in Iran (right).

▲ The freed hostages arrive in the United States after their ordeal finally ends in January 1981.

### Thinking Critically

1. **Recognize Causes** What event triggered the seizure of the American hostages in Iran?
2. **Synthesize Information** What actions did Carter take to try to get the hostages released?

Jimmy Carter, "Because people felt that Carter had not been tough enough in foreign policy . . . some bunch of students could seize American diplomatic officials and hold them prisoner and thumb their nose at the United States."

The hostage crisis began to change the way Americans viewed the world outside their borders. Nuclear war between the two superpowers was no longer the only threat to the United States. Although the Cold War still concerned Americans, the threats posed by conflicts in the Middle East threatened to become the greatest foreign policy challenge of the United States.

- ✓ **Checkpoint** How did the seizure of the U.S. Embassy by Iranian students affect Americans' view of the world?

## SECTION 3 Assessment

### Progress Monitoring Online

For: Self-test with vocabulary practice  
Web Code: nea-1808

### Comprehension

1. **Terms and People** For each item below, write a sentence explaining the way it affected U.S. foreign policy.
  - human rights
  - SALT II
  - boat people
  - sanctions
  - developing world
  - Camp David Accords
  - Ayatollah Khomeini

2. **NoteTaking Reading Skill: Identify Supporting Details** Use your concept web to answer the Section Focus Question: What were the goals of American foreign policy during the Ford and Carter years, and how successful were Ford's and Carter's policies?

### Writing About History

3. **Quick Write: Present Skills** Put yourself in the place of someone applying to be the U.S. Ambassador

to Panama in the mid-1970s. Write a paragraph describing the key qualities needed for the job.

### Critical Thinking

4. **Draw Conclusions** What do you think were the most important foreign policy accomplishments of Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter?
5. **Draw Inferences** What did Carter's inability to secure the release of the hostages in Iran symbolize to many Americans?