

Fighting for Human Rights: the Jimmy Carter blueprint for a post-Trump foreign policy

This research demonstrates that Jimmy Carter's foreign policy of human rights provides a ready-made blueprint for restoring America's international leadership and for transforming the US in that role into a force for positive good.

Donald Trump's norm-violating unilateralism has generated global disorder on a scale not seen since the end of the Cold War. A restoration of America's reputation is vital to restoring its leadership role and ending that uncertainty.

When Carter ascended to the presidency in 1977, the US' international reputation was even weaker than it is today. The Vietnam War, Watergate, and years of Kissinger-style diplomacy had isolated the US, making it appear untrustworthy and aggressive. Carter's human rights policy, while imperfect, provided the bold, restorative vision that permitted the US to restore its leadership role in the 1980s.

Trump's successor as president must demonstrate the same vision. A great power's reputation is vital to its ability to act as a leader in international politics; the next president must therefore forge a new image of America, just as Carter did, if American leadership is to be maintained and global stability restored.

A mere revamp in America's image would be unsatisfactory, however. For innumerable countries around the world, American leadership has rarely been something to celebrate. The Carter blueprint, however, would inject morality into American foreign policy, so that US leadership could be something to be desired, rather than grudgingly accepted or feared.

Therefore, this research offers a pathway to restored global order under a more benign American leadership.