

ISIS, Obama, and Jimmy Carter: When God Was On Their Side

Written by Stephen McGlinchey

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STEPHEN MCGLINCHEY, OCT 12 2014

This week Jimmy Carter joined an ever growing list of former Obama supporters and former administration members in criticising the administration's policies and actions on the Islamic State.

The criticism has focused around Hillary Clinton's pleas for a more interventionist policy towards the Middle East, and criticism of Obama's weak and/or indecisive leadership by Leon Panetta and Robert Gates.

In Carter's words: "We let the Islamic state build up its money, capability and strength and weapons while it was still in Syria." Presumably then, like Clinton, Carter believes that an interventionist path is the right one, and Obama's leadership deficiencies are preventing him from making that call. If the US had taken decisive action to oust Assad in Syria two years ago, then perhaps none of this would have happened...

I sympathise with this thinking, but perhaps Carter should be a little more reminiscent of the disasters of this type of blunt 'swift action is best' typed thinking as witnessed when he held the Presidency between 1977-1981. And, frankly, his role in what might (arguably) be the origins of elements of the modern militant Islam phenomenon.

In 1980 Carter sent his National Security Adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, to Afghanistan following a Soviet invasion. Addressing a crowd of displaced locals, Brzezinski said: "Your cause is right and god is on your side". Oh dear... how words can come back to haunt you in politics!

Although this was dressed up as no more than a pep talk and a diplomatic exercise, a covert policy was already maturing to arm and train the Mujahedeen to wage a jihad on their Soviet occupiers. In truth, the CIA were on the ground in Afghanistan long before the invasion as the US sought to use whatever means it could to prevent the Middle East from slipping further down the plughole after the Iranian Revolution in 1979.

Without wanting to compress history terribly, there is a clear linkage between this event and the formation and general constitution of Al Qaeda – if not the Islamic State itself. Interested readers can easily dig into that without expending much effort. A good place to start would be Robert Gates' *From the Shadows*. Therefore, it is more than a little revisionist (or perhaps just unfair) for Carter to be making such recommendations of Obama as he has recently, knowing full well the impact that the blowback of past disasters in the region have had on US foreign policy.

Carter was one of the most humane and intelligent persons to inhabit the Oval Office. However, he was also the President who called the Shah of Iran 'a rock of stability admired and loved by his people' mere months before he was torn from power. So, while his heart is usually in the right place, evidently his political head isn't always in the best place.

Carter also has a habit of somewhat revising history to suit his own internal editing process (something I dedicated a chapter to in my latest book, and explore further in a forthcoming journal article). Even that withstanding, I do think that due to the direct lineage to his own actions in the region over three decades ago it is a little too cheap for him to

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criticise Obama in this case. You might even say that Obama's famous 'don't do stupid shit/stuff' philosophy is not based on the Bush administration's actions in foreign policy as many have quipped... but might just be based more on examples from his own party's past actions while in government.

About the author:

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