

**The Carters—A Conversation  
Program 1**

15:41:17.11

Ifill: President and Mrs. Carter, thank you for having us here at the Carter Center

President Carter: Well, you're certainly welcome, glad to have you.

15:41:25.23

Ifill: And, congratulations on your Nobel Prize.

President Carter: Well, it's a shared honor for us both.

15:41:32.02

Ifill: I know you were gratified winning this prize, but was it a vindication for you as well, President Carter?

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President Carter: Well, no, I don't feel that I needed to be vindicated. In 1978 when we negotiated the Peace Treaty between Israel and Egypt and then the award was given to Begin and Sadat, they notified me later that I was also chosen, but that I had not been nominated. So, you know I felt always as though I had already been honored, but the honor came in that the peace treaty that we negotiated, not a single word of it has ever been violated, in more than 20 years, so that was really the vindication I think.

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Ifill: Mrs. Carter, how much of the Peace Prize do you think was a recognition of the work you've done in the twenty years since the Carter Center has been open, as well as acknowledgement of what happened in Middle East Peace talks?

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Mrs. Carter: That played a big part in the decision to give him the Peace Prize. I was really proud of him. But, Camp David combined with our programs around the world and working for peace and human rights, I felt very much like he deserved it.

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Ifill: You talk about working for peace, do you think the Peace Prize is an acknowledgement of peace that you have succeeded in helping to make, or an acknowledgement of how difficult the process of making peace is?

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President Carter: I say both. The Nobel original concept was that the Peace Prize would be awarded for two purposes. One, was if someone did contribute it to peace, but primarily I think the emphasis is to strengthen the effort for peace, using the recipient for the award as kind of a symbolic gesture for the world that peace is important.

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Ifill: There was a lot of symbolic gesturing during the announcement of your award. How did you feel about that?

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President Carter: I didn't really hear any of that until after which I got questions from the news media and one member of the committee did make some statements with which I didn't agree, but he was criticized by all other members of the committee. He said that was just his own personal opinion.

15:43:44.09

Ifill: Mrs. Carter, when the President was asked about the Peace Prize, one of the things he said was that he'd acknowledged your role in all of this. Fifty-six years of marriage, got a little emotional while he was talking about it, why don't you describe for us your partnership and how it's worked.

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Mrs. Carter: Well, I think we just developed a mutual respect for each other and what we can do. When we first married, Jimmy was in the Navy, he was gone all week, I was at home taking care of the children, the babies. I had to learn how to do things without him and then when we came back to Plains, I started keeping books at our farm supply business and pretty soon he was asking me questions about the business because I knew a lot about it on paper, and we just developed a real working relationship and it carried on through the campaign. And, then, when we were campaigning I learned the issues, as did my children, so that we could go out and campaign for him and, um, just been a really good partnership.

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Ifill: You'll of course remember when you were First Lady, there was a lot of talk about the pillow confidences that you were supposed to have shared with you husband. Did that, do you feel that in some ways that you redefined the First Ladyship?

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Mrs. Carter: I don't know. I went to Cabinet meetings after the first year at the White House. Jimmy said that every time he stepped off the elevator to come home in the afternoon I said, "why didn't you do this," or "why didn't you do that?" Because I had either heard, um, something on the radio, or television, or read something in the newspaper, and he said, "why don't you just come to the Cabinet meetings, then you'll know why we do things." So, I went to Cabinet meetings and I never did speak up at Cabinet meetings, that would have been out of place, but then in the afternoons we'd sit on the Truman balcony and we'd talk about the things that happened that day.

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Ifill: Mr. President, you know your presidency was defined so much by events. Are there things that you wish you had been able to address? Things that were left unfinished?

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President Carter: Well, one of the things we have already mentioned on this program and that is the Camp David Peace Agreement that related to the Palestinians and Israel and also that related to Egypt and Israel. And I was able to solidify the relationship between the two nations, but I don't have any doubt in my own mind that if I had devoted four more years to the Israeli/Palestinean relationship that we may very well have avoided the conflict and the suffering that's taken place since then. So, four more years to work on Mid-East peace would have been beneficial I think.

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Ifill: When you look back now at what you accomplished in 1978 and you look at where we stand now, which seems kind of so hopelessly deadlocked in that situation, do you think there is something else that you could have accomplished that would have set the process on a different pace than it is now?

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President Carter: No, because at the time the agreement was complete between me and Menachem Begin and Anwar Sadat. It called for a complete implementation of U.N. Resolution 242, which required Israel to withdraw from the West Bank in Gaza and for full rights for the Palestinians. That would have led to a Palestinean state. So, the things that are being contemplated now for the future, I hope not too distant future, were in the agreement that Menachem Begin signed, which by the way was ratified by the Israeli Parliament with an overwhelming vote, eighty-five percent vote, and then it went kinda downhill after that because the United States didn't maintain its intense interest that is almost a crucial element in peace between the Israelis and the Palestineans.

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Ifill: The United States is involved in so many issues and foreign fronts now. Do you think that by being focused on all these other issues including in Iraq that we are not paying the kind of attention to the Middle East peace process that we could have?

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President Carter: No I don't think it's changed because when I was in office, you know, I was negotiating an agreement with the Soviet Union on nuclear arms control. I was negotiating my most difficult challenge of all and that is the Panama Canal treaties, I was negotiating with China to establish diplomatic relations for the first time in thirty-five years, so that panoply of issues was multi-faceted and we had to deal with all of them simultaneously. So, no President can just concentrate on one thing. The United States is too powerful and too influential to do that.

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Ifill: That's an interesting point you make about being able to concentrate on one thing. At the end of your Presidency one of the things you had to concentrate almost entirely on was the hostage crisis in Iran. If you had had another thirty days, and I'm going to direct this question to Mrs. Carter 'cause she was there, do you think that there was something

else that you could have done, or was Ayatollah Khomeini so convinced that he wasn't releasing those hostages on your watch that there was nothing to be done?

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Mrs. Carter: I think Jimmy did everything that could possibly have been done and they actually were in the airplane on the runway waiting for Jimmy to be out of office before the plane took off. But we was... That was supposed to be just a really sad day because we were leaving Washington and going home involuntarily and the Secret Service agent whispered in my ear as we were leaving the platform that the plane had taken off, so it turned out to just be an exciting day.

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Ifill: Not a, you didn't feel any chagrin at that?

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Mrs. Carter: Well, we had waited for it for so long and we realized what was happening and the fact that they were all going to be free and safe was, was really wonderful.

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President Carter: All the negotiation were done by us. The Reagan Administration didn't participate at all in any of the negotiations to get the hostages out. And that morning, at ten o'clock, as Rosalind said, all the hostages were in the airplane, safe, and ready to take off. And Ayatollah waited 'til five minutes after I was out of office before they released the plane. But, the celebration was probably the most enthusiastic and heart-felt that Rosalind and I and Fritz Mondale and his wife, Joan, ever experienced. It was a time of glorious thanksgiving that our prayers had been answered and every hostage came home free.

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Ifill: Did you feel at all though that the hostage in effect took you hostage as well?

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President Carter: It did. Well, the last year that I was in office that was an overwhelming issue that was addressed by the news media and by the world at large, and also the war between Iran and Iraq. When Iraq invaded Iran, it cut off all supplies from both those two countries, so we had an enormous increase in the price of oil which brought about inflation. So, there's no doubt that the hostage crisis directly, or indirectly, was the biggest blight on my, in my Administration.

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Ifill: There is no question that the path that you both have taken from Georgia to the White House back to Georgia has been remarkable. What I'm curious about, I suppose is which was the biggest change for you, going from Georgia to the White House by way of Atlanta, or going from the White House back home? Mrs. Carter...

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Mrs. Carter: The biggest step was from Plains, Georgia, to the Governor's Mansion... Well, the Governor's, when we got to the Governor's Mansion I went to see Mrs., before we moved in, Mrs. Maddox, and I said, who does the cooking for you when you have guests? She says, I do. I said, who serves the table, she said, I do. Every time I ask her something...

Ifill: This is not the answer you were looking for...(laughs)

15:51:17.13

Mrs. Carter: They had only lived in the Governor's mansion for one year. She told me that her mother-in-law made the speeches for her. Well, I came home and said, "what have we gotten ourselves into?" and so we had to start from scratch to do everything in the Governor's Mansion, and, um, it was difficult. But, it was, um, I think one of our most exciting times. And, then, at the Governor's Mansion you have the State Legislature, Legislators for dinner, in the White House you have members of Congress. You have ambassadors here at the Counsel General's, in Washington you have ambassadors. So, it's kind of a little microcosm of what you see at, in Washington when you're in the White House.

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So, it wasn't as different leaving Atlanta and the State House going to the White House as one would expect?

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Mrs. Carter: No, no, not for us.

President Carter: You come out of a little town like Plains, Georgia, out of the peanut fields, to Atlanta and the beautiful Governor's Mansion is a bigger step than going from the Governor's Mansion to the White House. But, uh, it was very gratifying.

15:52:23.08

Ifill: But how was the work different for you?

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President Carter: The work was similar, but obviously on a much grander scale. There's no comparison between what a Governor does and what the President does, but the detail that you have to address and things concerning education, transportation, budgeting, welfare, health is much more pressing on a Governor than it is a President. What you have extra though, is being Commander in Chief of the U.S. Military Services and dealing with foreign affairs, that's a big challenge. And also the responsibility that United States Government has now as the only super power. That, that puts a sense on your shoulders that what you do will affect, possibly, you know, most of the people in the world.

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Ifill: People also seem to fall a little bit in love with the political story of your rise, you know the peanut farmer to President story. Did that help you, or did that undermine you because people expected less?

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President Carter: Well I was the first candidate from the Deep South that was elected since James K. Polk in the 1840's, elected President, so it was a great step for the south and for me and I think a lot of people in the rest of the country underestimated what the south had to offer. That was one challenge that we faced. But, coming from an unknown position, I had not been involved in national affairs at all. I was really not known in the country and all of a sudden winning the Presidency was a shock to the rest of the world as well. And I came along at a time when the country was suffering severely. From the aftermath of Watergate, the Vietnam War, the assassination of John Kennedy, and Bobby Kennedy, the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. The country was looking for something new and something that was not deeply involved in Washington and so that was an advantage for me as well.

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Ifill: But because of that was the country also more harsh in judging, what we look back on now seemed like fairly minor league mistakes?

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In a way, we had a pretty negative press. One reason was that the reporters that revealed the Watergate scandals always thought they were going to find something in my closet that would give them, you know, a Pulitzer Prize for a revelation of some ulterior secret and they never could find it. So, there was quizzical attitude towards our Administration as well. We had an extraordinary batting average with the Congress. In fact, my batting average on legislation with the Congress was as high as for Lynden Johnson and for President Kennedy. But, it was difficult and I think the coloration of my Administration in retrospect was a hostage crisis that was the main thing that gave a negative image to it.

15:55:25.07

The coloration of the years since you've been President have been dominated a lot by your work in human rights. Since you both are children of the segregated south, something you've written about, I'm curious about whether you're definition about what human rights is has changed over the years?

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President Carter: Mine has changed.

Mrs. Carter: Yes.

President Carter: Because I looked on human rights as just an extension of Civil Rights, where one group of people look down on, or persecute another because of race, or religion, or ethnic character. And that was a very narrow definition which involved incarceration without at trial, maybe torture in prison, or deprivation of right to vote. But since the Carter Center began it's work, there's a much broader definition of human

rights, certainly things I've already described, but if you look at the right of a human being to live properly, you also have to encompass the right to shelter and adequate food, and a modicum of health care, a sense of self dignity, hope for the future, some involvement in the process of choosing one's own leader. These kinds of things become very important as well as other political aspect of human rights. I would say, even the quality of one's environment, where you're not breathing filthy air, and being deprived of decent drinking water. So, human rights now involves a wide panoply of things beyond just persecution in prison.

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Ifill: Mrs. Carter would you add to that?

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Mrs. Carter: Um, I agree with him because we have seen people in the countries that we have our Carter Center programs in which are the poorest, most isolated countries in the world, who suffer so much, even if they are not oppressed and so many of them are and they are hungry and they are sick and they just need so much and, and it has to be part of human rights for them to live any kind of, of normal happy life.

You are talking not just a legal, but a moral definition of what human rights is. There are other unfinished challenges which are on the front pages right now, involving North Korea, you had been very involved, and Cuba, where you had been very involved. What is the U.S. role, what should the U.S. role be in hot spots like that?

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President Carter: Well, now that the United States is the only unchallenged super power, which is one of the rare times in human history, maybe just in the Roman Empire or things like that, we have a special responsibility and I think the responsibility encompasses the same kind of things on what the Carter Center is working. I would say we ought to be the champion of peace. (15:58:36.13) Promoting a concept and when there is an altercation between people, or a prospect of a civil war, an ongoing war, that we are recognized by everyone on Earth as the repository for a strong and aggressive act toward peace. I think we ought to be the champions of human rights, that we ought to promote freedom and democracy in the world. So, that even the poorest country, the most isolated country, the suffering country, will say the first place for us to look is to Washington and to that great nation that is so deeply blessed. (15:59:13.00) I think we ought to be the most generous country on Earth, uh, we see the suffering that people undergo that make 1.2 billion people living on less than a dollar per day. I think we ought to share some of our wealth with them. Much more than we do now. We're at the bottom now. I think we ought to be at the top and being generous. And, I think this would typify the characteristics of America that have been the foundation for our very existence.

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Ifill: But, isn't peace, and human rights, and generosity in the eye of the beholder. Isn't that a subject for some debate about what that means for the U.S. role?

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President Carter: I think you can quantify it as well. It's not just an ephemeral, or theoretical sort of thing. You know, the United States now, our Government gives a little bit less than one thousandth of our gross national product for the alleviation of suffering, or humanitarian aid in the rest of the world. The average European country gives four times as much, Norway gives seventeen times as much. You know, we could be in the forefront of that kind of generosity, not just giving people money to buy weapons from us, but to alleviate their suffering, to give them education, and health, and housing, and food, and a sense of decency and self-respect in hopes for the future. I don't think that's, um, a theoretical thing. I think that it can be quantified. (16:00:36.10) Also, of course, you know there are many countries struggling for democracy. The Carter Center is deeply involved in that. We have participated actively in about forty elections in the most troubled countries on Earth, in Africa, in Latin America, in the Caribbean, in Asia, and in the Middle East as a matter of fact. The Carter Center was in charge of monitoring the elections for the Palestinians in January of '96. So, that's the kind of thing that the U.S. Government itself could do much more. Not try to interfere in determining who will win the election, but just to promote the concept for freedom and democracy.

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Ifill: Mrs. Carter, as you look at your life and your experiences and as you shape these things, these ideas, these approaches to world issues, and you look back, who do you think, who do you credit with being your greatest influence, your mentor, your family members, who among these people has shaped your thinking?

16:01:35.23

Mrs. Carter: I think Jimmy. (laughs)

Ifill: Tell me about that.

Mrs. Carter: Well, I married him one month before I was 19, so he's had a pretty good, a strong influence on my life. But, as far as my mental health work, uh, Margaret Meade came to see me in the Governor's Mansion as soon as she heard I was going to work on mental health. And, um, we became friends, she came to see me at the White House and I traveled with her and she gave me ideas and thoughts about how we should really care for people who suffer from mental illnesses. Um, but I think Jimmy has had more influence on, um, um, on what is right and good and what we should be doing to help other people.

16:02:19.18

Ifill: And who's had that influence on you then?

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President Carter: Well, I should reciprocate first of all and say it was Rosalind, it's been a partnership...

Ifill: That is the proper answer by the way.

President Carter: Well, we have propped each other up, and inspired each other, and criticized each other without restraint. We are each other's most severe critique....I would say my mother in a way has. Because mother, when she was seventy years old volunteered to go in the Peace Corps and she spent two years of her life, two and half years, in India, dealing with lepers and with people who were suffering most and just the fact that my mother did was, was opened up an array of thoughts to me. Also, during the segregationist era, which lasted almost a hundred years after the Civil War, Mother was one in Plains, Georgia, which is Deep South southern country, who never paid any attention to racial distinctions and everybody knew it and since she was a registered nurse, she could kinda get away with it. So, I would say my mother. (16:03:18.09) In the field of health care and broad arenas of alleviating suffering, Dr. William Faghy has been a great impact on my life. Dr. Faghy was in charge of the eradication of Small Pox. When I became Governor I had to put him as head for the Centers for Disease Control and he was one of the earliest directors of the Carter Center, but his ability to take a theoretical question about the eradication of a disease and actually go into the villages and put medicine into the mouths of people and put a filter cloth in their hands that could correct their problem, has given me an insight that I didn't have before about the broad generation, generalities of life, and how that general concept, or ideal can be actually be implemented specifically with an individual person. So, I think that he's been another one that has helped me a lot.

16:04:15.22

Ifill: Well, taking the generalities of life and applying them to specific is what you all have all done as a couple. Thank you very much for joining us.

16:04:23.12

President Carter: It's been a pleasure.

Mrs. Carter: It's been fun.

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