



Carter's Confusion. Why would a former president visit with a terrorist master?

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Let's be fair to Jimmy Carter. Let's suppose he isn't indulging in egotistical grandstanding, that he doesn't harbor a deep-seated bias against Israel, and that he's not been influenced by the millions of dollars Islamists have provided to his Carter Center. Let's suppose his freelance diplomacy is sincerely in pursuit of the elusive path to peace in the Middle East.

Even so, why in the world would he pay a courtesy call on Khaled Mashaal, an admitted terrorist master? Mashaal has claimed responsibility for organizing numerous suicide bombings, slaughtering mostly Israeli civilians but Americans too. The head of Hamas' politburo, Mashaal lives not in Hamas-ruled Gaza, from which missiles rain

down on Israeli villages daily. Nor does he live in the West Bank, which is controlled, more or less, by Fatah, Hamas' rival. He resides instead in Syria, a guest of dictator Bashar al-Assad, Iran's client, who for the past five years has facilitated the flow of al-Qaeda combatants into Iraq.

Those who attempt to appease tyrants are generally suspected of cowardice. More often, I suspect, lack of imagination is the cause. When Neville Chamberlain met with Hitler in Munich, he no doubt believed he could reason with him because he also no doubt believed that the *Führer* -- whatever his grievances or ambitions -- was a reasonable man like himself. Offer Hitler a good deal -- land, power,

prestige – and surely he'd take it rather than plunge his nation into a terrible war.

What this leaves out is ideology. Hitler's ideas – odious as they may now seem to you, me and Carter (though certainly not to Meshaal) – inspired millions to fight and die for the glory of the Third Reich. And Marxist/Leninist/Stalinist/Maoist ideology inspired millions to fight and die for the illusion of a Communist utopia.

The ideology of Hamas derives from something more enduring than *Mein Kampf*, *Das Kapital* and the sayings of Chairman Mao. It is rooted in a 1,400-year-old religion. Hamas proudly proclaims that "the Koran is our constitution, Jihad is our way, and death for the sake of God is our highest aspiration." Hamas leaders promise their followers not just rewards here on Earth but in the next world as well – a selling point neither Nazism nor Communism could offer.

Hamas' Charter asserts that it is "one of the wings of the Moslem Brotherhood," a transnational organization "characterized by its deep understanding, accurate comprehension and its complete embrace of all Islamic concepts of all aspects of life, culture, creed, politics, economics, education, society, justice and judgment, the spreading of Islam, education, art, information, science of the occult and conversion to Islam."

Surely, Carter is aware that, as a matter of religious conviction, Me-

shaal can not accept Israel's existence. Hamas believes every inch of Israel and, indeed, of any land ever ruled by Muslims is "an Islamic *Waqf* consecrated for future Moslem generations until Judgment Day." A Muslim can fight to reclaim this endowment or he can fail to fulfill the obligations his faith imposes. To Hamas, there is no third option.

The Hamas Charter asserts that "initiatives, and so-called peaceful solutions and international conferences, are in contradiction to [Hamas'] principles ... There is no solution for the Palestinian question except through Jihad." And by Jihad, Hamas does not mean a struggle for personal improvement.

Not only do Hamas members oppose a "two-state solution," they believe that nation-states are un-Islamic. Instead, an Islamic caliphate is to be re-established, an empire that is to expand until the *Dar al-Islam*, the world ruled by righteous Muslims, consumes the *Dar al-Harb*, the world in which infidels and apostates currently hold sway. "Rome will be conquered, just like Constantinople was, as was prophesized by our prophet Muhammad," Hamas member and Palestinian parliamentarian Yunis al-Asal pledged this month on a Hamas television program.

Does Carter sincerely think he can convince Meshaal to reject such ideas and embrace the Carter Center's kumbaya mission of "waging peace and building hope"? Does he really believe he can change Mashaal's mind, much less open his heart?

If so, Carter is as clueless now as he was almost 30 years ago when, on his watch as president, the Ayatollah Khomeini took power in Iran, seized America's embassy, held our diplomats hostage and sat back to watch Carter do nothing effective in

response. But let's be fair to Carter. He alone is not responsible for the rise of Islamism in all its malevolent variations. He is responsible, however, for so profoundly misunderstanding what is happening in the world over so many years.

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