



Carter Willing to Make Diplomatic Visit to North Korea

During an interview with *New York Times* op-ed columnist Maureen Dowd on October 21, former President Jimmy Carter made some surprising statements, coming from a lifelong Democrat. Carter's most widely reported comment was his affirmative reply to Dowd's question about whether he would be willing to travel to North Korea to lead a diplomatic mission aimed at smoothing out the tense relationship between President Trump and North Korea's leader, Kim Jong-un.



"I would go, yes," replied Carter.

After Dowd told Carter that influential Washington "big shots" were terrified about the ongoing Twitter battle between Trump and Kim (she referred to them by the pejorative nicknames they had pinned on each other — "the Dotard" and "Little Rocket Man") Carter replied: "I'm afraid, too, of a situation. I don't know what they'll do. Because they want to save their regime. And we greatly overestimate China's influence on North Korea. Particularly to Kim Jong-un. He's never, so far as I know, been to China."

Carter continued, "And they have no relationship. Kim Jong-il [Kim's father] did go to China and was very close to them."

Carter, reported Dowd, said that the "unpredictable" Kim Jong-un makes him more nervous than his father, Kim Jong-il, and that if the young leader thinks Trump will act against him, he could do something preemptive. "I think he's now got advanced nuclear weaponry that can destroy the Korean Peninsula and Japan, and some of our outlying territories in the Pacific, maybe even our mainland," Carter said.

Carter told Dowd that he has talked to Lieutenant General H. R. McMaster, Trump's national security adviser, about going to North Korea, but has so far gotten a negative response. "I told him that I was available if they ever need me," Carter related.

If Carter should manage to get Trump to agree to sending him to North Korea, it would not be the first time he has gone on such a mission. In 1994, after North Korea had expelled investigators from the International Atomic Energy Agency and was threatening to begin processing spent nuclear fuel, then-President Bill Clinton called for U.S. sanctions and ordered an increase in the U.S. military presence in the area.

However, Clinton also secretly recruited Carter to undertake a peace mission to the communist regime that was described as Carter's own private mission.

Carter negotiated an understanding with Kim Il-sung (Kim Jong-un's grandfather), but went further and outlined a treaty (agreed framework), which he announced on CNN without the permission of the Clinton administration, as a way to force the United States into action.



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The Clinton administration signed a later version of the Agreed Framework, under which North Korea agreed to freeze and ultimately dismantle its nuclear program and comply with its nonproliferation obligations in exchange for oil deliveries and other perks.

The agreement was widely praised at the time as a significant diplomatic achievement, but, in December 2002, it collapsed as a result of a dispute between the George W. Bush administration and the North Korean government of Kim Jong-il.

Carter also made some other noteworthy statements during the interview with Dowd. He expressed little sympathy for NFL players kneeling during the playing of the national anthem: "I think they ought to find a different way to object, to demonstrate. I would rather see all the players stand during the American anthem."

When Dowd asked if he thought that Trump was deepening racial divisions in the country, he replied: "Yes, I think he is exacerbating it," but added "But maybe not deliberately." Carter did not provide any examples of what Trump had done to aggravate racial division and Dowd did not follow-up any further.

When Dodd asked Carter about the foreign policies of President Trump and former President Obama, Carter was more critical of Obama than of Trump.

Carter said he liked Trump's attempt to reach out to Saudi Arabia and did not view the president's use of his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, in the effort as being detrimental to eventual success.

"I've seen in the Arab world, including the Palestinian world," Carter said, "the high esteem that they pay to a member of one's own family."

The former president does not think "there's much hope now that Israelis will ever permit a two-state solution." Regarding Obama's Middle East policies, he said, "He made some very wonderful statements, in my opinion, when he first got in office, and then he reneged on that."

Carter also complained that Obama had "refused" to talk to North Korea more, and regretted the fact that Obama joined in the bombing of Yemen. He described Yemen as the most interesting place he'd ever been.

One of the most interesting points covered in the interview was Carter's view on allegations made by many Democrats that the Russians had influenced the 2016 presidential election in Trumps' favor. His opponents have also criticized Trump for reaching out to Russia concerning the ongoing civil war in Syria.

"At the Carter Center," he said, "we deal with Putin and the Russians quite frequently concerning Syria."

When Dowd asked if the Russians had stolen the election from Hillary Clinton, Carter said, "Rosie [his wife, Rosalynn] and I have a difference of opinion on that," he said.

"They obviously did," Mrs. Carter said.

However, the former president was firm on that point: "I don't think there's any evidence that what the Russians did changed enough votes, or any votes."

Carter's presidency was not markedly different than most of the administrations of both parties that preceded and followed it, particularly in the area of foreign policy. The fact that Cyrus Vance, the secretary of state during most of his presidency, had been a Chairman of the Board of the Rockefeller Foundation and Vice Chairman of the Council on Foreign Relations is more indicative than anything of



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the close ties between the Carter administration and the establishment internationalists who dominated U.S. foreign policy from the end of World War II until the present day.

However, since leaving the White House, Carter has occasionally shown some independent, non-establishment-like thinking, such as in 2013 when he reportedly said the National Security Agency's invasion of privacy had gone too far, and he defended the actions of Edward Snowden. "He's obviously violated the laws of America, for which he's responsible," Carter said of Snowden at that time, "but I think the invasion of human rights and American privacy has gone too far."

In his latest interview with Dowd, Carter continued to exhibit an independent streak that is sometimes surprising.

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