

**THE RUNAWAY CRISIS : AMERICAN HOSTAGES IN IRAN  
1979-1981**

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DECLARATION

Certified that the dissertation entitled "THE RUNAWAY CRISIS:  
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## PREFACE

President Jimmy Carter arrived in the White House on January 20, 1977 with an extensive new agenda of foreign policy objectives. Iran, a Middle Eastern country of great strategic and economic significance in the international community of nations, was not expected to be a foreign policy problem which needed special attention. The administration's view of Iran was that as the central pillar of the US' Persian Gulf policies, it was stable enough to face any external or internal challenges. The Shah's regime seemed to be firmly in control of Iranian affairs. The policy differences between Iran and the new US administration were regarded as relatively minor and manageable.

However, in the end, it was Iran that dominated the critical last years of Carter presidency and contributed substantially to his electoral defeat. During 1978 -1979, Iran witnessed a sequence of political and strategic disasters: the uprising of the Iranian people under the leadership of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini; the collapse and exile of Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi; the establishment of an Islamic Republic in Teheran. The culmination of the political and ideological transformation of Iran symbolized by the attacks on the US embassy in Teheran and the holding of US citizens as hostages for 444 days brought about Carter Administration's greatest foreign policy crisis.

The major reason for this political earthquake in one of the most sensitive regions of the world was that the Shah was closely identified with the policies and political economic philosophy of the US. In the pursuit of the total physical security of Iran through the expansion of the Iranian armed forces, the US and the Shah failed to detect the growing popular discontent. Even during the Iranian-American tensions following the revolution the American government failed to recognize the seriousness of the Iranian situation. The administration confronted the crisis without any serious reappraisal of its own failed policy in Iran. Instead, it reintroduced the same policy premises into new approaches to deal with the crisis. In turn, it heightened the tension between the both the countries.

For the US, it was a crisis set in the complex Iranian political context where three different purposes converged: to get the hostages out; to defend its honour; and to further long term strategic interests. The real problem was that when these were sought to be achieved it turned out that they were mutually not compatible. What might have achieved one purpose would have failed in the case of others. Later, efforts to solve the crisis only exacerbated and extended the crisis. This was because the administration's decisions were highly influenced by political considerations, bureaucratic infighting in the foreign policy set up, the vested interests of private personalities like Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger, David Rockefeller to Iranian leaders like Sadaq Ghotbzadeh and

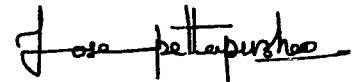
Abol Hassan Bani Sadr. It also witnessed an unprecedented involvement of the media. Caught between this extraordinary interplay of considerations and personalities the administration lost its control over the crisis. It not only undermined the strategic position and international credibility of the US but also contributed to a profound change in the US and Iranian domestic political alignments and attitudes.

This study is a critical analysis of the management of the hostage crisis. It also traces the origin and the impact of the crisis by examining, the thirty years of US-Iranian relations, and the various economic, diplomatic, legal, political and military options used to manage the crisis. This study is based on limited primary and secondary source materials. The memoirs of the participants in the crisis management team such as President Carter, Rosalynn Carter, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, Deputy Secretary of State and Chief negotiator of 1981 agreement Warren Christopher, National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, White House Chief of Staff Hamilton Jordan, the principal White House Adviser on Iranian affairs Gary Sick, Special Presidential Advisor on Iranian Crisis George Ball, US military liaison officer in Iran Robert E. Huyser and Delta Force Commander Charles A. Beckwith have been extensively used in this study.

I would like to express my deep indebtedness to Prof. B. K. Shrivastava for his constant encouragement and

supervision. I also thank my friends who helped me at the various stages of my work.

New Delhi  
July 1990.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jose P.A.', with a stylized, cursive script.

Jose P.A.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION : AMERICAN-IRANIAN RELATIONS - A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The collapse of the Shah of Iran, the seizure of the United States embassy in Tehran in 1979, and holding of American hostages until 1981 collectively constituted a major foreign policy crisis that the Carter Administration faced. The US followed an inherently flawed foreign policy in Iran and was slow to recognize the extent of the danger posed by such a policy. Flaws of massive ignorance, conflict within the foreign policy set up, uncertainty about Soviet policy, an economic obsession and the prevalence of informal and privatised decision making, all precipitated the Iranian revolution and the hostage crisis. America carried past mistakes into the future. Later attempts to defuse the crisis failed because of divergent policy advices received by the President from warring factions of his foreign policy advisers. It created a situation in which the administration had no real understanding or control over the crisis. In fact, an analysis of major foreign policy issues of the previous three decades (1950-1980) of US-Iranian relations proves that the hostage crisis was the result of deep rooted problems in the policy towards Iran.

Throughout this period of Iranian political history, there was continued interplay of super power interests. In the early nineteenth century Iran served as a buffer between



rival England and Russia. United States had only a limited involvement and very little influence on Iranian affairs till the end of the Second World War because it pursued the policy of "isolationism" after the First World war.

During the Second World War, Iran was ruled by Reza Shah Pahlavi, a nationalist dictator (1925-1941). He was protecting Iran's national integrity by balancing Anglo-Russian forces with the Nazi-German alliance. This Iran-Nazi German alliance seriously threatened the Allied war effort. Subsequently in 1941, the Britain and Soviet forces invaded Iran, deposed the King Reza Shah and installed his son Mohammed Reza Shah with a view to forestall the German influence in the Persian Gulf region. The US also supported the Allied forces in the World War because of its awareness of Iran's strategic importance. Iran served as a land bridge to Soviet Union and the Allied occupation of Iran helped to cut-off German attempts to secure the oil fields of the Persian Gulf region. Later in 1942, 40,000 American troops landed in Iran for American participation in the Tripartite Alliance between Iran, Britain and the Soviet Union. Subsequently these three powers signed the Tripartite Treaty in January 1942, which guaranteed the territorial sovereignty and political independence of Iran. The US

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1. For a brief account of British and Russian intervention in Iran, see Bizhan Jazani, Capitalism and Revolution in Iran (London, 1980), pp.1-33.
  2. For a concise discussion on US' early contacts with Iran, see "America and Iran Early Entanglements" in James A.Bill, The Eagle and Lion : The Tragedy of American-Iranion Relations (New Haven, 1989), pp.15-50.

took the lead in promoting a formal declaration of support by all three major powers for Iran's independence and territorial integrity once the war was over. President Harry S. Truman has noted in his memoirs that the Soviet Union agreed to withdraw its forces along with US and Britain, within six months, of the end of the war. Stalin told Truman, "We promise you that no action will be taken by us against Iran."<sup>3</sup> But contrary to his own assurance, when the Second World War ended, while the British and US forces withdrew in accordance with Tripartite Treaty, the Soviet Union continued to stay there with the idea of establishing a puppet regime. The strong US support for Iran was a critical factor in persuading the Soviets to withdraw in mid-1946, and it refrained from direct intervention when the Communist regime in Azerbaijan was overthrown by the Iranian government.<sup>4</sup>

Thus in early 1940s US entered Iran to protect America's perceived interests which focused primarily on the Allied war effort. Later it took a leading role to ensure Iranian independence and integrity to prevent the Soviet Union from transforming Iran into a permanent base for its hegemony in the region. It marked the beginning of large scale American involvement in Iranian affairs. This direct clash of wills can be regarded as one of the opening salvo

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3. Quoted in Harry S. Truman, Years of Decision : Memoirs (New York, 1965), vol.1, p.419.
  4. Gary Sick, All Fall Down: America's Fateful Encounter with Iran London, 1985), p.5.

of cold war between the US and the Soviet Union on Iranian soil.<sup>5</sup> However, the first substantial US involvement in Iran was following the nationalisation of British Oil Company, the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) by premier Muhammed Musaddiq in April 1951. Since 1909, the year after oil was first discovered in Iran, Britain had acquired a controlling interest and influence in economic and political affairs of Iran.<sup>6</sup>

Anglo-Iranian oil dispute escalated into the stage of stalemate with an effective British initiated world wide boycott of Iranian Oil and Musaddiq's relentless campaign against Western interest in Iran. The failure to resolve the dispute and Musaddiq's increasing dependence on the Communist Tudeh Party led America to believe that the USSR was laying the ground for the pro-communist coup in Iran. Under these circumstances Eisenhower Administration approved US participation in a covert military plan to oust Musaddiq in favour of the Shah who was known for his pro-American stand. The coup was proposed by the British government, and code-named Ajax. It was coordinated by the Kermit Roosevelt<sup>7</sup> of Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in 1953.

Reasons for the changed US policy in the Middle East from one of diplomacy and conciliation to intervention and

5. Ibid.

6. See Ronald W.Ferrier, "The Anglo-Iranian Oil Dispute: A Triangular Relationship", in James A.Bill and W.M. Roger Louis, eds., Musaddiq, Iranian Nationalism and Oil (London, 1988), pp.164-99.

7. Sick, n.4, p.6.

confrontation was the result of the changed US perception of Communist challenge in the Gulf region and American apprehension about secure source of oil. President Eisenhower and his Vice-President Richard Nixon have argued<sup>8</sup> in their memoirs.

The two major US policies, the Truman Doctrine of 1947 and Eisenhower Doctrine of 1957, were pronounced in the context of developments that were taking place in the Middle East. The Truman Doctrine aimed at safeguarding Greece and Turkey. Later when the US extended economic and military aid to Iran, the Truman Doctrine embraced Iran as well. The Eisenhower Doctrine focused on the Arab World and pledged<sup>9</sup> direct employment of US military power.

During the Eisenhower years the philosophy of collective regional security as a bul-wark against communism was promoted by the President and his Secretary of the State John Foster Dulles. The US first formed the Middle East Treaty Organisation (METO), but when the government in Baghdad was overthrown, it had to be content with the strategy of forming an alliance of three non-Arab States - Turkey, Iran and Pakistan. The METO, following the agreement in Baghdad had Iran as an important member and US as an associate member. Iran joined the pact in 1955 and

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8. Dwight D.Eisenhower, Mandate for change:White House Years 1953-1956 (London, 1963), p.130. Also see Richard Nixon, The Memoirs of Richard Nixon (London, 1973), p.118.

9. George Lenczowski, "The Arc of Crsis:Its Central Sector", Foreign Affairs (New York), vol.57, no.4 (Spring 1979), pp.796-7.

continued in the alliance when it assumed the name Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), following the anti-monarchical revolution in Iraq in 1958. The Shah felt that it was an important gesture of massive financial assistance and territorial guarantee from the US.<sup>10</sup> This pattern of American influence by offering economic aid as a political reward for establishing military alliance to guard Western interest in the Gulf region, in the 1950s later in 60s and 70s was designed to strengthen the Shah's government. This policy of regime reinforcement by Americans since the 1953 CIA coup germinated a deep discontent against United States in Iran.

Contrary to his predecessors and much against Shah's will the Kennedy Administration reviewed the US aid programme to Iran in 1961 and a presidential task force was set up to formulate a long term programme for Iran.<sup>11</sup> As a result of the reassessment of US-Iranian relations, Kennedy took strong stand against Shah's wrong emphasis on military expansion at the expense of political liberalization. He sought to cut back on military aid programmes and to replace them with economic development funds, and argued that it was necessary to avoid revolution in Iran. Kennedy's programme of enforced reform in Iran was intended to preserve rather

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10. Alvin J.Cottrell, "Iran's Armed Forces Under the Pahlavi Dynasty," in George Lenczowski, ed., Iran Under the Pahlavis (Stanford, 1978), pp.397-400.
  11. Arthur M.Schlesinger, A Thousand Days:John F.Kennedy in the White House (London, 1965), p.380.

than transform the Iranian political structure. The introduction of the reforms by the Shah on US insistence led to heightened expectations and aspirations. By initiating and imposing reform movement on the Shah, Kennedy deeply involved the United States in the affairs of Iran. An analyst has observed that : "...It was the only period in more than thirty years that the United States ever attempted to modify the Shah's ambitions and priorities, this ensures that the Kennedy proposal is somewhat a milestone in US-Iranian relations."<sup>12</sup> In March 1962 the Kennedy Administration suggested a reduction in Iranian armed forces to 150,000 men (down from 170,000 and 90,000 less than the level projected in 1959), stressing the interrelationship between military, economic and political factors. In return for accepting the cut in forces and the termination of defence support funds, the Shah was offered a military assistance package that stressed the qualitative aspect of arms procurement. At the cost of some \$ 330 million, the Military Assistance Programme (MAP) included two squadrons of advanced aircraft, a squadron of medium transport aircraft, the complete replacement of all the soft-skinned vehicles in the Iranian inventory and the completion of a military airfield. The Shah was unimpressed with these proposals, but Kennedy Administration's resolution to

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12. C.D.Carr, "The United States-Iranian Relationship 1948-78: A Study in Reverse Influence," in Hossein Amirsadeghi, ed., The Security of the Persian Gulf (London, 1981), p.70.

implement them compelled the Shah to sign an agreement on  
 this proposals in Setptember 1962.<sup>13</sup>

If the Kennedy Administration represented the period of greatest presidential involvement in US-Iranian relations, then the Johnson Administration represented the period of least presidential interest in Iranian affairs, because his Administration was profoundly involved in the Vietnam war. It was not interested in expanding the sphere of American interest. The major decisions in this period, in respect of US-Iranian relations were made by lower level of bureaucracy in the State and Defence departments.

Coming immediately after Kennedy's programme of enforced reform and involving a number of personalities responsible for that programmes, "The Johnson Administration shifted American policy into decidedly pro-Pahlavi  
<sup>14</sup>  
 directions."

The Shah by extending unconditional support to America's Vietnam war, anit-Nasser campaign in Egypt and support to US' Israeli policies was trying to cement Iran's relations with America. To ensure close relations with the United States, he concluded two treaties, much at the cost of Iranian pride. On 4 July 1964, US and Iran signed a Memorandum of Understanding which provided that with the oil revenues increasing, Iran could afford to purchase military equipments for cash or through credit provided by the United

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13. Ibid, p.69.

14. Bill, n.2, p.176.

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States. Later in the same year Iran approved Status Force Agreement (SOFA) which provided diplomatic immunity for all American military personnel and their dependents stationed in Iran. Following the signing of the agreement the government of the United States approved a loan of \$200 million which in turn was used by Iran to acquire sophisticated arms from the United States. It outraged the Iranian sensitivity as they believed that the American grant was the pay off for the acceptance of an agreement which compromised the independence and sovereignty of their nation. It was an abject surrender of the rights of Iranians. The outrage was voiced by Ayotallah Ruhollah Khomeini, a Shi'iate Muslim religious leader. The Shah responded quickly to growing protest by exiling Khomeini to Turkey on 4 November 1964.<sup>16</sup>

Until the assumption of the office of the President by Richard M. Nixon in 1969, the Shah had been unhappy with US foreign philosophy which was basically at odds with his own ambitions for a grandiose role for Iran in the Gulf. But if the United States itself was to be the major player in the region, then this ambition could not be realised. That the US had such a role in mind was evident from its military assistance programme, that was supported by the American administrations in the past. But in the late 1960s, rapid and fundamental changes in the internal and external

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15. Carr, n.12, p.71.

16. Bill, n.2, pp.156-60.



foreign policy environments of the Gulf region presented a threefold opportunity to the Shah to strengthen US-Iranian relations. First, with the expansion of war in the Vietnam and its greater involvement, the United States became increasingly more reluctant to be involved militarily in other regions. Second, the historic withdrawal of British forces from the area east of Suez including Persian Gulf region in 1971 created a power vacuum. Third, the dramatic transformation of the world oil market from a buyers to sellers market after the oil crisis in the early seventies thrust a new role on Iran.

The immediate task of the Nixon Administration was to fill the power vacuum created by the British withdrawal in the Persian Gulf region, to safeguard American and Western economic and strategic interests. President Nixon, and his National Security Adviser (later Secretary of State) Henry Kissinger found that the Shah could be a valuable ally with whom US shared views on regional security matters. He was also willing to co-operate with the US in opposing Soviet ambitions in the Persian Gulf. The Nixon Administration formulated a well defined policy towards Iran which became known as the "Twin Pillar Policy".

It recognized Iran as the guardian of America's Middle

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17. R.K.Ramazani, "Who Lost America? The Case of Iran," The Middle East Journal (Washington), vol.36 (Winter, 1982), p.11. Also see Murray Gordan, Conflict in the Persian Gulf (London, 1981), p.13.
  18. Henry Kissinger, The White House Years (New Delhi, 1979), pp.1261-2.

East interest by building up the military capability of Iran and that of Saudi Arabia. The idea was to enhance their political status so that they would serve as twin pillars of regional security. The US policy was based on the premise that close collaboration with Iran and Saudi Arabia was possible, because of their fear of Soviet Communism and their desire to contain the pro-Soviet drift in the Arab world especially in Iraq. The high point of that policy was reached when President Nixon and Henry Kissinger made the decision to gratify the Shah's desire for an expeditious military build up through massive US arms transfers to Iran.<sup>19</sup>

According to Henry Kissinger, "America's friendship with Iran reflected geo-political realities".<sup>20</sup> Because Iran is a landbridge between USSR and Middle East with fifty million people, a number almost twice that of all Persian Gulf countries put together, sharing 1,600 mile border with Soviet Union in the north. It is also a nation of special geo-strategic importance to the US as eighty percent of oil exported from the Middle East must pass through the two mile wide strait of Hormuz, policed by Iran's navy and air force. It being at the head of the Persian Gulf and stretching along its northern and eastern shores has always served as a barrier against Russian

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19. Henry Kissinger, Years of Upheaval (New Delhi, 1981), pp.524, 669.

20. Ibid, p.667.

ambitions toward the Indian Ocean and also acted as a buffer between the Soviet Union and other oil rich Arab states - all of which have fragile social and political structures. Thus the American interests were not confined to the Shah or even with the oil that Iran produces but were much more broader.

Apart from its strategic importance, the US had enormous economic stakes in Iran. Shortly after the British withdrawal from the Gulf, the US started to consolidate its commercial relations with Gulf states through government to government approach by extending American diplomatic presence in Iran and lower Gulf states. On 4 November 1973, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Commerce for International Commerce Marinus- Van Gessel called Iran a "special case". America viewed Iran as a significant power with ample human resources, wide variety of recoverable mineral deposits and strong foreign exchange position. At the same time, it was regarded that Iran was the main trade partner of the US in the Gulf. America had a huge volume of bilateral trade with Iran. In 1971 the total volume of US exports to both Iran and Saudi Arabia together constituted 80 percent of the total US exports to the Gulf states and in 1977 nearly six years later the proportion was 79 percent, almost the same. During the period from 1971 to 1977 US exports and imports to Iran rose from \$ 481.5 million in 1971 to \$ 2730.8 million in 1977. Although there were fluctuations, on the whole, the figures for US exports to Iran were higher than those for Saudi Arabia. It is clear

from Marinus Van Gessel's statement that Saudi Arabia did not occupy as much of 'special' position in US foreign policy as Iran. This US preference of Iran over Saudi Arabia was consistent within the broader framework of 'twin pillar' policy. The policy itself was primarily aimed at consolidating US relations with Iran than with Saudi Arabia.<sup>21</sup>

Meanwhile the Shah who had an unlimited appetite for sophisticated weapons, requested for the \$ 100 millions worth new weapon systems in 1969. This happened at a time when the US through the adoption of twin pillar policy was ready to meet Iranian demands for sophisticated weapons to protect American and Western interests in the Persian Gulf. According to an observer: "

It was the convergence between the Shah's emphasis on the qualitative aspects of Iranian armament, his enhanced financial position that enabled him to exert pressure on the US for the supply of weapons, and the US willingness to meet Iranian demands that led to the burgeoning of arms sales to Iran and the associated expansion in the size of the American military personnel there.<sup>22</sup>

These developments were noticeable between 1972 and 1976 and as a result of Nixon's visit to Iran on 30-31 May 1972. In his 1972 Iran visit President Nixon guaranteed the Shah an easy access to most sophisticated non-nuclear weapon systems. The Shah, in turn agreed to accept principal role

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21. Hussein Sirriyeh, US Policy in the Gulf 1968-1977: Aftermath of British Withdrawal (London, 1984), pp.249-51, 253-5.

22. Ibid, p.91.

in protecting Western interests in the Persian Gulf  
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 region.

Subsequently the Nixon Administration's decision to sell F-14 or F-15 aircraft and associated equipment to Iran had met with opposition from Defence and State departments. The Defense Department was reluctant to hand over technologically advanced weapon systems to Iran. At the same time State Department argued that the sale was provocative. "But Nixon overrode the objections and added a proviso that  
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 in future Iranian requests should not be second guessed". This 1972 decision to exempt arms sales orders by Iran from careful review and scrutiny by the Department of State and Defense had important consequences for US military assistance programmes in Iran. Because it generated an intensive American arms sales campaign in Iran, in which both government agencies; different services of the US armed forces and private contractors were involved. They made concrete efforts to stimulate Iran's request for more arms sales. This arms sales campaign was set in motion at a time when the Shah of Iran was attempting to expand the Iranian armament programme and accelerated his demand for more sophisticated weapons. Convergence of Shah's demand and President Nixon's willingness to meet them were two main factors that led to the acceleration of arms build up in  
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 Iran.

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23. Sick, n.4, p.13.

24. Kissinger, n.18, p.1264.

25. Sirriyah, n.21, pp.93-94.

Shah reciprocated to Nixon Administration's generous arms sales policies towards Iran by supporting every US moves in the region. Henry Kissinger has testified Shah's goodwill towards the United States in his memoirs. Kissinger wrote :

Iran's influence was always on our own side, its resources reinforced ours even in some distant enterprises in aiding South Vietnam at the time of the 1973 Paris Agreement, helping Western Europe in its economic crisis in the 1970s, supporting moderates in Africa against Soviet-Cuban encroachment, supporting President Sadat in the later Middle East diplomacy. In the 1973 Middle East war, for example Iran was the only country bordering the Soviet Union not to permit the Soviet's use of its air space in contrast to several NATO allies. The Shah absorbed the energies of radical Arab neighbourers to prevent them from threatening the moderate regimes in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and the Persian Gulf. He refueled our fleets without question. He never joined any oil embargo against the West or Israel. Iran under the Shah in short was one of America's best, most important and most loyal friends in the world.(26)

Kissinger's glowing tribute underlines the truth that Nixon and his chief foreign policy architect Kissinger were using the Shah of Iran to serve US policy objectives. This itself was slowly destroying the credibility of the Shah as he was increasingly viewed as a pliant tool of the Americans. One of the two foreign policy pillars was thus being gradually eroded. The same fact was discovered by the President Jimmy Carter's special Adviser on Iranian crisis, George Ball. According to him, it was one of the major reasons for American debacle in Iran in 1979. He also wrote:

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26. Kissinger, n.18, p.1262.

Meanwhile he [the Shah] made himself useful to a succession of United States governments - performing such unpopular chores, at our request, as selling oil to Israel. It was no wonder that American officials believed - because they found convenient to believe -- that his regime was in no danger.(27)

On the other hand by serving the American interests with a view to get more arms from the United States the Shah alienated his own people. Public resentment in Iran against American involvement in Iran's internal and external affairs was growing at a very fast pace.

Subsequently, Ford Administration also blindly followed Nixon Administration's Iranian policy by extending unquestionable military support to the Shah, without any policy review or analysis of the Iranian situation. An observer has rightly remarked that, such an

...unquestioning support for the Shah did not constitute aberrant behaviour in regard to US-Iranian relations but was merely the logical extension of the way that those relations had been developing since 1948. Worn down by decades of conflict with the Shah's regime, the US bureaucracy has been forced to rationalise its acquiescence to Iranian diktat in the same inflated terms that the Shah himself had used to justify increased aid to Iran in the early stages of relationship. What had been unacceptable then had been made acceptable by the attrition of decades of applied leverage, assisted by what has been termed the inertia quality of the 'curator mentality' with the US Department of State and by the presidential seal of approval that was the Nixon Doctrine. What had been the 'Iranian problem' during the Truman, Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations had by 1969, been transformed into an 'alliance and partnership' which precluded even constructive criticism.(28)

The most remarkable feature of this development was

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27. George W. Ball, The Past has Another Pattern : Memoirs (New York, 1982), p.456.

28. Carr, n.12, p.77.

that the US lost its control and initiative on its own Iranian policy and started to subscribe Shah's national security and defence policies as the basic concepts for the US policy towards Iran. This then was the background of US' Iranian policy before 1977.

In January 1977, President Jimmy Carter, an ardent advocate of human rights and arms control-the two most controversial issues in US-Iranian relations, entered the White House. Like his predecessors, he was also committed to protect America's special strategic relationship with Iran at all costs. His administration also considered Iran as a major military power for stability in the Persian Gulf and a moderating force in the pricing of petroleum. He has stated this fact in his memoirs:

I continued, as other presidents had before me to consider the Shah a strong ally. I appreciated his ability to maintain good relations with Egypt and Saudi Arabia, and his willingness to provide Israel with oil in spite of the Arab boycott. (29)

The factors which determined the direction of Carter Administration's policy towards Iran were the legacy of his predecessors, especially Nixon and Ford Administrations. Like other presidents Carter and his advisers were reluctant to commit the US forces in the foreign lands in pursuit of foreign policy goals. Therefore, it supported Iran as the keeper of peace in the Gulf region and continued the policy

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29. Jimmy Carter, Keeping Faith : Memoirs of a President (New York, 1982), p.435.



of supporting the Shah to maintain stability and security in the Gulf by endorsing arms sales to Iran.

President Carter's foreign policy team of Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, National Security Adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and Defence Secretary, Harold Brown recognized the Shah, because his policies directly benefited the US. Vance himself has listed five important services rendered by the Shah: (i) he provided substantial economic assistance to the countries in the area; (ii) helped reduce tensions in South West Asia; (iii) helped to defeat an insurgency in Oman; (iv) was "a reliable supplier of oil to the West"; he had in fact refused to join the 1973 Arab oil embargo; and (v) was Israel's primary source of oil. Thus "we decided early on that it was in our national interest to support the Shah so he could continue to play a constructive role in regional affairs."<sup>30</sup>

According to one source a few carrier service officials in the Carter Administration questioned American policy towards Iran on tactical ground. However, most of the top officials like National Security Adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, US Ambassador to Iran, William H. Sullivan, Assistant Secretary of State for Middle East and South Asian Affairs, Alfred Atherton, and the Director of the Office of Iranian Affairs, Henry Precht who had for long approved and

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30. Cyrus Vance, Hard Choices : Critical Years in American Foreign Policy (New York, 1983), p.317.

implemented the approaches inherent in the Nixon doctrine. It would be unrealistic to expect that they would have advocated a change simply because of a change in the administration. This was more so because Carter did not come to the office with fresh ideas on policy towards Iran. No change appeared to them to be on the horizon and a review was not even considered necessary. An observer has remarked that "Both sides of the debate focused on the international aspects of the United States-Iranian relations and not on Iran's domestic problem".<sup>32</sup> In this policy debate advocates of large scale arms sales to Iran won. Their trump card was the argument that denial of weapons would be a risky vote of non-confidence in the Shah's leadership at a time America needed Iran's help. Strengthening of Shah's regime also implied predominant position of American interest in the Persian Gulf.

This concept of excessively strong Shah was reflected in the 1977 CIA study which concluded with the statement that "the shah will be an active participant in Iranian life well in 1980s" and that "there will be no radical change in Iranian political behaviour in the near future". Subsequently on various occasions; on 31 December 1977, 30

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31. Barry Rubin, Paved with Good Intentions : The American Experience and Iran (New York, 1980), pp.190, 197. But no information is available as to who these officials were and on what grounds they disagreed and furthermore what policy options they advocated to overcome the crisis.

32. Ibid, p.192.

November and 12 December 1978 President Carter gave statement which encapsulated the CIA's assessment of the Shah and Iran. He asserted that Iran was an island of stability. On June 16, 1979 when Shah fled from Iran, Carter noted ruefully "I think that the rapid change of affairs in Iran has not been predicted by anyone so far as I know".<sup>33</sup> The confession only showed that his administration was extremely confused and did not have any understanding of the development taking place in Iran.

President Carter was uninformed and US officials were ignorant of Iranian politics. The reasons for the profound misunderstanding of the CIA were that over the years it was pre-occupied with the Soviet threat. The Soviet centric mind-set that pervaded the American official approach to Iran, relied heavily on the information obtained from SAVAK, the Shah's intelligence apparatus; like the Department of State, the SAVAK lacked contacts with the religious leaders, other social and informal groups. This American intelligence failure cut across agencies, offices,<sup>34</sup> ambassadors and missions.

This misinformation and mis-judgement about an excessively strong Shah resulted in the continuation of arms sales policies toward Iran. In May 1977 Secretary Cyrus

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33. Quoted in James A. Bill, "US Foreign Policy and Iran : A System of Reinforced Failure," in David P. Forsythe, ed., American Foreign Policy in a Uncertain World (Lincoln, 1984), p.4. And also see American Foreign Policy Basic Documents 1977-1980, (Washington, 1980), p.723.

34. Bill, n.2. pp.402-3.



Vance visited Tehran to appraise US' full-fledged support to the Shah. Vance also reassured that Carter Administration would honour all existing prior arms sales commitments to Iran and even prepared to offer AWACS weapon system to Iran.

Apart from this President Carter informed William H. Sullivan, U.S. Ambassador to Iran in May 1977, that

...he had no objections to selling nuclear power plants to Iran, provided that Iran agreed to appropriate safeguards, particularly on the disposition of spent fuel. Carter confirmed the continued importance to the United States' access to intelligence on the USSR acquired in Iran, and he reiterated his view of the importance of a secure and stable Iran for US strategic interests in the Persian Gulf. [Later] These essential elements of US policy were relayed to the Shah by Sullivan when he arrived in Iran in June. (36)

Subsequently, during President Carter's two day Tehran visit on 31 December 1977 and 1 January 1978, Shah demanded more than \$ 10 billion worth of arms for Iran. Secretary of State Vance wrote :

It soon became clear that most of the military and foreign policy professionals, both in the State Department and the NSC staff were strongly opposed to questioning the Shah's military equipment requests. Despite this resistance, an excellent analysis of Iran's security situation and defense needs was completed under the direction of Lesile Gelb and his staff in the State Departments' Politico-Military Bureau (PM). I had hoped this study could become the basis for an objective American evaluation of the Shah's requests, and the future arms sales decisions could be made in the light of our-own assessment of defence needs. As it was entirely dependent on the Shah's unilateral judgements about his force requirements. There was little agreement, though even within State Department, on how to proceed. Everyone

35. Vance, n.30, pp.317-18.

36. Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, Answer to History (New York, 1980), p.72, cited in Sick, n.4, p.25.

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accepted the need to manage sales more rationally, but there was no consensus on how to respond to the Shah's December requests or how to structure the mechanism for US-Iranian consultations. ...Yet most believed it would be very difficult for us to tell the Shah his own military needs were.(37)

It can be thus seen that the Carter Administration not only followed the preceding administration's arms sales policies but also encouraged and expanded it for the same reasons for which the Nixon Administration had approved the first increment. The statement of Vance also pointed out that within the foreign policy establishment the Shah was slowly building a pro-Pahlavite lobby. The US had positioned itself in such a way that it had become completely dependent on Shah's national security judgements. By repeating the same past mistakes the Carter Administration lost its control over its own Iranian policy. By offering nuclear power plants to Iran, Carter added a new dimension to arms sales programmes.

Since 1953 when it brought back Shah through its policies of supporting the Shah, the US continuously increased its influence in Iran to levels highly reminiscent of the colonial era. Meanwhile public resentment against American interference in Iran's internal and external matters was growing rapidly, neither the Shah nor the America could contain it. The excessive military sales became a target of religious and political opposition to the Shah's regime, which symbolized the military and political commitments to the Americans for its survival. Disastrous

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37. Vance, n.30, p.323. Emphasis added.

the US encouragement to the Shah to overload his country with inappropriate military burden ended in financial pressures that caused unemployment, disaffection and political repression which manifested through social, political, economic and historical forces.<sup>38</sup>

The most powerful opposition group was Shi'iate religious leaders under exiled Muslim cleric Ayatollah Rouhalloh Khomeini who resented the erosion of their authority as a result of modernization and secularization movement known as White Revolution. Allied with them were Bazar leaders, merchants and entrepreneurs of a more traditional type who were bypassed in a modern economic development in the 1970s by the new breed of businessmen and technocrats, these two groups together had the highest mass support. The third group consisted of discontented intelligentsia who cultivated liberal democratic ideas and clamoured for political participation and return to constitutionalism. It was secular in orientation and carried with it the legacy of nationalism. The fourth group was composed of various ideological left parties and radical groups, committed to the class struggle principle.<sup>39</sup> The coalescing of all these forces created a very explosive situation in Iranian body politic, and also generated an

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38. For a brief account of divergent social forces that coalesced to give rise to the Iranian revolution, see "Iran : The New Crisis of American Hegemony," Monthly Review (New York), vol.30, no.9 (February 1979), pp.1-24.

39. Lenczowski, n.9, pp.804-5.

anti American sentiment among Iranians by identifying America with the Shah.

US officials in Iran were slow to recognize the hidden crisis, by November 1978, US Ambassador Sullivan was trying to communicate the grave Iranian situation to Washington. But Sullivan found his messages were ignored in Washington. Not only had NSC adviser Zingniew Brzezinski and his NSC staff, but Secretary of State Vance himself refused to believe that the Shah was in serious trouble, because of Sullivan's early confidence in the Shah's ability to control the Iranian situation and late conversion into inability of the Shah, eroded the credibility of embassy reporting. It was symptomatic of the misunderstanding and lack of communication that henceforth marked Carter's Iranian policy.

Another factor that contributed to the failure of the US to anticipate developments in Iran was Secretary Vance and his departments's preoccupation with promoting democracy in Iran. The government was stable and helped in the attainment of US foreign policy objective. The time, as Vance says, was ripe for making the regime more democratic. But the hidden crisis was about to explode the entire fabric of Iranian society. Once it happened the US became concerned with the problem of the safe evacuation of the Americans who were trapped in the fire of revolution. While

the catastrophic developments from the point of view of the US were taking place, the various segments of foreign policy bureaucracy were engaged in their puerile game of one-upmanship. Particularly acrimonious was the tussle between Vance and Brzezinski for control over foreign policy.<sup>41</sup>

Contrary to it National Security Council led by Brzezinski consistently argued that only effective military actions could restore peace and order in Iran.<sup>42</sup> He had set up his own channel of communication through NSC officials, Gary Sick and General Robert E. Huyser. Huyser arrived in Iran on January 4, 1979 to prepare the Iranian military to carry out a coup d'etat. According to Huyser, "If that government (Bakhtiar) collapsed, then at exactly the right moment, I was to see that military took action".<sup>43</sup>

Carter's special adviser on Iranian affairs George Ball criticised Brzezinski, Ball has put on record

He was operating in a free wheeling manner, calling in foreign ambassadors, telephoning or sending telegrams to foreign dignitaries outside the State Department channels and even hiring a press adviser so he could compete with the Secretary of State as the enunciator of United States policy.<sup>44</sup>

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41. Zbigniew Brzezinski, Power and Principle : Memoirs of National Security Adviser, 1977-1981 (London, 1983), p.355.
42. Ibid, p.394.
43. Robert E.Huyser, Mission to Tehran (New York, 1986), p.88. The interim Iranian Government installed by the Shah on December 30, 1978 was then led by Shapour Bakhtiar. He remained as Prime Minister for five weeks after which he fled to France.
44. Ball, n.27, pp.457-8.



As different and inconsistent policy options were being pursued, by the end of December 1978 US policy towards Iran was in a complete muddle. The Shah has mentioned in his memoirs, that "The messages I received from the United States while all this was going on continued to be confusing and contracdictory."<sup>45</sup>

In the midst of Iranian uprising against monarchy and US' Iranian foreign policy chaos, on 16 January 1979 Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi left Iran as a crumbled pillar of American policy in the Persian Gulf region. After his downfall, US started its search for new relationship with the post-revolutionary governments in Iran. Department of State instantly developed a policy which attached much importance on moderate leaders who quickly moved in to position of Power after the Shah's overthrow.<sup>46</sup> The US officials proceeded to develop a direct contact with the moderates and encouraged them.

Many Iranian revolutionaries and radical religious groups such as, Mujahidin-i-Khalq, Fidayan-i-Khalq and Islamic Republican Party watched this mutual embrace with growing concern and found that Americans were again active, that US officials were trying to establish contacts with Western educated moderates. The groups most concerned about

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45. Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, Answer to History (New York, 1980), pp.164-5, quoted in Sick, n.4, p.73.

46. Vance, n.30, p.360.

these developments were radical left and religious right with whom US had no contacts. The earlier attempts of the State Department emissary, Theodore Eliot to contact radical religious leader Ayatollah Khomeini was blocked by Brzezinski. According to George Ball "Any approach to Khomeini was vetoed by [the President] presumably on  
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Brzezinski's advice.

Besides US' alienation from radical religious groups and its realliance with Western educated moderates were the most serious policy miscalculation of the Carter Administration. It resulted in the overthrow, first of the moderate government of Shahpour Bakhtiar and then of Mehdi Bazargan in 1979. The subsequent capture of American diplomatic officials as hostages on 4 November 1979 by religious radicals was an attempt to consolidate their power in post-revolutionary Iran against American backed moderate groups. The collaboration of American officials with moderates reinforced past mistakes of misjudged policies into post-revolutionary Iran which brought about the beginning of another crisis.

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47. Ball, n.25, p.462. And also see William H.Sullivan, "Dateline Iran : The Road Not Taken," Foreign Policy (Washington, D.C.), no.40 (Fall 1980), pp. 175-86.

## Chapter II

### THE BEGINNING OF THE CRISIS

To observers from outside the Iranian political scene had been deeply confusing and in a state of explosive flux since the Iranian revolution in 1979. Hundreds of political and religious groups were competing for gaining control over the political system. And strong undercurrents of anti-Americanism was present everywhere in Iran because of United States' close association for thirty years with Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. Ever since the revolution, US relations with Iranian-government was badly strained because of this. Importantly, US was illinformed about internal dynamics of the revolutionary Iranian politics. In an attempt to find out a new relation with revolutionary Iran, US was trying to develop a policy that was fashioned in Washington's foreign policy institutions inhabited by powerful American Pahlavi supporters, which placed its faith in a policy of cautious support and increased contacts with Iranian moderate political forces. This turned out to be a most serious policy miscalculation, since US preoccupation with the Iranian moderates ended in the beginning of the hostage crisis.

Immediately after the revolution, U.S. started to seek a new relationship with revolutionary regime. This attitude was based on the premise that whatever government might be in Tehran, Iran would remain important for the US and her Western allies because of its oil resources and geo-

strategic location.

Although it was primarily the Department of State that developed this policy, other foreign policy establishments such as National Security Council and White House also endorsed it without questioning the basis of the new Iranian policy. It was actually the result of the Iranian revolution. During the pre-revolutionary period American policy was mainly shaped by the NSC and White House staff. But the failure of this policy gave a freehand to the Department of State which could carry out its work without any undue interference from the NSC and the White House.<sup>1</sup>

In order to maintain contact and keep a channel of communication with the government in Tehran open, the United States maintained diplomatic mission with reduced number of officials. U.S. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance stated in his memoirs that "Their duties were to maintain contact with new government and provide Washington with current analysis of the bitter political struggle for control of the revolution."<sup>2</sup>

In the eyes of the US policy makers, Iranian moderates were individual political leaders of liberal democratic persuasion which mostly coincided with American political philosophy. Most of the moderate leaders who emerged in the immediate post-Shah Iran were culturally, politically and

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1. James A. Bill, The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations (New Haven, 1988), p.278.
  2. Cyrus Vance, Hard Choices : Critical Years in America's Foreign Policy (New York, 1983), p.368.

educationally Western oriented sympathizers. Leaders like Shapour Bakhtiar, Mehdi Bazargan, Abol Hassan Bani Sadr, Amir Abbas Entezam, Ibrahim Yazdi, Sadeq Ghotbzadeh, Karim Sanjabi. They carried with them impressive credentials of their struggle against the Pahlavi regime. Furthermore, the US had established direct contact with these individuals, and US embassy officials in Tehran had held many meetings with them during the late months of 1978. Unlike extremist religious leaders, they were easily approachable and told the government where they were obliged to deal with American officials.<sup>3</sup>

Carter Administration's decision to work with moderates had important foreign policy implications. It also carried with it the danger of easily being misunderstood by the rivals of the moderates. Establishing relations with new Iranian government was priority, as was the resumption of the interrupted oil flow to the West. Cyrus Vance has noted that "Our limited aims were to maintain access to Iranian oil and to gradually develop improved relations with the new government".<sup>4</sup> There was also concern that the Khomeini government might collapse and be followed by a regional splintering nation, a situation suited for exploitation by the Soviet Union. This political misunderstanding confirmed US faith in the moderate government of Iranian Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan, who assumed the office on February

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3. Bill, n.1, pp.278-9.

4. Vance, n.2, p.368.

5, 1979 with the support of Ayatollah Khomeini, Shi'is Muslim extremist religious leader. It resulted in US further increasing support to moderate political forces rather than opening up to religious leadership who held the real power. According to Vance :

A number of common interests gave us a basis for developing contacts with some parts of the government. Businessmen needed to return to Iran to pick up interrupted work and both governments wished to scale and sort out the residue of huge military purchase programme. Also hundreds of Iranian students wanted to return to the United States to continue their studies. (5)

By reintroducing Nixon-Kissinger policy premise of identity of interests and identifying it with moderate regimes American policy makers were reintroducing the past pattern of Iranian policy mistakes into new US-Iranian relations. Some US officials, especially the then Charge'd Affairs Charles Naas, in April and May 1979, expressed alarm at the obvious US interaction with moderate political forces<sup>6</sup> alonge and ignoring of the Iranian religious groups.

Despite this warning, US officials were trying to stabililize relations with the Bazargan government. In August 1979 US agreed to resume the limited supply of spare parts for the American made military equipments and also exchanged intelligence with members of the Bazargan government. Subsequently on 2 October, Iranian Foreign Minister, Ibrahim Yazdi met US Secretary of State Cyrus

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5. Ibid, p.368.

6. Bill, n.1, p.281.

Vance and later with other American officials in New York as part of the continuing efforts to sort out the residue of the military supply relationship.<sup>7</sup> According to the then US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, Harold H. Saunders, "In Tehran, the embassy was in touch with most of the important secular officials in the new revolutionary government as well as with some of the key religious figures".<sup>8</sup>

Despite its new, active political presence in Iran US failed to establish any meaningful relationships with the major extremist religious leaders. Even their contacts with the tame religious leaders, such as Ayatollah Shariatmandari were tenuous. This was because leading members of the Ulama were unenthusiastic about contact with Americans in the absence of any US-Khomeini relations. In fact it was the United States that was isolating itself from Ayatollah Khomeini. It was clear from the Assistant Secretary Harold Saunders memorandum entitled "Policy Towards Iran" to Secretary Cyrus Vance, on September 5, 1979. Saunders summarised the US attitude towards various Iranian political groups in the following words :

- We have had no direct contact with the man who remains the strongest political leader in Iran. His hostility towards us is unlikely to abate significantly, although there have been fewer venomous statements against us recently...

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7. Vance, n.2, pp. 368, 371.

8. Harold H.Saunders, "The Crisis Begins" in Warren Christopher and others, American Hostages in Iran: The Conduct of a Crisis, (New Haven, 1985), p.55.

- A meeting with Khomeini will signal our definite acceptance of the revolution and could ease somewhat his suspicions of us...

- On the other hand, we would risk appearing to cave into a man who hates us and who is strongly deprecated here and by Westernised Iranians. Thus we would want to be careful not to appear to embrace Khomeini and the clerics at the expense of our secular friends...

-The symbolism of a call on Khomeini would not attach to visits to the other religious leaders, but they will not see us until we have seen him. We badly need contacts with Taleghani, Shariatmadari, and other moderate clerics. We want to reassure them of our acceptance of the revolution as their influence may rise in the months ahead.(9)

After the revolution the US had no contacts with Khomeini, there had been no strong statements in support of revolution, no willingness to admit possible past foreign policy errors and no willingness to consider extradition of political criminals or repatriation of Pahlavi funds. There was also no serious attempt to cooperate with the real leadership of the Iranian revolution. Many Iranian revolutionaries were watching with concern that U.S. officials were allying with Western educated moderates. The US failure to endorse Iranian revolution deepened the doubt about US intentions in Iranian revolutionary leaders. The groups most concerned against US presence were the radical left and the extremist religious right, with whom US had little support. Besides alienating the extremists, the US was disturbing the very group of moderates whom the American decision makers hoped to court and strengthen politically.

9. Harold H.Saunders to Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, "Policy towards Iran" Sept 5, 1979 (Asnad, 16:72), quoted in Bill, n.1, pp.281-2.

10. Ibid, pp.280, 282-3.



Meanwhile on 16 January 1979 the Shah left Iran. Eventhough Carter Administration agreed to welcome him to the US, he chose to stay in Egypt as the guest of the President Anwar Sadat and then King Hassan of Morocco. He believed that his chances of returning to power would be great if he was in Middle East. It could help him to follow events in Iran more closely. In addition he wanted to avoide fleeing to America which could create an allegation from enemies that he was a US puppet. But in March President Sadat and then King Hassan urged him to leave their country respectively. Then the Shah began to express his desire to come to the US. By then the top foreign policy officials in State Department, Secretary Vance, Assistant Secretary Warran Christopher and Under Secretary David Newsom felt that Shah's admission would complicate the process of improving relations with post-Shah regime and that it would pose a threat to the safety of Americans in Iran.<sup>11</sup>

Their views were strongly contested by influential friends of the Shah in the US like David Rockefeller, Howard Baker, Gerald Ford and Henry Kissinger, who wanted to bring the Shah to the US. President Carter resisted it on the ground that it would endanger American lives in Iran. According to Rosalynn Carter, "...the pressure on Jimmy to bring the Shah to our country mounted, mostly from people

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11. Zbigniew Brzezinski, Power and Principle : Memoirs of the National Security Adviser 1977-1981 (London, 1983), pp.472-73.

who were trying to protect financial investments or who felt indebted to him for being such a good friend of the the United States."<sup>12</sup>

One of the most influential American Pahlavite and a financial power in the United States, David Rockefeller, was the chairman of the Chase Manhattan Bank and was also a close friend of the Shah of Iran. Rockefeller groups had a long history of financial interest in Iran. Chase Manhattan Bank itself established a thirty-five percent interest in Iran International Bank, created in 1974. The Bank was the recipient of huge deposits made by the National Oil Company. According to one researcher,

The Shah ordered that all his government's major operating accounts be held at Chase and that letters of credit for the purchase of oil be handled exclusively through Chase. The bank also became the agent and lead manager for many of the loans to Iran. In short, Iran became the crown jewel of Chase's international banking portfolio.(13)

Rockefeller was strongly backed by Henry Kissinger, Secretary of State for Presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford. Kissinger, like John J. McCloy, a lawyer diplomat, was also a personal protege and confidant of Rockefellers. These private Pahlavites were waging a constant campaign for the Shah's admission to the US.

The main thrust of the campaign continued to center on personal appeals to key decision makers to press for the

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12. Rosalynn Carter, First Lady from Plains (Boston, 1984), p.308.

13. Mark Hulbert, Interlock (New York, 1982), p.85.

Shah's admission. John McCloy and Henry Kissinger lobbied the Secretary of State incessantly in favour of the Shah. McCloy inundated Vance with pro-Shah letters. Vance subsequently wrote: "John is a very prolific letter writer. The morning mail often contained something from him about the Shah".<sup>14</sup> In the meantime Kissinger himself admitted that "...he made...five approaches to Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and other officials on Shah's behalf..."<sup>15</sup>

The Rockefeller-Kissinger-McCloy pressure in favour of the Shah became troublesome to President Carter and Secretary Vance because within the administration National Security Adviser Zibingnew Brzezinski was propagating Shah's cause in association with Rockefeller-Kissinger group. Brzezinski was a hard-line, American Pahlavite and staunch advocate for Shah's admission to the US. According to Brzezinski, "I felt throughout that we should simply not permit the issue to arise. This was a matter of both principle and tactics. I felt strongly that at stake were our traditional commitment to asylum and our loyalty to a friend."<sup>16</sup> On several occasions President Carter himself expressed his displeasure against Brzezinski's pressure on him in association with leading American Pahlavities. Brzezinski has recorded, "The President noted that

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14. Quoted in Terence Smith, "Why Carter Admitted the Shah," New York Times Magazine (New York), 17 May 1981, p.44

15. Newsweek (New York), 10 December, 1979.

16. Brzezinski, n.11, p.472

Kissinger, Rockefeller, and McCloy had been waging a constant campaign on the subject that "Zbig bugged me on it every day"<sup>17</sup>. Meanwhile, on 9 April 1979 David Rockefeller had met with President and had made his futile plea for the Shah. According to Rockefeller, "I got the impression the President did not want to hear about it."<sup>18</sup> When all their personal confrontation with Carter Administration failed,<sup>19</sup> Kissinger threatened "to go public". According to Brezinski "Kissinger in his subtle fashion linked his willingness to support us on SALT to a more forthcoming attitude on our part regarding the Shah".<sup>20</sup>

It made Kissinger's intervention particularly sensitive, because the administration was completing the second Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) with Soviet Union, and preparing for what it expected to be the biggest political battle of Carter's term. The President knew that Kissinger's position would influence the outcome of the ratification debate in the Senate.

By this time many of the Carter's top advisers such as Vice-President Walter F. Mondale and White House Chief of Staff Hamilton Jordan, started to favour the Shah. Jordan argued, "Mr. President, if the Shah dies in Mexico, can you imagine the field day Kissinger will have with that? He 'll

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17. Ibid, p.474.

18. Quoted in Smith, n.14, p.42.

19. Ibid.

20. Brzezinski, n.11, p.474.

say that first you caused the Shah's downfall and now you've killed him".<sup>21</sup> It was the political calculation that compelled many of the top foreign policy makers, especially in the white House staff to change their position in favour of the Shah's admission. For them failure to admit the Shah could have had a strong adverse effect on Carter's chances for re-election in 1980. Hamilton Jordan, Jody Powell and Rosalynn Carter were influenced by this dimension.

The Shah who was staying in his new temporary home in Bahamas was desperately trying to find out a permanent asylum. None of his European allies were willing to admit him because of their dependence on Iranian oil and fear about possible reaction of Iranian revolutionary government. Subsequently on 10 June 1979, with the help of Henry Kissinger, Shah found a new asylum in Mexico.<sup>22</sup> Eight days after his arrival in Mexico, on 18 October 1979, David Rockefeller's staff reported to the State Department that the Shah's condition was worsening and his illness, cancer could not be properly diagnosed and treated in Mexico. They wanted to bring him immediately to Sloan-Kettering Hospital in New York. On 20 October 1979, Department of State, after receiving reports from State Department medical director Dr. Eben Dustin who examined the Shah in Mexico, and US' Iranian embassy charge d' Affaires Bruce Laingen who in

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21. Hamilton Jordan, Crisis : The Last Year of the Carter Presidency (London, 1982), p.31.

22. William Shawcross, The Shah's Last Ride (London, 1989), p.228.

consultation with Iranian Prime Minister Bazargan and Foreign Minister Yazdi, confirmed that Iranian government's ability to protect US embassy in Iran, recommended to President Carter that the Shah would have to be admitted for humanitarian reasons. According to Secretary of State Cyrus Vance "...we were faced squarely with a decision in which common decency and humanity had to be weighed against possible harm to our embassy personnel in Tehran."<sup>23</sup> Subsequently on 22 October 1979, president Carter approved the Shah's entry into the US for medical treatment.

This momentous decision led directly to a new era in Iranian-American relations—an era dominated by extremism, distrust, hatred and violence. Carter later described the circumstances surrounding his decision; "I was told that New York was the only medical facility that was capable of possibly saving his life and reminded that Iranian officials had promised to protect our people in Iran. When all circumstances were described to me I agreed."<sup>24</sup> An examination of various facts proves that Carter's decision was not merely a spontaneous response to a medical emergency. But calculatedly Carter was misinformed about what Dr. Benjamin H. Kean, Shah's medical officer in Mexico told to Dr. Eben Dustin, State Department medical director. Later D. Benjamin Kean stated that, it was medically necessary, as the President had been informed, to treat the

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23. Vance, n.2, p.371.

24. Quoted in Smith, n.14, pp.36-37. Emphasis added.

Shah in the US and his advise was that the monarch should be treated promptly, not that he was at the point of death. Furthermore, it would be preferable to have the Shah treated at New York Hospital or elsewhere in the US but that if necessary it could be done in Mexico or virtually anywhere.<sup>25</sup>

It was again confirmed when the State Department later noted "...there were adequate facilities in Western Europe if not in Mexico."<sup>26</sup> It was the unwillingness of the American allies to receive the Shah that compelled the US to admit him to America. Now the US officials concede that the Shah could have been treated in Mexico. They acknowledge that the Shah was admitted to New York Hospital without any extensive independent examination by the US into his medical condition or the medical facilities available to him in Mexico.<sup>27</sup> Apart from these mistakes Carter Administration failed to meet the primary demand of getting the Shah examined by Iranian Physicians. According to Under Secretary David Newsom, "...the State Department then asked Dr.Kean and Dr. Williams to discuss the case with physicians selected by Iranian officials. But arrangement never worked out".<sup>28</sup> It revealed that Carter's decision was

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25. Smith, n.14, pp.37, 46.

26. Shawcross, n.22, p.251.

27. Lawrence K.Altman, "The Shah's Health : A Political Gamble", New York Times Magazine, 17 May 1981, p.48.

28. Ibid, p.50.

thus based in significant measure on misinformation and misinterpretation. There was wide discrepancy between what Carter was told about the Shah's medical state and about the real facts. Thus throughout this stage the President was clearly misguided.

The facts prove that President Carter's decision to admit the Shah to the US was not merely based on humanitarian considerations but involved important political and foreign policy calculations in response to high power pressure mounted on the administration by American Pahlavites. Rockefeller-Kissinger group from outside the administration and the National Security Adviser Zibignew Brzezinski from within. President Carter resisted the Shah's admission to the US for nine months, but finally he surrendered in the face of formidable pressure, genuine humanitarian consideration and political calculations involving forthcoming 1980 Presidential elections. In addition, he had strong faith in Bazargan Government's ability to protect US embassy in Iran because earlier in February 14, 1979, when US embassy was captured by militants, Bazargan government ensured the security of the Americans in the embassy.

Throughout this period Iranian revolutionary groups, the extremist religious right and the radical left were watching the US collaboration with Bazargan's moderate government and other political forces with intense suspicion. The Shah's admission into US reinforced their suspicion that US was planning to reimpose Shah's regime in



Iran. According to an observer "It was in turn aggravated by the reports of the involvement of Henry Kissinger and David Rockefeller in the Shah's admittance to the USA".<sup>29</sup>

Thereafter US senator Henry Jackson's public attack on the Iranian revolution in October and the National Security Adviser Zibigniew Brzezinski's meeting with the Iranian Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan, Foreign Minister Ibrahim Yazdi and Defence Minister Mustafa Alicharmran, on 1 November 1979 in Algiers,<sup>30</sup> was interpreted as an evidence of Bazargan government's collusion with an America that had given refuge to the Shah. According to Henry Precht, State Department Director of Iranian Affairs,

...the one constant theme that obsessed the movement against the Shah, both the leaders of the revolution and the followers, was the fear that the United States would repeat 1953 (when the Shah was restored to his throne) in destroying Iran's revolution. The secular People tried to destroy all connections with us. When we brought the Shah to New York, it fueled those suspicions, which were further sparked by the Brzezinski-Yazdi-Bazargan meeting in Algiers. No government, no force in Iran could support the United States when a question of the Shah was involved.<sup>31</sup>

On 4 November 1979, less than two weeks after the Shah's admission to the US and three days after the Brzezinski-Bazargan meeting in Algiers a group of young extremist Islamic students seized the US embassy in Iran and

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29. Sepeher Zabih, Iran Since the Revolution (London, 1982), p.44.

30. Brzezinski, n.11, p.475.

31. Quoted in Saunders, n.8, p.43.

held sixty six Americans as hostages and demanded that the deposed Shah of Iran, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, be returned to Iran to stand trial. It was the beginning of a crisis lasting 444 days which absorbed the attention of the entire population of both Iran and America. For the Carter Administration it was not just another foreign policy crisis where national interest and honour were involved but also a crisis in which all the American people uniquely were entangled. As far as the Iranians were concerned the take over of the US embassy was not a crisis in Iran's international relations but it was part of a nation wide struggle for control of a genuine domestic revolution. Thus it was the beginning of a unique crisis for both the nations. However, it had different meanings for each of them.

### CHAPTER III

#### ATTEMPTS TO RESOLVE THE CRISIS: INITIAL RESPONSES

In the days immediately following the US embassy take over, Carter Administration started to explore various possibilities to resolve the hostage crisis. It first sought the release of the hostages by sending emissaries to open negotiations with the radicals holding hostages. It sent or tried to send Ramsey Clark and William Miller; Palestine Liberation Organization; United Nations Organization and the White House Chief of Staff, Hamilton Jordan. Simultaneously, it tried to economic, diplomatic, legal and financial pressures against Iran. All these efforts failed because of the hostility of the radical religious revolutionaries who were in actual control. The Carter Administration was, however, in constant contact with moderate Iranian revolutionary government which paved the way for factional fight to gain domination between the secularist and religious factions. An analysis of the administration's initial responses to solve the crisis shows that it was reinforcing its past pattern of mistakes into its future course of action. This in addition to augmenting internal Iranian divisions, prolonged the crisis.

After the take over of the American embassy on November 14, 1979 was reported to the Iranian working Group within the State Department. Its Iranian Crisis Management Team instantly directed the embassy Charge d' Affairs, Bruce Laingen, who was in the Iranian Foreign Ministry Office at

the time of attack with his two colleagues, political counsellor Victor Tomseth and Security Officer Mike Howland, to seek Iranian Government's assistance. The officials in the State Department believed that it could clear up the Iranian-American dispute by dealing with moderate Mehdi Bazargan government. According to President Carter " we were attacks from the embassy compound embassy compound and release our people ... we had a firm pledge from both the Iranian Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister to give our staff and property this protection."<sup>1</sup> Washington accepted Bazargan government as a most accessible route to ensure safety and security of American officials in Iran, but in reality it was a blocked one. When Bruce Laingen demanded Iranian Foreign Minister Ibrahim Yazdi's direct intervention he was told "Then the lives of the people in the embassy were in danger but that is not true now."<sup>2</sup> Yazdi recognized that his government's control was much weaker, and his own political position had been further hurt by his meeting with US National Security Adviser Zibignew Brzezinski in Algeria on November 1, 1979. The militants holding the embassy were opposed to the Bazargan government for its alleged close relations with American Officials. It was true that the new chief of revolutionary government and his ministers

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1. Jimmy Carter, Keeping Faith : Memoirs of a President (New York, 1982), p.457.
  2. Quoted in Harold H.Saunders, "The Crisis Begins" in Warren Christopher and others, American Hostages in Iran : The Conduct of a crisis (New Haven, 1985), p.42.

disapproved the Islamic students occupation of the American embassy and favoured normalization with the US. But it was precisely because of these inclinations that their credibility was low with Ayatollah Khomeini and his adversaries, particularly within the Muslim clergy and other radical religious factions<sup>3</sup>.

Therefore, Prime Minister Bazargan's efforts to defuse the crisis even through somewhat less extremist religious leader like Ayatollah Muhammed Hussein Beheshti did not make much headway when he was approached to intervene in the name of human compassion, Beheshti retorted that "If America believed in humanity, it must hand over this enemy of the people to the Islamic revolutionary court."<sup>4</sup> Ayatollah Khomeini's support to the militants blocked all the efforts of the Bazargan government to get the hostages released. As a result on November 6, 1979, Bazargan government collapsed; power shifted to the Revolutionary Council, a body of clerics, their secular allies and militants who had been acting as the guardian of the revolution.

Bazargan's departure left US officials with virtually no one to talk to in the Iranian government. Disappointed and frustrated, the Carter Administration commenced preparing a contingency plan for possible rescue operation. One by one, various proposals were discarded as impractical or unlikely to succeed without considerable loss of life on

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3. Eric Rouleau, "Khomeini's Iran", Foreign Affairs (New York), vol.59, no.1 (Fall, 1980), p.10.

4. Quoted in Newsweek (New York), 19 November 1979.

both sides. The greatest problem, which seemed at first insurmountable, was the inaccessibility of the American embassy compound. It was more than six hundred miles from the nearest operating aircraft carriers and deep within the heavily populated urban centre of Tehran. Although, the US had the ground plans of the embassy, there was no precise information about the place where the hostages were being held exactly, because the US did not have any substantial communication channel with Iran since the seizure of the embassy. According to one source,

The Carter Administration was left to analyse reports of journalists as its major source of information. Even that source was drastically cut back early in 1980 when the Khomeini government ordered all us journalists to leave Iran by January 18 [1980]5

After receiving a pessimistic assessment on November 6, 1979 from the Joint Chiefs of Staff the idea of a rescue attempt was shelved. The fear that US military action would only stimulate the Shi'ite fervor for martyrdom, was one of the major reasons behind an early decision to use patient diplomacy and intense international pressure than force. Meanwhile on November 12, 1979, the newly appointed "Over Seer" at the Iranian Foreign Ministry, Abol Hassan Bani Sadr announced a new set of conditions for the release of the hostages. These were:

- (1). The admission by the United States that the Property and the fortune of the Shah were stolen.
- (2). Promise to refrain from further intervention.

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5. Historical Documents of 1979 (Washington, D.C, 1980), p.869.

(3). Extradite the Shah to Iran for trial.

under these conditions it was extremely difficult for the Carter Administration to formulate a new strategy because it needed to bring back American hostages alive while protecting national interest and honour. It felt that it was not desirable to return the Shah to Iran or offer any apology for past American policies or actions or permit the hostages to be tried. President Carter had clearly stated on 7 December 1979 that

The most important single message I can give you is this. As far as I am concerned, as far as our nation is concerned, there is one issue and that is the early and safe release of the American hostages from their captors in Tehran. And its impotant for us to realize that from the very first hour of the captivity of our hostages by a mob, who is indistinguishable from the Government itself, that has been our purpose. 7

The most fundamental and intriguing ddecision for the President was the setting of Amercian priorities in the negotiations, how to balance the safety of American hostages against the foreign policy interests of the nation. He vacillated between tough and conciliatory approaches towards Iran. When Iran threatened the United States on November 20 to put the hostages on trial on spy charges, Carter threatened to retaliate by taking military action. On November 28, Carter warned the Iranian government that it "must recognize the gravity of the situation which it has

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6. Peter Constable, "US Measures to Isolate Iran", Department of State Bulletin (Washington, D.C.), vol.80, no.2040 (July 1980), p.71.
  7. Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States : Jimmy Carter 1979 (Washington, D.C., 1980), Book 2, p.2205.

itself created, and the grave consequences which will result if harm comes to any of the hostages." <sup>8</sup> The warning served its purpose; hostages were not put on trial. The statement also made it clear that the release of the hostages was Carter's priority and that he essentially preferred a soft approach. This had important consequences for the entire negotiating process.

In the meantime the administration developed a two track strategy. The new strategy aimed to:

- (1). Open all possible channels of communication with the Iranian authorities to determine the conditions of the hostages and give them aid and comfort, to learn the Iranians' motives and aims in holding them, and to negotiate their freedom.
- (2) To build intense political, economic and legal pressure on Iran through the United Nations and other international forums, increase Iran's isolation from the world community, and to convince its leaders in Tehran of the costs of holding the hostages in violation of international law. <sup>9</sup>

Implementation of this strategy began almost immediately after it became clear that neither Bazargan nor Yazdi would be able to free the hostages. With a view to open negotiations with the Iranians President Carter decided to send two special emissaries, Ramsey Clark, attorney

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8. Quoted in Historical Documents of 1979, n.5, p.870.

9. Cyrus Vance, Hard Choices : Critical Years in America's Foreign Policy (New York, 1983), p.377.



general during the Kennedy Administration and William Miller. Clark was the natural choice because of his longstanding pro-Khomeini stand and his earlier contacts with the Iranian religious leaders including Ayatollah Khomeini. He was also well known in his opposition against the US support to the Shah's regime. William Miller was an ex-foreign service officer who had served in Tehran and spoke Farsi. Vance states in his Memoirs that the primary task of the two men mission was "... to obtain the release of the hostages, but they would also listen [to] whatever Khomeini and other leaders had to say about future relations with the United States."<sup>10</sup> According to Vance, by that time, "It was obvious that real authority resided with Khomeini."<sup>11</sup> While the Clark-Miller mission was enroute to Tehran, on November 7, 1979 Ayatollah Khomeini denied their entry to Iran and decreed that no Iranian official could meet with any representative of the American government. Secretary of State Vance later wrote that the failure of the Clark-Miller mission was partly due to America's own mistake, the administration's early announcement of the mission and vast media coverage made Khomeini reluctant to meet the American representatives.<sup>12</sup>

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10. Ibid, p.376.

11. Ibid, p.375.

12. Ibid, p.376.

While trying to open negotiations with Iran, Washington simultaneously started to exert international pressure on Iran, including an effort to isolate Iran in the world community. To achieve this America turned to influential religious leaders like Pope John Paul II, Arch Bishop Hilarion Capucci, Syrian Orthodox clergy men who had once been imprisoned by the Israelis on arms smuggling charges. Capucci visited Tehran twice during the months after the embassy takeover and was among the few foreigners allowed to see and talk to some of the hostages. He later escorted the bodies of the American soldiers killed in the unsuccessful April 25, 1980 rescue mission.

The US asked for help from its close European allies and also from such militant Arab supporters of Iranian revolution, as the Algerians, Syrians, Turks, Pakistanis, Libyans and the Palestine Liberation Organization. President Carter himself contacted between twenty-five and thirty leaders directly, including Soviet Leader Leonid Brezhnev. He later described these personal contacts as, "...private messages from me to the leaders themselves worded individually, depending on whether they were Moslem<sup>13</sup> or Christian or atheist."

One of the early intermediaries was the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). PLO had close ties with Iranian revolutionaries and provided security to Ayatollah Khomeini's group in Paris. The PLO leader Yezir Arafat had

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13. Terence Smith, "Putting the Hostages Lives First", New York Times Magazine (New York), 17 May 1981, p.78.

been one of the first foreign figure to pay a much publicized formal visit to Tehran after Khomeini's return in February. But involving the PLO had a serious problem. The American government had an agreement with Israel dating back to 1975, not to have any contact with PLO. In fact, the Central Intelligence Agency(CIA) had for several years maintained and occasionally used the little known so-called "black channel" line of communication with PLO headquarters in Beirut. Israel had known of this contact since they began but looked the other way. Therefore, the US employed the black channel to Beirut. Within few weeks of the embassy seizure it asked the CIA to request Arafat to use his influence with Ayotollah Khomeini. In addition to this, acting on his own initiative, Illinois Republican Representative Paul Findley who championed Palestinian cause also contacted Arafat and urged his intervention for the release of the American hostages. Eventually, Arafat sent two senior PLO officials with a message to Khomeini urging the release of the hostages.<sup>14</sup> Two PLO representatives arrived in Tehran on November 8,1979 to negotiate the release of the American hostages but the move was quickly rebuffed by the Iranian militants, they said "we will accept no negotiations whether by the PLO, Yasir Arafat or anyone else.<sup>15</sup> Our task is Imam's task" Later, under the

14. Harold H. Saunders, "Diplomacy and Pressure, November 1979-May 1980" in Warren Christopher and others, American Hostages in Iran: The Conduct of a Crisis (New Haven, 1985), pp.78-79. Also see Smith, n.13, p.81.

15. Editorials on File (New York), vol.10, no.21, 1-15 November 1979, p.1226.

Khomeini's orders the militant released thirteen women and black hostages on November 19 and 20, reducing the number still held hostages into fifty-three.<sup>16</sup> This release was not negotiated; it was an unilateral Iranian gesture, whether they made their decision at PLO urging or because they recognized the need to improve their position was not known. Many in the administration came to believe that it was the result of the PLO mission. US Secretary of State Cyrus Vance later recorded that "The PLO proved helpful in persuading Khomeini on November 17 to order the release of thirteen female and black hostages."<sup>17</sup> PLO officials remained active for more than two months but early in 1980, they concluded that the situation in Tehran was so chaotic that not even they would have much ability to produce a decision on hostages until the political struggle going on within Iran worked itself out.

When the efforts to make contact through Clark-Miller mission and PLO failed, attention shifted to a second channel. This focused on the United Nations, where the Secretary General Kurt Waldheim met with Iranian representatives in the first series of efforts to work out arrangements for the release of the hostages. President Carter in discussions with Secretary General Waldheim and in the United Nations took the position that Iran release the

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16. Julia C. McCue, "Major Developments in Hostage Crisis", Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report (Washington, D.C.), vol. 38, no.45, 8 November 1980, p.3348.

17. Vance, n.9. p.378.

hostages first; only then would the United States be prepared to discuss, in the United Nations or elsewhere Iran's grievances and other issues necessary to resolve the crisis. According to Harold Saunders, Assistant Secretary of State for the Near East and South Asia, who headed the Iran working group during the crisis, "The thought behind this position was that Iran was not entitled to use the UN platform to air its grievances while it was violating the very principles on which the United Nations was founded."<sup>18</sup>

Meanwhile Iranian Foreign Minister, Abol Hassen Bani Sadr dropped many of his demands enunciated on November 12, 1979. His later formulations stated that Iran's only demand was US' acceptance of the principle of an International Commission charged with investigating the behaviour of the Shah during his reign.<sup>19</sup> Responding to this US submitted its new proposal for further negotiations to UN Secretary General Kurt Waldheim. The US stated that it required release of all personnel held in Tehran that it agreed to the establishment of an International Commission to inquire into the allegations of violation of human rights in Iran under the previous regime, and proposed an affirmation by the governments of Iran and the United States of their intentions to abide strictly by the Declaration of Principles of International Law Concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation among states in accordance with

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18. Saunders, n. 14, p.81.

19. Ibid, p.81.

the Charter of the United Nations, and by the provisions of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations.<sup>20</sup> Waldheim suggested that he would invite Iranian Foreign Minister Bani Sadr to New York for discussions on the hostage issue with the Security Council and the US Secretary of State. Cyrus Vance could meet Bani Sadr in private. The planned meeting with the Iranian Foreign Minister never materialised. Bani Sadr was suddenly dismissed from his post as the Foreign Minister on November 28, 1979, and went into temporary eclipse until he re-emerged as the President of Iran in January 28, 1980. New Foreign Minister Sadegh Ghotzadeh, a secular nationalist, who was more close to Ayatollah Khomeini, cancelled his New York trip on November 29, 1979, because "...Khomeini on November 27 said on the Iranian radio that the security Council was a tool of the United States and the condemnation of our oppressed nation is welcomed by the (Revolutionary) Council."<sup>21</sup> This statement put an abrupt end to the Secretary of State's negotiations through US Secretary General Waldheim and Bani Sadr. Ayatollah Khomeini's statements made it abundantly clear that he had no intention to solve the hostage crisis because the hostages became a symbol of the Iranian defiance of the US in particular and Western ways in general. At the same time, American captives became valuable pawns in Iran's internal political struggle.

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20. Vance, n.9, p.379.

21. Historical Documents of 1979, n.5, p.870.

Meantime the administration was confronting a new problem in its attempts to solve the hostage crisis because of the refusal of the Mexican government to renew Shah's visa, despite Mexican President Jose Lopeze Portillo's own, October 17, 1979 assurance that the Shah could return to Mexico following his medical treatment in the US. Washington thought the continuance of the Shah in US would pose a serious problems to its efforts to get the hostages released. The White House Chief of Staff Hamilton Jordan remarked "that nothing was going to move with hostages until we got the Shah out of the country".<sup>22</sup> Concurrently no country was willing to provide asylum to the Shah. Jordan who had developed close relations with the Panamanian leader Omer Torrijos during negotiations for the Panama Canal Treaty, snatched an invitation from the Panamanian leader to the Shah who was temporarily staying in Lackland Air Force Base at Texas.<sup>23</sup>

Later Jordan persuaded the Shah to accept the Panamanian invitation through the "Lackland Understanding" which promised to provide the Shah with medical assistance from the US military medical facilities in Panama, advice on the Shah's Security and help to find out a permanent refuge. The agreement also provided that his children could remain in the US and that the empress could visit them. Vance

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22. Quoted in Smith, n.13, p.84.

23. For a full account of Jordan's efforts and discussions with Panamanian leader Omer Torrijos to gain an aslyum for the Shah in Panama, see Hamilton Jordan, Crisis : The Last Year of the Carter Presidency (London, 1982), pp.72-98.

stated that

The Shah's departure from the US does not preclude his returning here, but there is no guarantee that he may return. If he asks to return because of a medical emergency, we will favourably consider his request. If he asks to return for non-medical reasons, we will consider his request but can make no commitment whatsoever at this time. 24

Later on December 15, 1979 the Shah left for Panama. In fact, the situation that had led to the embassy take over no longer existed. The Shah's presence in the US was no longer the issue, because by that time the crisis had assumed a political life of its own in Tehran.

Hamilton Jordan's Panamanian contacts for the Shah's asylum opened a new negotiating channel to Iran through the French intermediaries who claimed to personally know Ghotbzadeh and Bani Sadr. The Iranian emissaries Christian Bourguet, a French Lawyer and Hector Villalon an Argentinian businessman living in Paris had close associations with the members of the Revolutionary Council. They came to Panama to present to the Panaminian authorities a formal request for the Shah's extradition to Iran and also with a plan to solve the hostage crisis. They approached, the White House Chief of Staff Hamilton Jordan through Panamanians to avoid the State Department, because they believed the State Department was under the control of Kissinger-Rockefeller group. The Carter was detrmind to use the French lawyer's mediation. Secretary Vance has noted that "In mid-January our attempts

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24. Vance, n.9, pp.382-3.

25. Jordan, n.23, pp.102-6.



to initiate negotiations were hampered by the absence of a direct means of communicating with Iranian leaders".<sup>26</sup>

President Carter endorsed Hamilton Jordan and Harold Saunders efforts to carry out the negotiations through French lawyers. Carter explained the rationale behind his decision;

"This was the most encouraging development since our embassy had been seized. Khomeini had forbidden any Iranian official to even talk to an American, yet now the President of Iran was planning with me how to get our hostages home. Although Bani Sadr was apparently keeping his plans secret from some other members of the revolutionary Council, Ghotbzadeh was deeply involved. Although at odds personally, these two men were our best hope, and so we wanted to see them consolidate their political strength."<sup>27</sup>

French lawyers in their meeting with Jordan and Saunders disclosed the Iranian situation. The American embassy takeover was carried out by the religious right for the purpose of removing Western oriented moderates. According to their version "...they had gone to Panama in December at Ghotbzadeh's request to determine whether, by seeking the extradition of the shah, they could generate symbolic action that would give Ghotbzadeh a political context in which to arrange the release of the hostages."<sup>28</sup>

According to their plan the shah would not actually be extradited, but the UN commission, which Ghotbzadeh had discussed with Waldheim, meeting to hear Iranian grievances against the back drop of a move for the extradition might

26. Vance, n.9, p.401

27. Carter, n.1, pp.485-6. Emphasis added.

28. Saunders, n.14, p.116.

succeed in creating an environment in Tehran favourable for the hostages release. The reason behind Ghotbzdeh's decision to solve the hostage crisis was that he believed that getting rid of the hostages would wrench from the radical religious groups, one weapon they were using against the secular revolutionaries. They had already felled Bazargan and Yazdi with it, and Ghotbzadeh saw himself as the next target. Christian Bourguet and Hector Villalon wanted to find out some face saving compromise for Iran. In accordance with their earlier decision with Iranian Foreign Minister Ghotbzadeh they said,

We envision that the Iranians will call upon the United Nations to form a commission to investigate Iran's grievances. The United States should oppose the formation of that commission since it is important that it look as though it has been formed over the opposition of the United States that Iran has won a political victory over the United States in the United Nations...This Commission would go to Iran to inquire into Iranian grievances and the condition of the American hostages. After a week, the commission will issue a report to the UN and to the Ayatollah Khomeini, stating that the hostages are being held under the conditions that are not acceptable by Islamic standards. The Ayatollah, in an act of Islamic forgiveness will order the hostages released on an important religious holiday. Then the commission will return to New York and issue a public report on Iran's grievances. 29

Iranian moderates Ghotbazdeh and Bani sadr assumed that Ayatollah Khomeini would listen to some one he respected and that almost by definition would have to be an outside group that denounced the Shah and the US as supreme evils. Thus was born the idea for UN Commission, whose formation would

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29. Quoted in Jordan, n.23, p.135.

be announced as a panel to investigate the crimes of the Shah and the US. Its real purpose was to get the hostages released, whom it would visit on the pretext of questioning them as witnesses. According to Harold Saunders, "It was at this point that we began to sense through Villalon and Bourguet that Ghotbzadeh, too was trying to devise a series of events that could come together in such a way as to precipitate a decision in Tehran to expel the hostages."<sup>30</sup>

Subsequently White House Chief of staff Jordan and the head of the Iran Working Group Saunders had a series of secret meetings with the two French intermediaries in Washington, London, Paris and Bonn in the early months of 1980.<sup>31</sup> In these meetings US officials were convinced that they would have to find some way to create a situation in Iran which would create the correct environment for the release of the hostages. Later the administration formulated a new plan in accordance with Bourguet-Villalon-Ghotbzadeh formula for getting the hostages released. It was a complicated plan with the description of what each of the parties - the United Nations Commission, the Iranians, and the US - would do and say at every step of carefully orchestrated process. The result was a six point modified position in which the US would follow the following steps :

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30. Saunders, n.14, p.116.

31. For the details of Jordan's secret meetings with French intermediaries, see Jordan, n.23, pp.114-18, 130-17, 142-5, 149-51, 162-8, 193-5.

- 1) Following a public request from Iran's Revolutionary Council, a five member United Nations Commission would be formed, its members to be approved by Bani sadr and President Carter.
- 2) The Commission would be fact finding and not conduct any kind of trial. Its members would listen in private sessions to grievances from both sides and would visit Iran to obtain evidence.
- 3) The members would visit the hostages, but only to determine their conditions and not to interrogate them in any way.
- 4) After holding discussions with Iranian authorities the Commission would announce that it was prepared to return to New York to report to the Security Council on Iran's grievances. At the same time, the Commission would tell the Revolutionary Council that the hostages were being held under inhuman conditions. Khomeini would then order the hostages transferred to a hospital, under the joint control of the Iranian government and the Commission.
- 5) The Commission would report to the Secretary General Kurt Waldheim, simultaneously Ayatollah Khomeini could pardon the hostages in conjunction with a Shi'ite religious period in March and expel them.

This arrangement was put in motion on February 13, 1980, by the Iranians with a message to Waldheim indicating approval of the idea of a Commission of Inquiry. Later on

february 17, the Secretary General, Waldheim named the five members of the commission : Harry W. Jayawardene, a lawyer from Sri Lanka; Adib Daoudy: a carrier diplomat from Syria; Louis Edmond Pettiti, a renowned international journalist and human rights advocate from France; Mohammed Bedjaoui, Algeria's Chief delegate to the United Nations; and Anders Aguillar Mawdsley, a diplomat and human rights activist from Venezuela. The Commission was approved by Bani Sadr on february 18.<sup>33</sup> The Commission members gathered in Geneva and flew to Tehran on February 23. Meanwhile, there was a momentary hitch with Iran's request for the Commission Failed to relate it to the release of the hostages. This ommission was corrected. there was a second hitch on february 20. While the Commission was assembling in Geneva, the Iranians sent a message to UN Secretary General Waldheim authorising the Commission to come to Tehran but mis-stating its terms of reference. When the Commission was enroute to Tehran, on February 23, Ayatollah Khomeini announced that the hostages issue will be decided by the Majlis (Iranian Parliament), which was not to be elected until March 14, Ayatollah Khomeini's announcement was a significant departure from the plan and raised doubts as to whether Khomeini had actually agreed to it. In the meantime Bani Sadr and Ghotbzadeh were manoeuvring desperately to persuade Khomeini to order the transfer of the hostages to

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33. Andrea J. Yank, "Hostage Release Uncertain as UN Group Goes to Iran," Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, vol.38, no.8, 23 February 1980, p.540.

the government custody. The Commission decided to continue, and began its work of collecting information on Iran's grievances against the Shah's regime and past US actions.

As a result of the manoeuvring by Bani sadr in the revolutionary Council, it issued a statement that the militants either had to give up the hostages to the government or allow the Commission to meet with them. However, it failed to gain a clear sign of support from Ayatollah Khomeini. Later on march 10, Khomeini finally chose sides and publicly instructed the militants at the compound to prevent the Commission from seeing the hostages until it had issued a report on Iran's grievances and the Iranian people had in some unspecified way approve it. Correctly inferring from this, that the government did not have Khomeini's support, the militants reneged on their March 6 announcement that they would relinquish the hostages to the government. Thus blocked, the Commission could go no futher. Refusing Ghotbzad's appeal to stay, the members of the Commission departed from Iran the next day.<sup>34</sup>

These develoments proved the weakness of Bani sadr, and the personal incompatibility of moderate leaders. Bani sadr, and Ghotbzadeh were also competing with each other for thier own political gains. Earlier in January, Bani Sadr had won a landslide election victory as the nation's first President, capturing three quarters of the vote. But due to his failure to establish a party organization, he was never able to

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34. Vance, n.9, pp.404-5.

assume power. The next five months the President and his Foreign Minister were fought at every turn by the alliance of the students and the leaders of the traditionalist clerics of the Islamic Republican Party. They were convinced that the hostages taking had severely disrupted the revolution and the future of the moderate government because they understood the hostages were an effective instrument to throw out the moderates from power. In this infighting, Revolutionary Council was divided into two factions of clerics led by Ayatollah Muhammed Beheshti against moderate alliance of Bani Sadr-Ghotbzadeh group, who argued for the transfer of the hostages to Iranian government. On the occasions when the moderates won a majority, the Council could never agree on a specific plan. Finally, Revolutionary Council voted to turn the matter over to the Khomeini who supported the clerics by putting off any decision on the hostages. Secretary Vance later wrote "More than that it tended to confirm the view that he [Khomeini] intend to hold the hostages until all the main institutions of Islamic state were in place."<sup>35</sup>

When the UN mission plan failed the Carter Administration abandoned all hopes of solving the crisis through the French lawyers - Brougout and Villalon. But the failure presented the administration with a new dilemma, since from the turn of the year Iran had been pressing for the Shah to be sent back to Iran. Panamanian law forbids

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35. Ibid, p.404.

extradition, for political offences in cases where the death penalty might be involved. Nonetheless, the Panamanians had played along with the Iranian request. Their strategy was the theoretical possibility of extradition as a lever to persuade the Iranians to release the hostages. Thus Iran was encouraged to file a formal extradition request within sixty days. The Panamanians implied that they would place the Shah under arrest once those papers were received. Privately, Omar Torrijos, the Panamanian President, reassured the Shah that he would never be sent back to Iran. Concerned about the health and faced with the prospect of extradition proceedings that were to begin formally on March 24, 1980, the Shah began to consider alternatives for his operation and recuperation. One possibility was Egypt, where the Shah had a standing invitation another was returning to the US under the terms of the Lackland Agreement. When the White House heard that the Shah was considering such a move it was alarmed because, "[the] administration officials were apprehensive that the sudden move would invite retaliation against the American

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hostages." As Hamilton Jordan said,

we were certain, that if the Shah exercised his right to come back to the United States, some of the hostages would be killed... Even the move by the Shah to Egypt deemed likely to upset the hostage

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36. Andrea J. Yank, "Shah's Flight to Egypt Makes Hostages Release More Uncertain than Ever", Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, vol.38, no.13, 29 March 1980, p.878.



negotiations since the Iranians might read it as an American plot to return him to power. (37)

In spite of frantic efforts by the Carter Administration to dissuade the Shah, he left Panama on March 23, 1980 and flew to Egypt. By returning to Egypt he came full circle before his death in Cairo on July 27. But for the Americans at the embassy in Tehran and for the Carter Administration the ordeal was not over.

In addition to diplomatic initiatives the Carter Administration moved step by step to bring the full weight of American economic and political pressure on Iranian Revolutionary government. As a first move in this direction on November 9, 1979 President Carter blocked the delivery of \$ 300 million in military equipment and spare parts to Iran, which Iran had ordered and paid for during the Shah's regime, posing a potentially serious worry for Tehran authorities in the face of an insurgency by Kurdish tribe men in the north and the threat of an invasion by Iraq in the South.<sup>38</sup>

Next an unprecedented presidential order on November 10, 1979, Carter directed : "...the Attorney General to identify any Iranian students in the United States who are not in compliance with the terms of their entry visas and to take the necessary steps to commence deportation proceedings against those who have violated applicable immigration laws

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37. Hamilton Jordan quoted in Smith, n.13, p.92.

38. US News and World Report (Washington, D.C.), 26 November 1979.

and regulation." <sup>39</sup> This deportation was not merely a retaliatory action but intended to protect the American hostages life in Iran by avoiding US-Iranian clash on American soil. <sup>40</sup> President Carter explained that the reasons behind his decision were that,

American anger and frustration had risen as the days passed and the prisoners were not released. With our hostages in captivity, American citizens including the President were in no mood to watch Iranian 'students' denouncing our country in front of the White House. I was convinced that the demonstrators might precipitate a riot in which they would be killed or cause the death of others' such an event would have been bad enough in itself, but violence of this kind would very likely have been publicized in Iran, and might have caused Americans to be killed or injured in retaliation.(41)

This move was followed by, first economic sanction against Iran on November 12, 1979, by ordering the prohibition on purchasing and delivery of Iranian oil to the

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39. Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Jimmy Carter 1979, n.7, p.2109.
40. It was true that Iranian students demonstrations against the Shah was spreading all over the US. On November 15, 1977 during the Shah's visit to America Iranians held an anti-shah demonstration in front of the White House embarrassing the Shah and the Carter Administration alike. Since then it got a new momentum and became a major concern for the administration. In June 1978 Iranians interrupted President Carter's meeting in Atlanta, and late in October they attacked Chip Carter in Texas University Campus. After the hostage seizure the situation worsened. On November 9, 1979, the day Carter appealed the American public to remain calm until the hostage crisis was solved through the diplomatic means, thousands of Americans protested against hostage taking and Iranian students' defiance of American law. It led to the direct clash between Americans and Iranians in US. See Carter, n.1, pp.433-4; Carter, Rosalynn, First Lady From Plains (Boston, 1985), pp.306-7; Editorials on File, vol.10, no.21, 1-15 November 1979, p.1241.
41. Carter, n.1, p.460.

US. It was clear that Iranian embargo was not a serious threat to US supplies. On the contrary, there were obvious advantages in pre-empting an anticipated Iranian cut off, thereby depriving Iranians to score an advantage in propaganda and prevent the creation of any illusion that they might harbour about their ability to use oil as an instrument of Iranian blackmail. President Carter stated that "NO one should underestimate the resolve of the American Government and the American people in this matter. It is necessary to eliminate any suggestion that economic pressures can weaken our stand on issues of principle."<sup>42</sup>

It was widely recognized that in the then existing nature of oil market there were many other willing buyers for Iranian oil. This meant that the action was largely cosmetic and intended only as a public declaration that the US would not be influenced in this crisis by Iran's traditional role as a major supplier of oil. It was a calculated political action more than an economic action. President Carter had disclosed that it was based on the advise of Rosalynn Carter that in an election year "People around the country might think you are under pressure from the Iranians."<sup>43</sup>

Iran countered US actions with a decision to economically desert American financial institutions than opening new avenues of negotiations. Beni Sadr announced

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42. Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States : Jimmy Carter 1979, n.7, p.2109.

43. Carter, n.1, p.461.

the Iranian decision to withdraw all its assets from American banks, which also would jeopardize billions of dollars in potential US claims both public and private against those assets and threatened disruption of the International Financial System. The US responded to the Iranian announcement by invoking the provisions of the International Emergency Economic Power Act. President Carter issued an executive order, No.12170 on November 14, 1979, which declared,

I hereby order blocked all property and interests in property of the Government of Iran, its instrumentalities and controlled entities and the Central Bank of Iran which are, or become subject to, the jurisdiction of the United States or which are in, or come within the possession or control of persons subject to the jurisdiction of the United States.(44)

The order obviously was intended to protect the interest of American citizens.

The most controversial aspect of the freeze order on Iranian assets was its implication to Iranian dollar deposits in branches of US banks outside the continental US. In fact, this provision asserted that branches of US banks were subject to US law rather than the laws of the nation in which they were located. The freeze order was quickly challenged by Iran in the courts of Great Britain, France, Germany and other nations. The US strategy was to use every possible legal and political device to postpone such a judgement and let litigation drag as long as possible. The

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44. American Foreign Policy Basic Documents 1977-1980 (Washington, 1983), p.740.

assets were unfrozen only in 1981 as a part of hostage release deal. None of the court cases had come to judgement. The main purpose of the freeze was to impress on the Iranians that continuing to hold hostages had direct costs to Iran. At the same time, according to Richard Davis, Assistant Secretary of the Treasury, responsible for financial and economic sanctions, and Robert Carswell, Deputy Secretary of the Treasury in charge of all economic issues relating to the crisis. "The decision was based on a political judgement that the United States could not be continually passive in the face of repeated hostile acts by another country (taking hostages, attacking our financial institutions) without responding with some form of action."<sup>45</sup>

These punitive actions proved to be totally inadequate to persuade or coerce Iranians by bringing them to the negotiating table. The punitive measures did not hurt Iran as much as they could because other countries did not join the US. As Secretary of State, Vance wrote:

Despite the allied' sympathy for our plight, they strongly disagreed with us on the advisability of imposing stringent economic and diplomatic sanctions. Although we would push them, I was not optimistic about their willingness to face significant economic loss or risk political damage in the gulf before we had fully exhausted the possibilities of Waldheim's mediation.(46)

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45. Robert Carswell and Richard J.Davis, "The Economic and Financial Pressures : Freeze and Sanctions," in Warren Christopher and others, American Hostages in Iran : The Conduct of a Crisis (New Haven, 1985), p.177. Also see Robert Carswell, "Economic Sanctions and Iranian Experience" Foreign Affairs, vol.60, no.2 (winter 1981/82), pp.247-65.

46. Vance, n.9, p.381.

The US allies indicated their willingness to take limited economic steps against Iran only if mediation and diplomacy failed. The US moved into international forums for this purpose. It took its case to the International Court of Justice on November 29, 1979, and asked the court to order reparations, the prosecution of those responsible to secure the release of the hostages and assure their safe exit from Iran.<sup>47</sup> Later on December 15, 1979, the World Court ruled in favour of the United States. Reiterating international diplomatic concerns the court said, "...there is no more fundamental pre-requisite for the conduct of relations between states than inviolability of diplomatic envoys and embassies, so that throughout history nations of all creeds and cultures have observed reciprocal obligations for that purpose..."<sup>48</sup>

It said the hostages should be released and protected and not be subjected to trial.

Meantime on December 4, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 457 which called on Iran to release the hostages.<sup>49</sup> When Iran rejected these resolutions, President Carter expelled all but a handful of Iranian diplomats from the US and began consultations with allies on the imposition of economic sanctions. As a part

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47. American Foreign Policy Basic Documents 1977-1980, n.44, pp.744-6.

48. Ibid, p.749.

49. Ibid, pp.746-7.

of its continuing efforts to solve the crisis on December 17, United Nations adopted an anti-hostage code and, on the final day of the year, the Security Council voted again, in favour of a US resolution deploring the holding of the hostages. It also endorsed Secretary General Kurt Waldheim's offer to go to Iran to try to resolve the issue. The resolution also decided to convene a meeting on January 7, 1980, to "adopt effective measures" if the hostages were not released by then.<sup>50</sup> A trip by Waldheim on January 1, 1980 to Tehran failed to break the stalemate statement but it became the basis of his report to the Security Council. This failed mission reopened the question of sanctions. Later on January 13, 1980 US resolution for economic sanctions against Iran was vetoed by the Soviet Union. As a result of Soviet veto the US allies were reluctant to join the American efforts to impose unilateral sanctions. Since the Iranian presidential elections were scheduled for January 29, its allies asked the US to refrain from imposing sanctions. They advised to find out whether the new Government would enter into negotiations. The US agreed to their request.<sup>51</sup> However, the new President of Iran Bani Sadr was not able to make a binding decision on the hostages issue and all the secret negotiating track pursued collapsed with Ayatollah Khomeini's declaration that the hostage issue

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50. Historical Documents of 1979, n.5, p.871.

51. Vance, n.9, p.400. Other sources give a different date for the election. For example Julia C.McCue gives January 28 as the date when Bani Sadr was elected Iranian President. McCue, n.16, p.3348.

would be decided by the Iranian Parliament -Majlis, which was not to be elected until March 14, 1980. By that time, according to President Carter, "It was obvious to me that the Revolutionary Council would never act and that, inspite of all our work and the efforts of the elected leaders of Iran, the hostages were not going to be released.<sup>52</sup> I decided to go ahead on additional economic sanctions...

For the Carter Administration, that the patience of the American people was running out and that firm and decisive steps had to be taken. As a result on April 7, the President announced a number of new sanctions against Iran. The US broke diplomatic relations with Iran and all Iranian diplomatic and consular personnel and military trainees were compelled to leave. It formally and unilaterally put into effect the economic sanctions that were vetoed by the Security Council on January 13. Subsequently, it urged European and Japanese allies also to impose sanctions as well, and their sanctions went into effect shortly after the agreement was reached on May 17.

A formal inventory of Iran`s frozen assets and of American's claims against Iran was ordered. Visas held by Iranians were invalidated and they were required to obtain new visas. These were to be issued only for humanitarian<sup>53</sup> reasons.

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52. Carter, n.1, p.505.

53. American Foreign Policy Basic Documents 1977-1980, n.42, pp.758-9.



Ten days later on April 17, the White House announced additional economic measures to increase the pressure on Iran. Financial transfers to Iran were prohibited without Treasury Department licence; imports from Iran were banned; American travel to Iran was banned except for journalists and others with individual authorization from the Secretaries of State and Treasury; military equipment previously purchased by Iran but still in the United States was made available for purchase by other users.<sup>54</sup>

While broadening the sanctions could have effect in the long run, but it did not succeed in pressuring Iran to the immediate release of the hostages. Many of these measures were to convince the American public that the administration was getting tougher with Iran. According to Harold H.Saunders "Like so many other sombre moments in those 444 days, this too was broken by unintended comic relief."<sup>55</sup>

The American campaign of persuasion and pressure which was mounted in the days and weeks following the hostage seizure was most extensive and sustained efforts of its kind. The US mobilized all resources at its command to bring the maximum political, economic, diplomatic, legal, financial and even religious pressure on the revolutionary regime in Tehran. The result was virtual onslaught of messages, pleas, statements, personal emissaries, condemnations and resolutions of all kinds from governments,

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54. Ibid, pp.760-1.

55. Saunders, n.14, p.141.

institutions and individuals around the world, descending in torrents on Iranian officials and representatives whoever they might be. All these international pressures, and sanctions and negotiations failed to produce any tangible result. On the contrary it demonstrated inherent limitations of international pressure and misunderstanding and mistakes of the US policies to deal with a renegade nation in a state of revolutionary euphoria.

The main reason for the failure of Carter Administration's attempts in the first half of the year to solve the hostage crisis was its total misperception of the Iranian situation which resulted in its dependence on the powerless factions of the Iranian leadership to solve the crisis. The initial responses of the Carter Administration towards the hostage taking revealed that either President Carter or his top aides were not aware of the real happenings in Iran and link of the militants with the religious leaders. "...whom the Carter administration labelled later as 'Marxist terrorists' beyond the control of Ayatollah Khomeini and his revolutionary council."<sup>56</sup>

The administration failed to understand the importance of the student-clergy movement and it tended to view the militants in standard "red menace" terms. The White House Press Secretary Jody Powell told the reporters fully two months after the take over that militants were following "a

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56. Historical Documents of 1979, n.5, p.869.

rather radical and certainly a Marxist line".<sup>57</sup> How far removed from the reality the statement was can be seen now.

The attack on the embassy was no spontaneous happening. The student militants were well drilled. The attackers had studied blue prints of the embassy in advance and each participant had been assigned a specific job. Some were issued weapons, and all attackers were given identification cards that would get them entries into the embassy grounds.<sup>58</sup> Though members of the Carter Administration contended that students group had been infiltrated by Marxist terrorists. In fact the student militants were young Islamic zealots. The student leaders met with Hajatolism Ashgar Moussavi a militant young clergyman became their adviser and through them he became to be an important figure in the months ahead, though he was virtually unrecognized by most of the United States government officials. The students also notified Hojatolislem Ahmed Khomeini, the son and chief aide of the Ayatollah Khomeini of their sit-in plans. It was planned to last, at most, three to five days. The students were greeted with overwhelming and unexpected acceptance and enthusiasm that carried them forward in a way they could not fully control. The compelling forces of the country`s past and present, the division between traditional clergy and more moderate, pro-

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57. Quoted in John Fifer, "How Sit-in Turned into a Siege", New York Times Magazine, 17 May 1981, p.63.

58. Newsweek, 19 November 1979.

west but anti-Shah governing factions began directing the students as much as the students were directing these forces. There were also key individuals with real influence; but the United States government never really recognized them, who they were or how much influence they had.<sup>59</sup>

For Iranian revolutionaries they were facing growing loss of enthusiasm for the revolution, and it needed efforts to revive it, because, a revolution is at its most dangerous not when it begins at the moment but when waning enthusiasm demands a spectacular and catalytic event, one that will distract popular attention from mounting problems and justifying the further radicalization of the revolution. The United States government by admitting the Shah, provided the excuse for such event, which made possible radicalization of the revolution. Moorhead Kennedy, hostage and US economic Counsellor in US' Tehran embassy later wrote "The other reasons as some of the students were to bring about the revolution within a revolution, to replace the moderate Bazargan government with more radical elements, and to keep revolutionary fervor at a high pitch while new institutions were being set in place."<sup>60</sup>

At the same time, the hostage crisis occasioned major political power struggles within Iran. The most general confrontation was the conflict between the extremists and

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59. Fifer, n.57, pp.54-6.

60. Moorhead Kennedy, The Ayatollah in the Cathedral : Reflections of a Hostage (New York, 1986), p.97.

the moderates which demonstrated that the extremists had mass support while the moderates lacked credibility at the grass-roots. The extremists used the hostage episode to consolidate their hold over the revolutionary political process. The second struggle involved the formal governmental apparatus represented by the Islamic Republican Party (IRP) on the one hand and the student militants within the embassy compound on the other hand. The embassy take over presented the IRP with a fait accompli, Khomeini and IRP leaders soon saw a general popularity of the hostage taking and then used it to achieve important political ends. The Carter Administration was ignorant about the motives of the radical religious revolutionaries. According to President Carter "It was not at all clear what the militants wanted".<sup>61</sup>

Immediately after the seizure of the hostages Ayatollah Khomeini labelled it as a new phase of the revolution; the 'second revolution'. He had clearly found that Bazargan government had outgrown its usefulness. The imperial army, decapitated and purged by the revolutionary guards called Islamic Komitehs, no longer represented a danger for the Islamic republic. The larger industrialists who had controlled the economic power had been dislodged from their positions by various measures, including massive nationalizations. All that remained was to neutralize the representatives of the middle classes; the moderate

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61. Carter, n.1, p.458.

nationalists who had been reviled publicly as Westernized liberals ready to co-operate with United States. Traditional religious leadership was also sure that the government along with secular nationalists and most of the leftist parties were preparing to resist the adoption of the draft Islamic constitution then being drawn up. The occupation of the American embassy came in handy to the religious groups for uniting the people and warring factions of the radicals for bringing a new Iranian state to life and to remove Iranian moderates from political power.<sup>62</sup>

After silencing Bazargan and Yazdi, Khomeini and his clerics turned against Bani Sadr and Ghotbzadeh who were making fruitless attempts to solve the hostage crisis through negotiations with American officials. Caught between this Iranian power struggle, real hostage issue became unimportant for Iranians and this is clear from Ghotbzadeh's own statement to the World Court on December 10. He said the hostages comprised only "a marginal and secondary aspect of an overall problem".<sup>63</sup> For Khomeini and his religious radicals it was essential to drag on the hostage crisis until they crushed the moderates.

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62. Rouleau, n.3, pp.11-12.

63. Quoted in Historical Documents of 1979, n.5, p.870.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE RESCUE MISSION

The first five and a half months of the hostage crisis Carter Administration was desperately trying to solve the crisis through the various intermediaries, revolutionary government of Iran, International Court of Justice and International Organizations. The volatile Iranian political conditions alongwith the hostile attitude of the radical religious groups towards the American government caused an abrupt end to all negotiations being carried out by the administration. This situation offered only a few policy options. A rescue mission, a retaliatory military strike and international economic sanctions against Iran. The later changes in international political and foreign policy environment due to the Soveit invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, followed by Soveit veto on the UN Security Council resolution for economic sanctions against Iran, and the reluctance of the US allies to impose unilateral sacntions without a binding UN resolution killed any possible effective military and economic action against Iran. As a result of these developments President Carter began to move towards the option of a rescue mission, an option that had been kept in abeyance which sparked a new foreign policy dispute among the President's political and foreign policy advisers. The subsequent decision to

embark on a military rescue attempt and its failure cannot be explained merely in terms of technical problems; more than that it exposed the weakness of the Carter Administration's decision making apparatus.

In this respect those who took the decision to undertake rescue mission failed to evaluate the risk realistically, played down their own doubts as to its likely success and excluded leading critic of this adventure from the decision making process. In fact , this decision was President Carter's response to a number of other important factors like political manoeuvring for policy differences among different decision making groups. Political considerations of the 1980 American presidential elections the thinking that the hostage crisis would not be solved through negotiations and his perceptions of his responsibility as the individual charged with protecting American national honour and interest. Over burdened with these considerations and convictions the administration officials accepted the judgement of the military professionals without the much needed political scrutiny of the various plans and proposals of the rescue missions which ended in failure.

Almost from the first moment of the capture of the US embassy in Iran, a military response was actively considered. On 6 November 1979, the second day of the crisis , Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), presented to the



Special Coordinating Committee (SSC) of the National Security Council the general outlines of three potential courses of action. These were; first, a possible rescue mission to extract the imprisoned Americans from the besieged embassy in Tehran; second, a possible retaliatory strike that would destroy Iran's economy and third if Iran should disintegrate as a political entity a military reaction focused on the vital oil fields in Southern Iran.<sup>2</sup> In the November 6 meeting of the SSC most attention was paid to the first two options, the possibility of a rescue mission was examined in considerable detail. The scrutiny of the embassy complex, its location in the center of a large city whose population was inflamed, and the great distance between Tehran and the facilities that might be available for US military use suggested that such an

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1. The normal crisis management group of the NSC in the Carter Administration was the SCC. It was chaired by the President's NSC adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski. The normal membership of this group included the Secretary of State, and Defence or their deputies, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), and the Director of the CIA. The Budget Director and other senior White House Staffs often attended as well as senior NSC staff members and Assistant Secretary of State, who headed the Iran Working Group. During the the hostage crisis Secretary of Treasury, the Attorney General and sometimes the Secretaries of Energy, Commerce, or Agriculture attended when the crisis spun off problems in their areas of responsibility. This group's job was to develop a picture of all aspects and consequences of a crisis. Harold H. Saunders, "The Crisis Begins", in Warren Christopher and others, American Hostages in Iran : The Conduct of a Crisis (New Haven, 1985), p.64.
  2. Gary Sick, "Military Options and Constraints", in Warren Christopher and others, American Hostages in Iran: The Conduct of a Crisis (New Haven, 1985), p.144.

operation would be enormously complicated and would involve unacceptably high risks.<sup>3</sup> The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, David Jones, recommended against any immediate attempt at a rescue mission, since reliable intelligence and a complex plan would require time to develop. At the November 6 meeting SSC also analysed possible targets for a retaliatory strike. It was obvious that a purely punitive strike would not set the hostages free. On the contrary, it might well result in some or all of them being killed by their captors. Thus a punitive strike was reserved as a retribution in the event the hostages were killed. The president ordered that the planning for a strike be perfected and withheld, stressing that the objective would be Iranian economic targets with minimum loss of life among Iranian civilians. Two other alternatives were examined in the context of a military strike were the seizure of an Iranian territory -- Kharg Island in the Persian Gulf (an important oil outlet) and a military blockade by naval mining. However it was estimated that the taking of a significant piece of Iranian land would risk incurring sizable casualties on Iranians and Americans. It could also set off an armed conflict between these two countries in the Persian Gulf that would prove to be enormously costly to the broader interests of the US its western allies and oil producing states of the Gulf. Moreover it might incite Iran to unite in nationalistic response and turn to the

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3. Ibid, pp.144-5.

Soviet Union for protection. As a consequence this option<sup>4</sup> was never discussed much beyond the conceptual stages.

The possibility of imposing a military blockade by mining Iranian harbours was given serious considerations from the very beginning as US policy moved progressively towards an embargo on all trade with Iran because the ability to mine Iranian harbours was increasingly regarded as potentially classic example of diplomatic strategy by military means. There were, negative consequences associated with the mining operation, that it might divert into a much wider and more destructive armed conflict between Iran and the US. The oil producing states of the region would have regarded such an operation with alarm as would many of America's oil dependent allies, affecting the movements of oil tankers into the Gulf and aiding a future increment to the price of oil. The Soviet Union could have offered mine-sweepers and provided air defence assistance, which Iran might have found difficult to refuse, thus increasing the possibility of a direct Soviet penetration of the region. Although it would have greatly increased the pressures on the Iranian regime there was no basis for assuming that such an operation would result in the prompt<sup>5</sup> release of the hostages.

As a result of this analysis the November 6 NSC meeting adopted a number of policy guidelines on the question of use

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4. Ibid, p.145.

5. Ibid, pp.145-6.

of force through the crisis.

(1) US would attempt to increase the cost to Iran of its illegal actions until it outweighed whatever benefits it might aim to achieve.

(2) Peaceful means would be explored and exhausted before resort to violence.

(3) US would retaliate militarily if the hostages were put on trial or physically harmed.

(4) It would not make any threats it was unwilling to carry out.

(5) No military action would be taken which would lead US  
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into an armed conflict with Iran

According to NSC's Iranian expert Gary Sick, "These guide lines were never codified and were never articulated by President Carter as objectives and policy boundaries for his advisers in developing US strategy. They established the framework for consideration of military options throughout the entire course of the 444 days drama."<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, Soviet invasion of Afganistan on 27 December 1979, abruptly altered both tracks of American policy; the diplomatic and the pressures, including military. In the UN Security Council Soviet Union vetoed a proposal on international economic sanctions against Iran. The US was unable to muster the support of its allies for imposing far-reaching sanctions in the absence of a UN resolution. On

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6. Ibid, pp.146-7.

7. Ibid, p.147.

the military and strategic front attention was diverted away from the hostage crisis. The Iranian leadership responded sharply to the Soviet invasion, and the US and Iran suddenly found themselves quite independently pursuing parallel efforts to mobilize an anti-Soviet Islamic coalition and an opposition against the Soviet Afghan invasion. In the dramatically changed strategic context, President Carter's NSC adviser and leading political proponent of military action throughout the crisis, Zbigniew Brzezinski subsequently wrote; in his memoirs of the Carter years, that until the Soviet Afghan invasion, the trend was toward more and more serious considerations of military action, but the Soviet aggression arrest this trend and the American strategy increasingly became "... to mobilize Islamic resistance against the Soviets - and that dictated avoiding anything which might split Islamic opposition to Soviet expansionism. In turn it was more independent than before to avoid an Iranian-American military confrontation." <sup>8</sup> Consequently, the military plans were shelved, and a new round of secret negotiations was begun that lasted until April 1980.

Contrary to the American expectations, that Iran might like to resolve the hostage crisis because of Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. The circumstances in April 1980 were materially different from those in November and

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8. Zbigniew Brzezinski, Power and Principle : Memoirs of the National Security Adviser 1977-1981 (London, 1983), p.485.

December. The protracted efforts of intermediaries and of the UN had produced no significant change in the Iranian position. Iran had ignored the Security Council resolution, and failed to cooperate with UN fact finding commission and comply with the order of International Court of Justice<sup>9</sup> calling for the release of the hostages. Collapse of these diplomatic efforts drastically reduced Washington's policy choices. Under the circumstances Carter Administration's policy options were:

- (1) The US could choose to do nothing at all in the belief that Iran would release the hostages when Ayatollah Khomeini concluded that there was no further benefit to be gained by holding them.
- (2) New efforts could be launched to find out an alternative channels of communication to Ayatollah Khomeini and ruling circles in Tehran with the objectives of embarking a new round of negotiations.
- (3) US could impose additional unilateral sanctions on Iran, recognizing that this could be symbolic, since all trade and state to state activity had already ceased.
- (4) An international efforts could be launched to persuade other nations to impose sanctions on Iran in the absence of a UN resolution.
- (5) Unilaterally extend the scope of economic sanctions by a naval blockade.

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9 Oscar Schacter, "Self-Help in International Law: US Action in the Iranian Hostage Crisis," Journal of International Affairs (New York), Vol.37, no.2 (Winter 1984), p.243.

(6) An independent effort could be launched to forcibly rescue the hostages.

(7) A punitive military action could be carried out against selected Iranian targets.<sup>10</sup>

The first two policy choices, seeking new channels of communication through patient efforts were supported only by the Secretary of State Cyrus Vance who argued that, once an elected Majlis (Iranian parliament) was in place, Iran would find that hostages were intolerable burden and would begin to seek ways to resolve the crisis. Vance argued that the

... only realistic course was to keep up the pressure on Iran while ... waited for Khomeini to determine that the revolution had accomplished its purpose, and that the hostages has no further value. As painful as it would be, ... national interest and the need to protect the lives of ... fellow Americans dictated that we continue to exercise restraint.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, the search for new negotiating channels was viewed as a functional equivalent to doing nothing, in American presidential election year against popular American demand for action against Iran. Obviously Carter Administration remained alert for any signals coming from Tehran, but having discovered the President and Foreign Minister of Iran as unable to resolve the crisis, it was difficult for a majority of the administration officials to believe that the new negotiating position was likely to appear in the near future. Like the search for new

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10. Sick, n.2, p.152.

11. Cyrus Vance, Hard Choices: Critical Years in America's Foreign Policy (New York, 1983), p.408.

negotiating channel Washington rejected any kind of military action against Iran. It felt concerned that it might endanger the lives of the hostages as well as invite a Soviet intervention. It in turn was left with only one policy option, a rescue mission.

The secret planning and preparations for the rescue mission which began on 6 November 1979, continued along side with complex processes of negotiations for the release of the hostages.<sup>12</sup> Focusing on the composition and training of the rescue force, Joint Chiefs of Staff organized an ad-hoc Joint Task Force instead of utilizing the existing Joint Task Force (JTF). This special force drawn from all the four armed services included 90 member air crew and the 90 support personnel in the rescue team. They were all volunteers.<sup>13</sup> This new JTF organizational set up was aimed to keep a rigid operations security (OPSEC) under the various commanders of the Task Force.<sup>14</sup> In the meantime, the planners of the rescue mission overcame many complex logistic problems involved in mounting a rescue mission, such as the task of identifying the precise location of the

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12. For a comprehensive account of the planning and training of the hostage rescue team, see Charlie A. Beckwith and Donald Knox, Delta Force : The US Counter Terrorist Unit and the Iranian Hostages Rescue Mission (London, 1984), pp.187-265.
  13. Ann Pelham and John Felton, "Attempting the Rescue of Hostages:...Why the American Operation Failed", Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report (Washington, D.C), Vol. 38, no.18, 3 May 1980, p.1162.
  14. Historical Documents of 1980 (Washington, D.C., 1981), pp.357-8.



hostages, nature of their captors, with the help of State Department and CIA. The State Department provided the rescue mission planners detailed blue prints of the buildings in the embassy compound to find out each building in the compound and its communication network, to sever at the time of rescue operation.<sup>15</sup> However, the major problem that remained since the seizure of the embassy was that the US did not have a single CIA agent in Iran. Later in December 1979, the first CIA agent arrived in Tehran followed by a small group of CIA operatives including military personnel and Iranian exiles to collect the first hand military information about the hostage situations in and around the embassy. They also carried out the preparations for the transportation of the rescue team to the embassy compound. By observing the situation in Tehran and checking out various arrangements made in Tehran for the movement of rescue force from Desert Two to a place known as Warehouse, Richard Meadows, CIA agent in Iran signalled to Washington that everything was ready for the mission to proceed.<sup>16</sup> On 11 April 1980 at the NSC meeting, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff David Jones recommended 24 April to President Carter the final day for the deployment of the rescue force. It was primarily based on the considerations

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15. Drew Middleton, "Going the Military Route", New York Times Magazines (New York), 17 May 1981, p.106.
  16. Steve Smith, "The Hostage Rescue Mission", in Steve Smith and Michael Clarke, eds., Foreign Policy Implementation(London, 1985), p.14. Also see for a detailed account of the intelligence operation in Tehran, Newsweek(New York), 12 July 1982, pp.16-13.

of pressing environmental factors that could cause the major revision of the rescue plan; available hours of darkness and ambient temperatures. Because by 1 May the number of hours between the evening and morning nautical twilight would drop to nine hours and 16 minutes. Eight hours were required for the helicopter mission, with one hour contingency factor. By 10 May, prevailing temperatures of 30 C would increase density altitude and limit helicopter performance. With these conditions, additional helicopters and C-130s would be required. On April 16, President Carter approved the plan, after he was briefed by Commander of Joint Task Force, General James B. Vaught, his deputy, General Philip C. Gast and the Commander of the ground rescue force Colonel Charles Backwith.<sup>17</sup>

According to the rescue mission plan, on the evening of 24 April, after five and a half months of planning and training under very tight OPSEC, eight RH-3 (Twin turbine heavy lift helicopters, called Sea Stallions) helicopters from the aircraft carrier Nimitz to fly nearly 600 nautical miles at night at a very low altitude, with radio blackout, from the Arabian Sea to Desert one, a pre-selected refueling rendezvous. There they would meet the ground rescue force (codenamed Delta Force) that would have arrived from Egypt via Oman on six C-130 (Lockheed Hercules four engine multipurpose transport aircraft). The helicopters would refuel from C-130, and then take Delta

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17. Historical Documents of 1980, n.14, pp.360-1.

Force to a second location, Desert Two some fifty miles southeast of Tehran, where CIA agents would meet them and hide the rescue force at a mountain hideout. Delta Force would remain hidden during the day before being picked up by CIA operatives early the next night and driven to a location known as the warehouse just inside Tehran. From there they would move to attack the embassy and the Foreign Ministry where three of the hostages were held, rescue the hostages, and take them to a nearby soccer stadium, where the helicopters would meet them and transfer them to a further, airstrip at Monzariyeh, to be taken to Egypt by the C-141's (Lockheed Star Lifter is larger than C-130 and lacks aircraft versatility). But the rescue mission (codenamed Eagle Claw) never got beyond Desert one. Of the eight helicopters assigned to the mission, one was caught in a dust-storm and had to return to the Nimitz, and two suffered mechanical breakdown.<sup>18</sup> This left only five helicopters in working order at Desert one, whereas the plan had called for six helicopters to move on to Desert Two. The mission was subsequently aborted, and in the process of manoeuvring to vacate Desert One, one of the helicopters hit a C-130,

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18. Helicopter number 6 of the formation abandoned due to rotor-blade failure, number 5 experienced malfunction of essential flight instruments flew back to carrier and helicopter number 2, arrived safely at rendezvous suffered from hydraulic leak. Sick, n.2., pp.158-9.

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causing the death of eight men. According to commander of the ground rescued force Colonel Beckwith "Unless six-helicopters - a minimum figure deemed necessary by the air planners to lift the combined weight of the assault team and the equipment were able to depart and fly to the next location, the mission would be aborted at Desert One."<sup>20</sup>

A critical examination of the decision to undertake a rescue mission proves that there were serious deficiencies in the implementation of the plan and the decision making process. The accidental crash in the desert and the general failure of the mission had detracted from a discussion of the basic flaws in the concept of the operation itself. This was the concern of the Joint Chiefs of Staff who set up a Special Operations Review Group (SORG) to examine any possible planning failures.<sup>21</sup> The group highlighted twenty three areas of concern in the planning and execution of the

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19. Steve Smith, "Policy Preferences and Bureaucratic Position: The Case of the American Hostage Rescue Mission", International Affairs (London), vol.61, no.1. (Winter 1984/85), pp.11-12. Also see, Jimmy Carter, Keeping Faith : Memoirs of a President (New York, 1982), pp.509-10.
  20. Beckwith, n.12, p.253.
  21. To avoid a formal congressional investigation, the administration arranged for the appointment of a military review group of six retired military officers headed by Admiral James L. Holloway III, included Lieutenant General Samuel V. Wilson, Lt.General Leroy J. Manor, Major General James C. Smith, Major General John L. Piotrowski and Major General Alfred M. Gary. They were instructed to delve only into the military causes of the failure - what went wrong how the services could apply them in the future. Paul B. Rayon, The Iranian Rescue Mission : Why it Failed (Annapolis, 1985), pp.107-10.

rescue raid and eleven were considered to be major. The major issues, which underlined in the SORG report were, OPSEC, Independent review of plans, organisation, command and control. Comprehensive readiness evaluation ,size of the helicopter force. Overall coordination of joint training, Command and control at Desert one, centralized and integrated intelligence support external to the Joint Task Force, alternatives to the Desert One site, handling the dust phenomenon and C-130 path finders.

According to SORG report, the planners of the mission had erred by putting an unnecessarily strong emphasis on maintaining secrecy. The planners had not kept any overall written plan for the mission, because of an overriding concern for operational security, oral briefings were used. In the view of the SORG, an overall plan would have sharpened their understanding of details and led to more incisive report. The report also stated that the mission would have been more likely to succeed had the planners been more willing to sacrifice a margin of secrecy and had they

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22. Historical Documents of 1980, n.14, pp.356-7.
23. Special Operations Review Group of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Rescue Mission Report (Washington D.C., 1980), p.36. Cited in Steve Smith "Groupthink and the Hostage Rescue Mission", British Journal of Political Science (Cambridge) vol. 15 (January 1985), pp.119-20. President Carter also mentioned the way his administration guarded the secrecy of rescue mission, he later wrote "When the meeting [April 11, 1980 NSC meeting] adjourned everyone understood that plans had to be kept a carefully guarded secret. Not wanting anything written in my dairy that might somehow be revealing , I made...cryptic entry". See Jimmy Carter, Keeping Faith : Memoirs of a President (New York, 1982), p.507.

utilized an existing Joint Task Force, rather than assembling a special unit for the rescue mission.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, even the selection of the helicopters were aimed to maintain secrecy of the mission at any cost, Commander of the ground rescue force Colonel Beckwith has noted that

In the event helicopters were used several major questions and problems emerged... There were several options.... It became clear, that the 53 series met most of the requirements... These choppers were designed for mine sweeping and their presence on board a carrier would not cause any surprise, thereby strengthening security considerations.<sup>25</sup>

At the same time there was no questioning by the political leadership as to the size of the helicopter force despite being informed by General Vaught that, the helicopters were the weakest element in the plan.<sup>26</sup> This was most significant since the evidence concerning the reliability of the helicopters was available and their vulnerability to mechanical breakdown a constant factor in the planning process. Even the most optimistic assumptions of the planners indicated that one of the helicopters would be lost, so that there was a margin of only one more (six choppers were minimum to rescue mission), a realistic evaluation of the plan and its risks would have at least questioned this. Yet this was not questioned by the decision makers.

SORG, also noted that so many risky and dubious aspects

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25. Beckwith, n.12, p.216. Emphasis is added.

26. Hamilton Jordan, Crisis : The Last Year of the Carter Presidency (London, 1982), p.257.

of the plan had slipped through the political decision making process, e.g., an absence of independent review by the experts, lack of devices to destroy the abandoned helicopters which contained sensitive materials, absence of sufficient number of back up helicopters, weather reconnaissance aircraft which could have contributed greatly to a successful mission. The planners of the rescue mission never ordered a full scale and an overall rehearsal of the mission because of their concern for secrecy. The rescue force rehearsed in separate units. The planners also failed to anticipate the number of issues which might have caused the failure of the mission had it not been aborted at Desert One. The other main issues of concern were that the rescue force did not know where the hostages were when the go ahead signal was given. Further more, there was no overall commander of the mission in the ground, each service having responsibility for its own part of operation. According to Colonel Beckwith the command system of the rescue force was that "From Desert One, Jim Kyle and I back to General Vaught in Egypt. Back to General Jones at the JCS, back to the President."<sup>27</sup> It clearly shows that the command structure of the rescue force was more confusing because of the absence of a single command structure. It is thus clear that having decided on a rescue mission the decision makers adopted very optimistic assessment of its likely success,

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27. Smith, n.23, pp.119-20.

28. Beckwith, n.12, p.258. Emphasis added.

without examining in depth the factors that could have caused its failure.

According to President Carter the reason behind the decision to carry out a military rescue attempt was that "... the militants in the compound had threatened to 'destroy all the hostages immediately'",<sup>29</sup> But it was not merely, this humanitarian concern over the hostages life which led to the decision to embark on the mission. In fact, it was the result of jockeying for power and influence between National Security Council and Department of Defence against the Department of State which led to this decision. In this intense policy manoeuvring the role of White House political advisers; especially, Hamilton Jordan, Jody Powell, Walter Mondale and Rosalynn Carter were most influencing factor.

The decision about the mission was taken at three meetings on 22 March, 11 April and 15 April 1980 by a very small group. In many ways it was only the formal ratification of what by then became the dominant mode of thought, since the initial reaction to the seizure of the hostages. The leading political proponents of military action were National Security Adviser Brzezinski and Defence Secretary Harold Brown. They viewed that the seizure of the US embassy itself was an act of war and that the US,<sup>30</sup> therefore, justified in adopting a military response.

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29. Jimmy Carter, Keeping Faith : Memoirs of a President (New York, 1982). p.506.

30. Middleton, n.15, p.103.



Indeed, just two days after the hostages were taken, Brzezinski, Brown and David Jones began discussing the possibilities of a rescue mission. When it led to the conclusion that an immediate mission was impossible, Brzezinski strongly favoured a contingency scheme in the event the hostages were put on trial and then sentenced to death. He reasoned that "... in such circumstance we would have to undertake a rescue mission out of a moral as well as a political obligation, both to keep faith with our people imprisoned in Iran and to safeguard American national honour."<sup>31</sup> In addition, he even proposed a generalized retaliatory strike, which could have publicly described as a punitive action and which would be accompanied by the rescue attempt. Later he remarked, "If the rescue succeeded that would be all to the good; if it failed, the US government could announce that it had executed a punitive mission against Iran...."<sup>32</sup> In the earliest days of the crisis, Brzezinski, Brown Jones and Stansfield Turner (Director of CIA) regularly meet in private to discuss military options. It was this group which directed the planning for the mission and gave the eventual plan, its detailed review.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, it was Brzezinski who pressed for the rescue mission, if the negotiations failed.

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31. Brzezinski, n.8, p.488.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid, p.489.

This decision was reached on 22 March at the Camp David<sup>34</sup> meeting. It is clear from the above evidence that Brzezinski was the major political force behind the military action. Turner, the Director of the CIA, also spoke forcefully in favour of the mission. It appears that he did not voice the very serious doubts which had been articulated in a report by a special CIA review group, prepared for him on 16 March 1980. The report somberly warned that the rescue plan would probably result in the loss of sixty per cent of the hostages. It also estimated that the mission was as likely to prove a complete failure as a complete<sup>35</sup> success. In other words chances were no more than fifty per cent. Yet it was exactly at this time that the review of the plan was undertaken by Brzezinski's small military group. Brzezinski contended that, "A very comprehensive review of the rescue plan undertaken by Brown, Jones, and me in mid-March led me to the conclusion that the rescue mission had a reasonably good chance of success, though

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34. Camp David briefing on 22 March was important because at this meeting President Carter gave permission for the reconnaissance flight into Iran. From that date on, the rescue mission became an obvious option and on that point there was almost unanimous consent within the top decision makers, except Secretary of State Vance. This meeting was attended by President Carter, Vice President Walter Mandale, Secretary of State Curys Vance. National Security Adviser Zibigeniew Brzezinski. Defense Secretary Harold Brown, the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, David Jones, Director of CIA, Standfield Turner, Carter's Press Secretary Jody Powell and Deputy National Security Adviser David Aaron. Brzezinski, n.8, p.493. Also see Carter, n.29, p.501.

35. Smith, n.19, p.16.

there probably would be some casualties. There was no<sup>36</sup>  
certain way of estimating how large they might be....

Turner was also involved in the detailed briefings of the President. At the meeting of April 11 where he stated that the conditions inside and around the embassy compound were<sup>37</sup> good. The evidence did not suggest that he made his agency's doubts public at any of these meetings, either in the small military group of Brzezinski or in the Presidential briefings.

Instead of this policy manoeuvring of the military group, Presidential White House advisers, Mondale, Powell and Jordan, adopted a position that promised to bolster the President's domestic standing. Their concern was first and foremost with the effect of the crisis on the Carter presidency. This can be seen very clearly in Jordan's memoirs, which revealed both a loyalty to Carter and evaluation of rescue mission in terms of how it would help<sup>38</sup> Carter out of a domestic political problem. He remarked, "I knew, our hard-line approach wouldn't bring the hostages home any sooner, but I hoped that maybe it would buy us a little more time and patience from the public....'The rescue<sup>39</sup>  
mission was the best of a lousy set of options'" Through

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36. Brzezinski, n.8, pp.489-90. Emphasis added.

37. Jordan, n.26, p.251.

38. Ibid, pp.248-89.

39. Ibid. pp.248-9. Emphasis is added.

out his memoirs, at every juncture of the mission's planning, failure and consequences, Jordan's position was consistently one in which he advocated what he believed would benefit the President. This determined his reaction to Vance's objections. The evidence also unambiguously supports the contention that Mondale and Powell were motivated above all by an awareness of the President's domestic standing and their perceptions of how it might be improved. Brzezinski has noted that Powell, Mondale and Jordan were feeling increasingly frustrated and concerned about rising public pressures for more direct action against Iran.<sup>40</sup>

All of them seemed to think that direct action was needed to stem this public pressure, especially after the Wisconsin primary announcement of the President on April 1, that the hostages were about to be released.<sup>41</sup> By that time President Carter candidacy was entering a turbulent patch. He was mercilessly assailed by the press and by the Republican Party for failing to act decisively. He was also being challenged strongly for the Democratic Party's nomination by Senator Edward Kennedy to whom he lost New York and Connecticut primaries. President Carter was, thus in the midst of a fight for his political life which he appeared to be losing. He was advised by his White House staff, that a military operation that freed the hostages

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40. Brzezinski, n.8, p.490.

41. Jordan, n.26, pp.248-0.

would dramatically alter the odds.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, his perception of his responsibility as the individual charged with protecting American national honour, alongwith his deep desire for re-election led him to embark on the rescue mission.

As the side that favoured the mission appeared to be winning the side opposing it pressed their point view. There was a fundamental split on the acceptability of military force. Secretary of State Vance counselled against the use of force throughout the crisis.<sup>43</sup> At the camp David briefing on 22 March, Vance was willing to accept a reconnaissance flight, but he stood against the use of any type of military force expect in the case of a threat to the hostages lives. He believed that military action could jeopardize American interests in the Persian Gulf and risk the lives of the hostages. Therefore, he advocated continued search for diplomatic options to solve the crisis.<sup>44</sup> After this meeting, Vance felt there was no indication that a decision on the use of military force wass imminent and on 10 April he left for a long weekend's rest in Florida. But on the very next day themeeting was held that made the decision to go ahead with the rescue mission.

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42. Pierre Salinger, American Held Hostages: The Secret Negotiations (New York, 1981), p.235.

43. Martin Hollis and Steve Smith, "Roles and Reasons in Foreign Policy Decision Making", British Journal of Political Science (Cambridge), vol.16 (July 1986), p.274.

44. Vance, n.11, p.408.

Vance was not informed by the administration that the rescue mission. Vance was not informed by the administration that a rescue mission would be proposed on 11 April meeting, on his absence Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher represented the State Department. Christopher, who shared the views of Secretary Vance on military action, believed that the Secretary Vance already knew that the President had decided to undertake the mission, therefore he declined to take a formal position on the rescue mission, since he had not been told about it in advance by Vance. He therefore assumed that Vance had either accepted the plan or the State Department could not really prevent its going ahead.<sup>45</sup> His impression was reinforced when Carter informed the meeting that "...Vance, prior to leaving for his vacation in Florida, had told the President that he opposed any military action but if a choice had to be made between a rescue and a wider blockade, he preferred the rescue."<sup>46</sup> It shows that Vance was deliberately shunted aside from the critical meeting in order to weaken his and the State Department's ability to prevent the mission from proceeding. Vance himself claimed that his exclusion was deliberate, later he wrote,

On Friday, April 11, in my absence, a meeting of the National Security Council was hastily called to decide whether a rescue operation should be attempted. Warren Christopher attended as acting Secretary as State. He was aware of, and shared my strong views against the use of military force in Iran, but, he was not fully

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45. New York Times, 4 May 1980.

46. Brezzezinski, n.8, p.493.

briefed on the rescue operation, which had been kept a tightly held secret. Christopher properly declined to take a position on the rescue mission and argued that there still remained important political and diplomatic options to consider before we resorted to military force. But he was isolated. Everyone else at the meeting supported the rescue attempt. and President Carter tentatively decided the mission would be launched on Thursday, April 24, 47.

After his return, at the 15 April, NSC meeting Vance listed a number of objections to the rescue mission; it was extremely risky, the Iranian could respond by seizing other American's in Iran; it would turn Islamic World against the US it would also give the USSR an opening in the Gulf area, finally, the State Department had spent months getting the allies to agree on economic sanctions against Iran, and they would feel cheated as they were about to go ahead with the sanctions in order to forestall US military action. But his objections were overridden, the decision for rescue mission was confirmed, as a result of it on April 21, Vance tendered<sup>48</sup> his resignation, which was announced on 28 April 1980.

To this extent, the failure of the mission cannot be explained in terms of mechanical problem or simple bad luck. But those who took the decisions to undertake the rescue mission failed to realistically evaluate the risks, played down their own doubts as to its likely success. By excluding the leading critic of the mission (Vance) from the key decision making meeting which left no one who would subject the plan to a critical analysis except those who

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47. Vance, n.11, p.409. Emphasis added.

48. Ibid, pp.410-12.

formulated it. In fact, there was no other dissenter in President Carter's decision making group, the participants saw themselves as a team players.<sup>49</sup> It limited their ability to foresee the weakness of the mission in its planning stage. The rescue mission seemed almost like the one planned and executed by military professionals without much needed political control, It raised a fundamental question about the nature of relationship between a civilian commander in-chief and professional military advisers in the Carter Administration. Evidence suggest that President Carter and his advisers failed to provide command over the military planners of the rescue mission.<sup>50</sup> Colonel Backwith has noted;

I recalled the briefing held that afternoon [16 April 1980, Presidential briefing] before we all went over to the White House, when General Meyer expressed his concern to General Jones about the command and control at the Pentagon of the Iranian operation. He feared it might be over controled. When President Carter brought up the Subject, 'David this is a military operation and you're going to run it' he almost used General Meyer's exact words.<sup>51</sup>

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49. It is obvious from President Carter's memoirs that they acted as a team with identical interest than as persons with critical eyes. He had noted that "He [Vance] was alone in his opposition to the rescue mission among all my [Carter's] advisers", Carter, n.29, p.513.
50. Gary Sick has noted that Carter's failure to assert civilian control over the military affairs was not accidental but it was well intended to avoid criticism about unnecessary presidential involvement in the military operations. Once the decision was taken to undertake the operation, Carter left the details in the hands of military specialist without questioning it in detail. See Sick, n.2, p.161; Carter, n.29, p.507.
51. Bekwith, n.12, p.258. Emphasis added.



Bekwith also mentioned that the nature of the review of the rescue mission was extremely weak especially from the side of President Carter's top advisers. The April 16 White House briefing "...had occasionally been interrupted for clarification, once by Dr. Brzezinski and another time by Vice-President Mondale. I don't believe either had asked a<sup>52</sup> key question."

Carter Administration's surrender of the entire rescue mission operation to military professionals weakened his position to ensure that, the advice he was receiving from them were based on the best possible judgement and experience. This was because of President Carter's predetermined decision to carry out the rescue mission to influence the outcome of 1980 Presidential election, and his advisers over enthusiasm 'to act' decisively to influence the domestic political situation. By overriding the objections of the Department of State and the Secretary of State, the President was guided by the NSC staff who advocated military action from the beginning. On the contrary, an independent review by experts, tighter and critical political scrutiny by the political leadership in advance could have helped to find out the basic flaws of the mission which became evident only during the operational stage. The failure of the mission was the failure of the administration's decision making process.

The mission, which aimed to end the run of bad luck at

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52. Ibid., p.5 Emphasis added.

home and foreign policy problems in Iran, brought more troubles for Carter presidency. The American allies who had believed that more stringent sanctions would forestall any unilateral US military action felt that they had been cheated. Moreover American military reputation was dealt a devastating blow, many American allies began to doubt the effectiveness of US military capability to protect Western interest in the Gulf region and its ability to protect the Western world from the Soviet aggression. The release of the 53 hostages held in the US embassy since the November 4, 1979 appeared more remote than ever because the hands of the hardline militants opposed to freeing American captives was strengthened by the rescue mission. While President Carter's room for manoeuvring, including the use of any type of military action to free the hostages became severely restricted. More important chances of Carter's re-election in 1980 presidential elections were severely reduced by the scathing public criticism of his political opponents on his political judgement and handling of the hostage crisis.

Though unintended, the failure of the rescue mission, relieved public pressure for a large scale American military action against Iran. It created a quieter policy environment that permitted to de-emphasise the crisis and inclined the public to wait for the solution of the crisis until the Iranian internal problem settled down.

## CHAPTER V

### HOSTAGE CRISIS AND 1980 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

The Carter Administration faced the 1980 American presidential election at a time of rapid changes in national and international arena. Domestically President Carter was in the midst of political trouble; largely because of inflation, challenges to his leadership from Senator Edward Kennedy and the Republican party candidate Ronald Reagan, along with the foreign policy debacle in Iran. This was despite the administration's glowing foreign policy accomplishments like the Panama Canal Treaty, the Camp David Agreement between Egypt and Israel, avoidance of race war in Zimbabwe, the emphasis on human rights, and normalization of relations with China. However, the two nagging foreign policy problems, the fall of the Shah of Iran and the holding of the 52<sup>1</sup> American hostages in Iran, followed by the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan far outweighed the achievements.

The hostage crisis drastically altered the shape of the national agenda and the conduct of 1980 presidential election. It was mainly because of Carter's own wrong handling of the crisis as a result of which he failed to muster political support for his re-election by sustaining a

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1. On July 11, 1980, under instructions from Ayatollah Khomeini Iranian militants released Richard I. Queen, a Vice-Council because he was seriously ill. It was later diagnosed as multiple sclerosis. This reduced hostages strength from 53 to 52.

sense of genuine crisis in public mind. The prolongation of the hostage crisis by Iranian political manouverings and the massive media coverage created an impression on the American people that the administration was indecisive and reluctant to assert American power. His foreign policy was excessively moralistic and insufficiently militaristic to deal with crisis situations. This foreign policy failure largely contributed to the defeat of President Carter in the 1980 American presidential election.

Later changes in American political leadership along with the political developments in Iran marked by the triumph of the religious radicals over the moderates and their desire to consolidate the revolution against the US economic and diplomatic leverage finally brought the resolution of the crisis on January 20,1981. Iranian realized that by holding the hostages in the changed political circumstances nothing could be gained but killing them could have brought unacceptable damage which would have surely followed. Ronald Reagan's election was part of the changed reality. An analysis of these factors provides eloquent proof to the linkage theory, that of the growing impact of American foreign policy on domestic affairs and vice versa.

By late 1979, a year before the Presidential nominating conventions, President Carter was confronting serious domestic problems; a twenty per cent inflation, primarily because of the rise in oil prices triggered by the Iranian revolution and huge oil price increases by Organization of

Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)<sup>2</sup>. America's growing dependence on foreign oil stimulated inflation, depreciated the value of the dollar abroad and shifted the balance of political power towards the oil producing Middle Eastern nations. The fall of the Shah, the guardian of American oil interests in the Persian Gulf, along with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan were a potential threat to American and western economic and political interests in the region. These adverse developments had their repercussion on American domestic, economic and political scene. Concern was heightened by the seizure of the US embassy in Tehran by the militants who had the explicit sanction of the revolutionary religious leader Ayatollah Khomeini. These series of events raised serious questions about the level of the nation's military preparedness (especially under the glare of the failed US' Iranian hostage rescue mission) and the administration's ability to deal with crisis situations.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, despite many other foreign policy success Carter was seen as a weak leader. His popularity rating was lower than any other chief executive except Harry S. Truman in the midst of the Korean war and Richard Nixon at the depths of the Watergate scandal. His critics argued that

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2. Jimmy Carter, Keeping Faith : Memoirs of a President (New York, 1983), pp.526, 568.
  3. Henry A. Plotkin, "Issues in the Presidential Campaign" in Marlene Michals Pomper, ed., The Election of 1980: Reports and Interpretations (Chatham, N.J., 1980), pp.39-40.

the nation's problem was the result of lack of competence within the administration. Carter's political weakness had stimulated challenges within the Democratic Party. The main contestants were Governor Jerry Brown of California and Massachusetts Senator Edward Kennedy. Kennedy was very popular among Democrats and posed serious challenge to Carter's renomination.<sup>4</sup> However, Carter's principal opponent in 1980 presidential election was Ronald Reagan of the Republican Party.

On November 4, 1979, exactly one year before the Presidential election, Carter dramatically escaped from the domestic challenges for a while, because of the seizure of American embassy in Tehran. It diverted the focus of the popular attention from burning domestic issues to foreign policy problems. The crisis later deepened when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, Carter initiated economic, diplomatic and military actions against Iran to obtain the release of hostages. In response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, he initiated a series of actions, including a substantial increase in the military budget, the reinstatement of registration for the draft, the halting of sales of grain and advanced technology to the Soviet Union, a deferral of Senate action on a Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) and a boycott of the Moscow Olympics.

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4. Gerald M. Pomer, "The Nominating Contests", in Morelene Michals Pomer, ed., The Election 1980: Reports and Interpretations (Chatham, N.J., 1981), pp.6,9.

Diplomatically these measures were a failure but the impact of the measures on the presidential nominations was great. They enabled Carter to present himself as a strong leader, reacting calmly and forcefully to serious crisis situations. In this peculiar conditions unable to anticipate or control events, his opponents were compelled to extend their support to the President. If they criticized Carter as Kennedy did in his campaign speech they were attacked for undermining national unity.<sup>5</sup>

In a television interview in San Francisco on December 2, Kennedy remarked that the Shah had "run one of the most violent regimes in the history of mankind".<sup>6</sup> The Senator's comments were immediately pounced by Carter's supporters and the media as undermining the president's efforts to free the hostages. Carter's campaign chairman Robert Strauss went on to say that it was a mistake "...to inject everything into a campaign that would endanger the lives of the American Hostage over there." He concluded that "I really don't think Senator Kennedy understood the impact of those statements (on Iran)."<sup>7</sup> It clearly indicated how effectively the administration used the hostage issue to its political advantage. Thus the President willingly surged

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5. Ibid, pp.7-8.

6. Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, December 8, 1979, P.2775, quoted in William Crotty, "The Presidential Nominating Process in 1980", in Paul T.David and David H.Everson, eds., The Presidential Election and Transition 1980-1981 (Carbondale, 1981), p.81.

7. Ibid, p.18.

the patriotic fervour in his favour by both symbolizing and stimulating these feeling of national solidarity. It forced Kennedy to stress on issues like unemployment and inflation which seemed almost irrelevant in the light of a foreign policy crisis.

According to Rosalynn Carter, the President's Chief election campaigner: "At first, the public supported Jimmy all the way. During the crisis, the incumbent President can almost count on a surge of approval and the Iranian crisis was no exception. Within the first few weeks of the embassy takeover, the country was caught in an outpouring of patriotism and support for the President, just as the 1980 campaign was beginning. Unfortunately, for Ted Kennedy and Jerry Brown, both announced their candidacy the same week the hostages, were captured; they were then in a predicament, trying to decide how to attack Jimmy in the midst of the general approbation. And from that time on our fortunes and theirs would be strongly affected by the hostages situation".<sup>8</sup>

Kennedy officially announced his candidacy on November 7, only three days after the hostage seizure.<sup>9</sup> Since then his campaign was interrupted and damaged by the outburst of patriotic support for Carter. It focused attention on Carter's attempt ot manage the crisis and limited the

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8. Rosalyn Carter, First Lady from Plains (Boston, 1984), p.312. Emphasis added.

9. William Crotty, n.6, p.16.



opportunity for adverse criticism on the administration. In addition, in a nationally televised interview with Roger Mudd of CBS, Kennedy could neither explain coherently why he wanted to be the President nor dispell the perception that he was holding out on the Chappaquidick incident. This<sup>10</sup> disastrously impaired his nomination prospects.

President Carter's campaign strategy was based on his position as the incumbent. Throughout the prenomination campaign he used his position as a Chief Executive to set the agenda for media and public discussion. He even used the unexpected foreign policy crisis such as the hostage crisis to command television time for exposing himself to extensive media coverage not available to any other candidate.<sup>11</sup> Carter's advisers found that his undivided attention to the crisis was producing an enormous political advantage which led them to the conclusion that the best way for him to campaign for renomination was to be the President on the job. This assumption gave birth to the much criticized 'Rose garden strategy'. It was enunciated in a White House press conference on February 13, 1980, where he stated that "I as President, have got to maintain the accurate image that we do have a crisis which I will not ignore until those hostages are released. I want the American people to know it, I want the Iranians to know it, I want the hostages' families and the hostages to know it, I

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10. Larry M. Bartels, Presidential Primaries and the Dynamic of Public Choice (Princeton, 1988), p.220.

11. Crotty, n.6, p.17.

want the world to know that I am not to going to resume business as usual as partisan campaigner out on the campaign trial until our hostages are back here free and at home."<sup>12</sup>

Calling attention to the foreign polciy crisis by refusing to leave the White House and declining televised debate which Governor Brown and Senator Kennedy Carter limited meadia attention to his political adversaries and also denied free exposure and equal forum for political evaluation. The year's foreign policy problems in political terms were a lucky break from domestic issues for the President. While he was unable to control the hostage crisis he did make an effective political use of these developments.<sup>13</sup>

The political dividend from the `Rose garden strategy' almost immediately became apparent CBS/NewYork Times opinion polls showed that, the day before the American embassy was taken over only 30 per cent approved of Carters performance as President and only 28 per cent supported his handling of foreign policy. But in February 1980 as the Presidential primaries began a 53 per cent majority approved of his general performance, while 49 per cent support his foreign policy and 63 per cent endorsed his actions in Iran. Among the Democrats who decided the President's renomination, approval rate raised from 37 per cent in November to an overwhelming 62 per cent in Fenruary 1980. It would later

12. Public Papers of the President of the United States : Jimmy Carter 1980-81 (Washington, 1981), Book no.2, 1980, p.310.

13. Pomer, n.4, p.21.

drop to their previous levels. But in June Carter had reassured his renomination as the Democratic party's presidential candidate.<sup>14</sup>

In the face of the tremendous public outpouring of support for the President, his Republican and Democratic challengers alike found immobilized as foreign policy critics in the then prevalent political climate. So Ronald Reagan and Kennedy all held their critical views on the Iranian crisis for the time being. Not having to campaign was especially helpful for Carter because it stalemated the smooth running of Kennedy's campaign from the beginning.<sup>15</sup> But Carter's 'Rose garden strategy', soon outlived its usefulness because his political adversaries were able to launch a counter attack on his strategy as a sign of his political weakness. Senator Kennedy charged that Carter was hiding behind the Iranian crisis and urged him to get out of the Rose garden and debate the issue with him.<sup>16</sup> He was supported by the Senate majority leader Robert Byrd. Latter advised Carter to actively involve himself in the campaign and even remarked as "the Ayatollah Khomeini does not just have 53 hostages...He also has the President hostage."<sup>17</sup>

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14. CBS News/New York Times Polls, 1979-80, cited in Pomer, n.4, p.22.
  15. Jack W.Germand and Jules Witcover, Blue smoke and Black Mirrors: How Reagan Won and Why Carter Lost the Election of 1980 (New York, 1981), p.85.
  16. New York Times (New York), 9 November 1980.
  17. Quoted in Editorial on File (New York), vol.1, no.9, 1-15 May 1980, p.550.

fact President Carter by keeping the crisis at the centre stage of the campaign trial gave the Iranian militants a leverage over the hostages which limited the administration's manoeuvrability in negotiations and heightened popular frustration across the US with the administration's inability to bring the hostages home. It also increased the value of the hostages in the eyes of the captors and Khomeini and encouraged them to extend the crisis till they had achieved their political goal. The then Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs and the Head of the Iran Working Group Harold H.Saunders remarked

"that frustration over our inability to bring the hostages home may have limited the administration's manoeuvrability in negotiation led the President to take steps like the rescue mission that he might otherwise not have approved and caused the voters to turn against the President Carter..."<sup>18</sup>

What finally forced him to relinquish the Rose garden strategy was the failure of the rescue mission which made the release of the hostages more unlikely than ever. In a news conference on April 13, 1980 Carter stated that "None of these challenges [Afghanistan invasion, hostage crisis and inflation] are completely removed, but I believe they are manageable enough for me to leave the White House for a limited travel schedule including some campaigning..."<sup>19</sup>

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18. Harold H.Saunders, "The Crisis Begins" in Warren Christopher and Others, American Hostages in Iran: The Conduct of a Crisis (New Haven, 1985), p.48.
19. Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States : Jimmy Carter 1980-81, n.14, p.804. Emphasis added.

In view of the failed rescue mission, majority of the Americans considered Carter's statement as evidence that the President was neglecting the hostages. Subsequently, in his first campaign meeting at Columbus in Ohio, he told that "America is turning the tide in every area of challenge".<sup>20</sup>

Both the statements discredited him in the context of the persisting realities of his failure to solve the crisis. Rival presidential candidates and media were keeping scorn on the President for reversing his once strongly affirmed decision that he would not campaign until the hostages were released. Ronald Reagan condemned Carter Administration's policies as "vaccilation, appeasement and aimlessness".<sup>21</sup>

Even though Kennedy was in an adverse political circumstance he challenged Carter strongly in many of the state primaries by winning, Massachusetts, Vermont, New York, Connecticut, California, New Jersey, Rhode Island, South Dakota and New Mexico where he split the delegates, but these were not enough to get the nomination.<sup>22</sup> President reasoned that :

... whenever it seemed obvious that the ultimate contest with Kennedy would be decided in my favour, the people tended to use the primaries simply as a protest - a means to express their displeasure about the hostages, the economy, or any other aggravating issue. This kind of reaction resulted in uneven election results and delayed our final, inevitable victory.<sup>23</sup>

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20. Quoted in New York Times 9 November 1980.

21. Quoted in Facts on File, vol.40, no.2054, 21 March 1980.

22. Crotty, n.6, p.2.

This kind of reaction resulted in uneven election results and delayed our final, inevitable victory.<sup>23</sup>

There were growing signs of skepticism about Carter's handling of the hostage crisis because he was increasingly using the foreign policy crisis for political advantages. Many of his responses to these crisis were closely associated with the electoral calendar. In a press conference one day before the Iowa caucuses, the first in the nation, Press Secretary Jody Powell used every opportunity to denounce the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, convinced that hardline position would help Carter. On the same day the President himself formally proposed the Olympics boycott. He hosted a televised reception at the White House to the US hockey team which had defeated the Soviet team in the winter Olympics, just a day before the New Hampshire primary.<sup>24</sup> The weekend before the same primary, he dispatched the UN commission to Tehran. Two days before the critical Illinois primary he emphasized a strong stand on Afghanistan by hinting that he would renounce the SALT treaty.<sup>25</sup>

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23. Carter, n.2. pp.580-1.

24. Laurence Radway, "The Curse of Free Elections" Foreign Policy (Washington, D.C), vol.40 (Fall 1980), p.68.

25. Pomper, n.4, p.21.

This move helped him to defeat Kennedy in his most crucial test for presidential nomination; because Illinois primary was where the Senator was campaigning among urban industrial, heavily ethnic and catholic population. Despite these advantages to Senator Kennedy the Illinois result was an overwhelming victory for the President which led to the press to declare the nomination decided. <sup>26</sup> However, the most dramatic political exploitation of the hostage crisis came on the day of the Wisconsin primary. At that time the UN commission had been negotiating with the Iranians and the administration hoped that it might lead to the release of the hostage because they received private message from Iranian President Bani Sadr that he was mustering the votes in the Iranian Revolutionary Council to order the hostage captors to handover the hostages to the government control which later thwarted by the religious radicals in the council. Carter without confirming the news from Iran simply called a White House press conference on April 1, 1980 at <sup>27</sup> 7.13 a.m. He announced

we don't consider it necessary at this time to impose additional sanctions, but that is always an option open to us. The best assumption now is that the President of Iran is speaking for his government and that the hostages will be indeed be transferred to the care and protection of the government itself.. I presume that we will know more about that as the circumstances

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26. For a detailed account of Illinois primary, see John S.Jackson III, "The 1980 Democratic Primary in Illinois" in Paul T.David and David H.Everson, eds., The Presidential Election and Transition 1980-81 (Carbondale, 1981), pp.27-44.

27 Germond and Witcover, n.15, pp.156-7.

develop. We do not know the exact time schedule at this moment.<sup>28</sup>

This statement sounded like the hostages release was eminent particularly because the word came directly from the President. Following the primary polling in Wisconsin Carter secured an overwhelming majority over Senator Kennedy and Governor Brown.

Immediately after Wisconsin failure Kennedy attacking Carter as manipulative said,

just every single evening there was twelve, fifteen, eighteen minutes of national television focused on the hostages and the administration's reaction to it. It was that dominance of that issue of the foreign policy that touched the hearts and souls of American people also reached the matter of national honour and prestige as that prestige and power is institutionalized in the presidency... And of course as one who shared same kinds of emotions, I probably didn't anticipate it could be that divisive in terms of the political implication vis-a-vis the administration and myself.<sup>29</sup>

With the criticism of Kennedy the President's handling of the crisis emerged as a full - fledged issue in the campaign. The media apparently highlighted Kennedy's losses as the result of Carter's politicalisation of the hostage crisis and the sly manipulation of the media, then onwards the American electorate looked with suspicions at Carter's political manipulations of the foreign policy crisis.

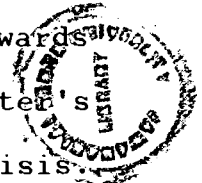
Rosalynn Carter later wrote that

As campaign continued through the Fall, the news media assumed that Reagan was a good guy who was careless with his comments but he did not really mean what he was saying. Jimmy was portrayed as a mean person who

28. Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States : Jimmy Carter 1980-81, n.12, p.576. Emphasis added.

29. Quoted in German and Witconer, n.15, pp.144-5.

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criticized Reagan for his positions and refused to debate John Anderson, an independent candidate<sup>30</sup>

However, by the time, it became obvious that Carter would win Democratic Party's nomination. Kennedy attempted to reopen the contest by calling for an open convention by attacking a convention rule.<sup>31</sup> Kennedy had the support of prominent Senate Democrats for an open convention. The assumption behind the move was that some of the Carter's delegates might have a second thought on Carter, given the fact that the opinion polls showed, Republican candidate Reagan leading Carter and the revelations of Billy Carter scandal,<sup>32</sup> and the hostage crisis. Carter camp opposed the call for an open convention with an argument that it was against the convention rule and it also help to violate delegates' promises to represent the expressed preference of voters which amounted to a call for a brokered convention.<sup>33</sup> Following a vote on convention rule, Carter secured a comfortable majority of 1336.4 votes to 1390.6 of Kennedy.

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30. Carter, n.8, p.335.

31. Rhodes Cook, "Democrats Head for Convention in Big Apple", Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report vol.38, no.32, August 1980, p.2262.

32. Ibid. In July 1980 a scandal brokeout that involved President Carter's younger brother Bily Carter who was accused of an unregistered foreign agent for Libya of havong been paid \$ 220,000 by Libyans as his commission. He was also accused of having used his political influence with the American government to further his business dealings.

33. Carter, n.2, p.531.

soon after his failure, Kennedy withdrew from the  
 34  
 presidential nomination contest.

In fact by that time Kennedy had inflicted irreversible damage on the administration through his severe criticism of the handling of various foreign policy issues. He blamed Carter directly for the hostage crisis because he ignored the warning from Iran that the Shah's admission into US  
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 would provoke retaliation. He also charged the administration with acceptance of the dubious medical judgement of a doctor that the Shah could be treated only in the US. He argued that if Carter would not have accepted these two advices, the hostage crisis would not have taken place. His basic contention was that,

The 1980 election should not be plebiscite on the Ayatollah or Afghanistan. The real question is whether America can risk four more years of uncertain policy and certain crisis of an administration that tells us to rally around their failures of an inconsistent non-policy that may confronts us with a stark choice between retreat and war.<sup>36</sup>

Kennedy's criticism was more helpful to Carter's principal opponent Ronald Reagan in substantiating his argument and policies. Reagan also branded the Carter Administration as basically weak and incompetent, which resulted in the decline of the American power throughout the world, particularly in Third World. It revived a new debate

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34. Germond and Witcover, n.15, p.202.

35. Facts on File, vol.40, no.2047, February 1980, p.74.

36. Germond and Witcover, n.15, p.147.

on what an astute British observer Denis Borgan once called  
<sup>37</sup>  
 "the illusion of American omni-potence". Reagan found that  
 there was an adverse military and economic trends against US  
 throughout the world as the result of the administration's  
 failure to assert and strengthen America's military  
 capability. According to him "Overseas conditions already  
 perilous deteriorate. The Soviet Union for the first time  
 acquiring the means to obliterate or cripple our land based  
 missile system and blackmail us into submission. Marxist  
 tyrannies spread more rapidly through out the Third world  
 and Latin America. Our alliances are frayed in Europe and  
 elsewhere. Our energy supplies become even more dependent on  
 the uncertain foreign supplies. The ultimate humiliation,  
 militant terrorists in Iran continue to toy with the lives  
<sup>38</sup>  
 of Americans.

Reagan contended that the decline of American power was  
 not an unrelated thing but it was the after effect of  
 successive American administrations failure to confront the  
 growing challenges either at home or abroad, which marked a  
 continuing downward trend of American power in the global  
<sup>39</sup>  
 context. Furthermore it got a new momentum during the  
 Carter years because the administration's basic foreign

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37. Quoted in William P. Bundy, "Who Lost Patagonia? Foreign  
 Policy in the 1980 Campaign, Foreign Affairs (New York),  
 vol.58, no.3 (Fall 1979), p.20.

38. "1980 Republican Platform Text", Congressional  
 Quarterly Weekly Report, vol.38, no.29, 19 July 1980,  
 p.2030.

39. Ibid.

policy concept - Human Rights, which used against America's one of the most steadfast ally, the Shah of Iran. It encouraged Iranian religious radicals to believe that the US was supportive of their position than that of the Shah's which inturn motivated radical religious groups to overthrow the Iranian monarch.<sup>40</sup> It was rather a very simplistic explanation. For a leadership that was moved by powerful moral indignation Carter's attitude towards the Shah could at best provide a marginal motivation but Reagan considered that the major reason for the loss of American influence throughout the world was Carter's non-militaristic policies and the confusion derived from it. He reasoned that Carter failed to strengthen American defence system. He

...had cancelled B-1 bomber, delayed the MX (missile), delayed the Trident Submarine, delayed the Cruise missile, shut down the missile man-the three- the minute man missile production line, [sic] and whatever other things that might have been done. The Soviet Union sat at the table knowing that we have gone forward with unilateral concessions without any reciprocation from them whatso ever.<sup>41</sup>

Thus Reagan presented to the electorates a foreign policy which was a drastic departure from carter's non-militaristic policies. It implied that the sense of post-vietnam collective guilt would no longer be allowed to inhibit the excercise of the American power and influence. By advocating a strong militaristic policy, he presented a

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40. Plotkin, n.3, p.58.

41. "Text of Debate Between Carter and Reagan", Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, vol.38, no.44, 1 November 1980, p.3285.

clear determination to restore what by then was regarded as the dangerously eroded political and military effectiveness of the US. Thus he emerged as a credible candidate for those who were concerned with the direction of American defence and foreign policy.<sup>42</sup> Because at the end of 1980s the majority of Americans favoured a shift in American foreign policy with greater emphasis on the use of force as a means for decisive solutions of the nation's economic and foreign policy crisis which occurred during the Carter Administration's four years. The policy exposed by a Reagan well reflected much more closely this growing mood of American electorates and attracted them most.<sup>43</sup> At the same time Reagan was very successful in highlighting the confusion of the Carter Administration in key foreign policy issues. He argued that

over the past four years it has repeatedly demonstrated that it has no basic goals other than the perpetuation of its own role and no guiding principles other than the fleeting insights provided by the latest opinion poll. Policies announced one day are disowned or ignored the next, sowing confusion among Americans at home and havoc among our friends abroad.<sup>44</sup>

In the light of Carter's own decision to abandon Rose garden strategy along with his much criticized use of media and hostages for winning Democratic party's nomination, Reagan's criticisms seemed to be true. Republicans argued

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42. Times (London), 7 October 1980.

43. Charles William Moynes and Richard U.Ullman, "Ten Yeras of Foreign Policy", Foreign Policy (Washington, D.C.), no.40, (Fall 1980), pp.4-5.

44. "1980 Republican Platform Text", n.39, p.2030.

was that the fundamental responsibility of the US President was in foreign policy and Carter had failed to uphold American power and prestige by tolerating humiliation and disgrace from the hostage crisis. Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger even went on to say that another four years like the last four will make a disaster irretrievable<sup>45</sup> to American interest at home and abroad.

The Reagan camp was worried that just as the hostages seizure had helped to shape the outcome of the Democratic primary in favour of Carter, an early release of the hostages just before the election might help him to sweep into a second term on a wave of national relief. This came to be known as the "October surprise"<sup>46</sup>. The newly developed concept "October Surprise" virtually shifted the focus of election issues once again to the hostages, and even changed the course of the campaign throughout Fall of 1980. To find out and formulate a counter strategy to any surprise resolution of the crisis, the Reagan camp made extensive arrangements by appointing a hostage watch team under a retired naval admiral Robert Gurrik. They also made contacts with Department of State through Republican congress men, with the hostage's families and the outside Arab Governments who had contacts in the Iranian Parliament.<sup>47</sup> Thus the concern over the October Surprise continued unabated within

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45. Quoted in International Herald Tribune (Paris), 18 July 1980.

46. New York Times, 26 October 1980.

47. Germond and Witcover. n.15, pp.10-11.

the Republican camp until the last moment of the election day. This was the result of the Iran's political meddling in American presidential election by initiating a new round of highly publicized negotiations, followed by a massive media coverage which effectively turned America's attention again to the hostage crisis.

The Iranians intentionally started to discuss the hostage issue, aimed to influence the course and conduct of the presidential election in America. As a part of it, on September 9, 1980, Iranian emissary Sadegh Tabatabai, a relative of Ayatollah Khomeini, initiated a new round of secret negotiations through the German ambassador to Iran on the basis of four conditions which he conveyed to the Americans through the German government. The conditions were

- (1) The US pledge that it would not intervene in the internal affairs of Iran.

- (2) Return all of the frozen Iranian assets.

- (3) cancel all US claims against Iran.

- (4) Return the wealth of the Shah.

Later, on September 12, 1980, Ayatollah Khomeini endorsed in public this four conditions as the basic Iranian demands for the solution of the hostage crisis.

The most important aspect of these conditions was that Iran dropped her earlier demand for US apology for past mistakes against Iran. Subsequently after having appointed a seven men parliamentary special committee to devise terms

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for the release of the 52 American hostages (the Nabavi committee), the Majlis, in whose hands the Ayatollah had placed responsibility for deciding the fate of the hostages started its session on October 26, 1980 to discuss the  
<sup>49</sup>hostage issue. But the session failed to reach any conclusion because the radical groups boycotted the session the belief that any decision to free the captives before the American election would result in the reelection of the  
<sup>50</sup>President Carter, one thing which they did not want. Later on November 2, 1980, just two days before the American presidential election, and after a discouraging six weeks of negotiating inactivity and political meddling by the radical religious sections in the Iranian Parliament, came forward with a resolution spelling out its own version of the four  
<sup>51</sup>conditions previously laid down by Ayatollah Khomeini. Following passing of the Majlis resolution, the Iranians formed a committee in the Prime Minister's office headed by Minister of State for Executive Affairs Behzad Nabavi to coordinate the Iranian end of negotiations that were about to begin. The resolution also named the government of Algeria  
<sup>52</sup>as the sole Iranian authorized channel for negotiations.

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49. Margaret Thompson, ed., President Carter 1980 (Washington, D.C., 1981), p.23.
50. Facts on File, vol.40, no.2085, 24 October 1980, pp.819-20.
51. "Iranian Parliament's Condition's ", Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, vol.38, no.45, 8 November 1980, p.3349.
52. Harold H.Saunders, "Begining of the End," in Warren Christopher and others, American Hostages in Iran : The Conduct of a Crisis (New Haven, 1985), p.292.



On September 3, 1980 just a day before American presidential elections the militants who were holding the hostages agreed to transfer them to the Iranian government.

The last minute Iranian decisions had a tremendous impact on American election. The Republican's concern about the October surprise - an eleventh hour hostage release by the Iranians to influence the election results shoot up. It was speculated that the change in the Iranians stance had been brought about because as the result of the Iran-Iraq war, Iran needed American arms which had been ordered and paid for during the Shah's regime and later blocked President Carter in retaliation to taking of hostages. This feeling was reinforced once the Secreatrey of State Edmund Muskie started to justify the possible supply of non-lethal military equipments and spare parts to Iran, eventhough that action could be seen as interference in the Iran-Iraq war.

In response Reagan shifted all his priorities to envisage and counter the repercussions of the possible October Surprise which never materialised. It also resulted in the changing of the Carter's election schedule during the last days of campaign. Carter flew back to Washington from the Chicago campaign trial to respond to Iranian's demands. It again aroused the expectations of the American people that

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53. Thompson, n.49, p.23.

54. John Felton, "Iranian List Conditions : Frozen Assets Question key to Meeting Iran's Demand's", Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, vol.38, no.45, 8 November 1980, p.3347.

hostages might come home by the election day, and also left to unprecedented saturation of hostage news by American media which was the biggest news coverage since the Vietnam war and the fatal blow to the Carter's presidency.

Since the 1979 Iranian revolution, the Iranian leaders had sought to use the American media to carry their message to the American people because they believed that if Americans could be made to hear their story they would support Ayatollah Khomeini's policies.<sup>55</sup> However, only after seizure of American embassy in Tehran the Iranian problem attained the ultimate American angle which became an overwhelming national fixation by 1980. In part it was a result of mutual reinforcement between the White House and the media because, a foreign policy crisis implied a news agenda set by the President and his administration. According to a study of campaign reporting

All told, between January and December 31, CBS and UPI alleged President Carter to the hostages in 444 separate new stories...no news topic approached Iran in terms of coverage. What was true at CBS and UPI was true in all other media as well. In 1980, the three network [CBS, NBC, ABC] evening news programmes broadcast 1,031 Iranian news segments on the week day evening news. The Washington Post averaged three Iranian stories a day.<sup>56</sup>

This clearly demonstrates media's extensive coverage of the hostage crisis. Between January and April, the administration was the principal source of all hostage

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55. Barry Rubin, Paved with Good Intentions : The American Experience and Iran (New York, 1980), p.356.

56. Michael J. Robinson and Margaret A. Sheehan, Over the Wire and on TV: CBS and UPI in Campaign '80 (New York, 1984), p.217.

related news and even the President talked to media incessantly about the hostages. He exercised it by addressing meetings with various news executives, intended to influence the American electorate. But, right after the failed rescue mission when he tried to de-emphasise the crisis, he lost advantage and control over the media.<sup>57</sup>

According to Jody Powell, Carter's Press secretary, "Almost immediately, Senator Kennedy accused the President of manipulating news from Iran to help us with the Wisconsin primary which, by the way, we had won by landslide...The press took up Kennedy's attack and went at the Carter tooth and tong. Here was an absolute proof that the President was the devious, manipulative bastard they had always thought he was. They were, by God, determined to make sure the country knew about it."<sup>58</sup>

Eventhough, the media portrayed Carter as manipulative after his victory over Senator Kennedy he succeeded in de-emphasising the crisis until Fall of 1980. Then once again the crisis went more public with Iranian initiated negotiations and expectations but by the October 1980, when Iranian Parliament - Majlis started its discussion on hostages, carter's attempts to downplay the crisis failed, because the revolutionary groups learned that they could influence the American presidential election through the American media. Rosalynn Carter later wrote,

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57. Ibid, pp.185-6.

58. Jody Powell, The Other Side of the Story (New York, 1984, p.217.

By October 24, a week and a half before the election the hostages situation once again almost totally dominating the news, NBC was even claiming that they would be released in two shifts starting the following week end. Naturally I was deluged with questions, but I had not answers. I called Jimmy, who was campaigning in Grand Rapids, Michigan, but he told me to downplay the stories that nothinfg was ever definite in dealing with the Iranians. They were playing with as to some degree, he thought in order to get the media attention they released. Jimmy had hoped the public expectations would not get so high...but when the week end passed without the hostages being released, Jimmy was blamed sort of their actual release, we were in a no-win situation.<sup>59</sup>

Throughout the crisis, the Iranians talked to the American government and the public via through the three privately owned US networks, ABC, CBS, NBC, but they did not make their state owned media available for Americans to deal with the Iranians, therefore the administration accused that the American networks of serving the Iranian government.<sup>60</sup>

By the first week of the November 1980, President carter had lost his command over the press, the negotiations and even his own election schedule by the Parliamentary debates going on in Iran, followed by the anniversary of the embassy takeover on November 4, which was also the Ammerican presidential election day. All the news media and television networks were recounting and reviewing the foreign policy crisis of the Carter Administration especially America's humiliating and tragic failure in Iran. It apparently reminded American people of all negative results of the Carter's Administrations : the OPEC price rise, inflation,

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59. Carter, n.8, p.337.

60. Michael Mosettig and Henry Griggs, Jr., "TV at the Front" Foreign Policy (Washington, D.C.), no.38, (Spring 1980), pp.67-8.

Iranian revolution, Cuban refugee problem, Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and lastly the hostage crisis over which the administration had no control at all. These events had severely shaken the American people's confidence in President Carter. Especially they viewed the hostage crisis as a proof of the erosion of American power and prestige all over the world under his leadership. This inevitable public attention on Carter's performance led to Reagan's landslide  
61  
victory.

Reagan's election as the President led to a quite diplomatic move to resolve the hostage crisis with the de-emphasize of the crisis by the American media and the public. Iran too believed that under the changed political conditions, a speedy resolution of the crisis was in Iran's own interests. negotiations were began with Algeria serving  
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as the intermediary. Meanwhile American negotiating team

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61. Carter, n.2, p.568. Reagan won 489 electoral votes in 44 states against Carter's 49 electoral votes, Carter won only in six States, Rhode Island, Maryland, West Virginia, Minnesota, Georgia, Hawaii and District of Columbia. For a detailed account of the election results see "Official 1980 Presidential Election Results", Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, vol.39, no.3, 17 January 1981, p.138.

62. Iran authorized the government of Algeria as its sole intermediary to negotiate with the US. Algeria was a logical choice because she was trusted by both the US and Iran. For Iran, Algeria was a non-aligned Islamic nation with impeccable revolutionary credentials which had been serving as Iran's diplomatic agent (protecting power) in the US. At the same time US was its biggest trading partner. The members of Algerian team were Mohammad Banyahia; Foreign Minister and the head of the team, Redha Modek; Algerian Ambassador in Washington, Abdelkrim Gheraieb, Algeria's Ambassador to Iran and Seghir Mostefai; the Governor of Algeria's central bank. Newsweek (New York), 26 January 1981.

drafted a response to Iran's conditions for the hostage  
 . 63  
 release. According to American position, the US was  
 prepared only to concede the Iranian demand for a pledge  
 non-intervention, but on other demands. US informed Algeria  
 that the President was unable to release the frozen Iranian  
 assets until the US Supreme Court resolved the number of  
 legal claims attached to the Iranian assets which would take  
 a long legal process. Iran had also failed to interest and  
 principal on many loans made to Iran by the same banks that  
 had Iran's deposits, therefore, those banks were unwilling to  
 return the deposits, until the repayment of the loans.  
 However, immediately after the release of the hostages US was  
 ready to release several billion dollars which did not have  
 any attachment claims. But the remaining frozen assets  
 could not be released until an agreement was reached on  
 borrowings and judicial attachments. This US position made  
 it impossible to meet Khomeini's third demand that the US  
 64  
 should cancel all US claims against Iran.

According to Roberts Owen, Legal Advisor to American  
 negotiating team,

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63. High level American negotiating team was headed by  
 Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher included:  
 Lloyd N. Cutler, Counsel to the President; Gary Sick,  
 NSC Staff; Harold H. Saunders, Assistant Secretary for  
 the Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs; Roberts  
 Owen, Legal Advisor; Arnold Raphel, Special Assistant  
 to the Secretary to Treasury; John M. Harman, Assistant  
 Attorney General; Larry Simmas, Deputy of Office of  
 Legal Counsel and Douglas Dworkin, Special Assistant to  
 Chief Negotiator Warren Christopher.

64. Roberts B. Owen, "The Financial Negotiation and Release  
 in Algiers" in Warren Christopher and others, American  
 Hostages in Iran: Conduct of a Crisis (New Haven, 1985),  
 pp. 302-3.

we never for a moment considered the possibility of acceding to the third demand, simply because cancellation of valuable commercial claims by the US government would surely have been regarded as a payment of ransom, conferring a multi million dollar financial benefit on Iran at the expense of US nationals.<sup>65</sup>

Therefore, US developed an alternative position to the third Iranian demand that US would cancel all commercial claims against Iran provided that Iran agreed to set up an international arbitration tribunal to submit claims attached on Iranian assets and also to pay any awards made by the tribunal. The last of Khomeini's four conditions-the return of the Shah's wealth US proposed that within the American government the legal power to transfer the allegedly stolen property to Iran was with the US courts. Therefore, if Iran was to undertake such a litigation the US government would take legal steps to prevent the Shah's property from being removed from the country. Further more, to assist Iran in its efforts to collect information about Shah's property, the administration would advise the US courts that the members the Shah's family did not enjoy any special immunity from suit in American courts which would provide Iran with significant litigating advantage that it would not otherwise had enjoyed.<sup>66</sup>

After several weeks of negotiations on the basis of the American position, on December 19, 1980, almost a month before the expiry of President Carters' term- Iran pronounced a new demand for \$ 24 billion in financial

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65. Ibid, p.303.

66. Ibid, pp.303-4.

guarantee for the hostages release. The amount was in excess of its frozen assets while for the first time Iran indicated its willingness to accept a tribunal for adjudication of claims and guarantees rather than actual payments, which were major concessions on the part of Iran.<sup>67</sup> However, Secretary of State Muskie rejected Iran's demand. He said that these demands were "...unreasonable and as requiring of US actions beyond the power of the President."<sup>68</sup> At this stage the most unexpected help for the continuation of the negotiations came from the President elect Ronald reagan through his two statements made on December 24 and 28. Referring to the latest Iranian demands, he remarked that "the captors (of the American hostages) today are still making demands on us for their return when their captors are nothing better than criminals and kidnapers who have violated international law totally taking these innocent people and holding them this long".<sup>69</sup> In his subsequent remark on December 28, he further assailed and opposed the payment of billions of dollars to Iran in exchange of the hostages by describing such a payment as a "down payment". He also said : "now I don't think you pay ransom for people that have been kidnapped by barbarians".<sup>70</sup> The US

67. Warren Christopher and others, American Hostages in Iran: Conduct of a Crisis (New Havan, 1985), p.26.

68. "Secretary Muskie Interviews on 'Meet the Press'", Department of State Bulletin (Washington, D.C.), vol.81, no.2047 (February 1981), p.26.

69. Quoted in Facts on File, vol.40, no.2094, 31 December 1980, p.974.

70. Ibid.



negotiating team seized this opportunity in their late December meeting with the Iranian intermediaries, they emphasized two points; the first, was time factor : reminding them that the administration had only three weeks left in office, if Iran wanted an agreement to be reached it should be done by January 16, 1981. Otherwise the whole project would have to be abandoned because there would not be sufficient time to complete the contemplated transactions before Reagan assumed office on January 20.

It was obvious that if Reagan Administration inherited the problem it would need time to workout its own plan of action which would necessarily prolong the crisis. At the same time, Iranian could not expect a better deal from Reagan. Secondly the Christopher negotiating team re-emphasised the legal limits of the US to release the frozen assets without awaiting the outcome of protracted litigation.<sup>71</sup> As a result of these deliberations US came with a new set up conditions which provided:

- (1). US could release \$ 2.5 billion in the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, Prior to the release of the hostages.
- (2). If Iran quickly arrange to bring current its loans from US banks holding Iranian deposits overseas and ensure their eventual payment in full, an additional \$4.8 billion offshore plus accrued interest could be released.
- (3). \$ 2.2 billion Iranian deposits in the US banks could not be released for many months because its deposits had

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71. Owen, n.64, pp.310, 313.

been encumbered by attachment orders.

It does the US was offering around \$ 8 billion instead of the Iranian demanded \$ 24 billion . Iran responded to the new US conditions on January 7 ,1981 by demanding \$ 9.5 billion, \$ 1.5 billion more than the US offered and significantly stepping back from the earlier demand. In subsequent bargaining and negotiation Iran again modified and reduced its demand from \$ 9.5 to \$ 8.1 billion along with an agreement on escrow agents and escrow principle. It was the beginning of the complicated finance settlement

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through bank negotiations. Bank of England and Central Bank of Algeria were named as the escrow agents, according to the agreements reached on escrow principle the funds to be released to Iran in the immediate future. It would be initially be placed in the Bank of England, if the hostages were released, the agent would transfer the funds to Iran. Lest it should be returned to the US custody. It was also agreed that an Algerian certification that hostages had left Iran, followed by an instruction from the Algerian Central Bank to Bank of England would trigger the release of the escrowed funds to Iran.

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After the fourteen and a half months of frustrating

72. Ibid, p.313.

73. For the detailed account of the financial negotiations, involving banks, see Robert Carsweel and Richard J.Davis, "Crafting the Financial Statement", pp.201-34; and John E.Hofman, Jr., "The Bankers `channel'", in Warren Christopher and others, Hostages in Iran: The Conduct of a Crisis (New Haven, 1985), pp.235-80.

74. Owen, n.64, pp.314, 316-7.

negotiations, final agreement for the American Hostage release was signed on January 19, 1981, but the hostages did not leave Iran until 12.25 P.M.(EST) on 20 January, 1981, in the early hours of Reagan Presidency, as a result of last minute manoeuvring by the Iranians.<sup>75</sup> The US-Iranian hostage agreements provided three payments to Iran totally \$ 7.977 billion from the \$ 11- 12 billion Iranian assets frozen on November 14, 1979, by President Carter. Of the total, \$ 2.9 billion was paid directly to Iran, \$ 3.7 billion was paid to US and foreign banks on Iranian loans from the banks, and \$ 1.4 billion was held in escrow, pending settlement of further bank loans and interest disputes. Also under the agreement, US agreed to provide information on US assets of the late Shah of Iran for subsequent action by Iran. US acceded to void all private claims against Iran than pending in the US courts and prohibited future litigation based on existing plan by agree to submit disputed claims to an International Arbitration Tribunal, comprised of three members each appointed by the two countries and three additional members chosen by the appointed members. Finally, the agreement provided the US pledge that it would not intervene, directly or indirectly,<sup>76</sup> politically or militarily, in Iran's internal affairs.

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75. Iranian negotiating team accused the US of "an underhanded manoeuver" object to an appendix of the agreement, dealing with Iran's ability to recover assets, delayed the release on January 19, 1981. This allegation was aimed to prevent release during the carter presidency. Thompson, n.49, p.23.

76. Historical Documents of 1981 (Washington, D.C), pp.146, 148.

This agreement marked an end of the highly publicized and politicised 444 day long foreign policy crisis between US and Iran. According to US Secretary of State Muskie; the agreement was basically founded on the same four demands<sup>77</sup> enunciated by Khomeini on September 12, 1980. But in fact, provisions of the agreement clearly show that, it fell far short of meeting the Iranian demands. Throughout the last stage of the crisis Iran was incessantly fluctuating from its own stand which, gradually shifted the negotiating balance in favour of the US. American chief negotiator Warren Christopher has aptly remarked that,

The most reasonable conclusion to draw is that the aspirations of the Iranian changed according to who among them was doing the aspiring. Iranian treasury and banks officials were interested mainly in working out the best possible financial arrangement, concentrating on the release of Iranian assts. The radical clergy and the revolutionary 'students' holding the hostages wanted to consolidate the revolution, a process they saw as requiring a total separation from the United States, with the result that they placed the greatest stress on finding a forum to vilify the Shah and castigate the country that had been so closely identified with him. The secular officials like President Bani Sadar wanted to get the crisis out of the way because they saw from an early point that it was harmful to Iran, and they probably were interested in such a things as military supply and economic viability. The Ayatollah Khomeini, meanwhile had the greatest accumulation of power and probably the least coherent view of what procedures were feasible and what obtainable in the hostage context.<sup>78</sup>

Therefore, undoubtedly the resolution of the crisis was the result of changed political realities in Iran and the US.

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77. Richard Whittle, "Glee, Questions Great Release of Hostages," Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, vol.39, no.4, 24 January 1981, p.166.

78. Christopher, n.67, p.7.

It was true that ultimately President Carter succeeded in solving the crisis, but at the cost of his presidency. It could not be said that the hostage crisis alone had defeated Carter. There were many other issues such as abysmal state of the economy and his failure to cope with it, a divided Democratic party, Soviet invasion of Afganistan. They all contributed to his election failure. But during the campaign all these issues became much less important in comparison with the hostage crisis. Once the crisis began President Carter used his office and its power as President to campaign his reelection. He did this by a refusing to campaign until the hostages at home. In fact, the strategy was a wrong one in terms of attaining the release of the hostages. It only helped to personalise and emotionalise the crisis through the mass media. The massive coverage of the crisis tended to elevate the crisis both in Iran and in the US into a clash between two nations rather than leave it as the action of one group of Iranians against a small group of American officials. If Carter would have down-played the crisis the media would have had diverted its attention to other campaign issues, but he used the media and the crisis through his Rose garden strategy to ensure his re-election. <sup>79</sup> The short term result was politically helpful to Carter but in the long run it prolonged the crisis and paralyzed the administration, because the Iranians found the hostages as a valuable instrument to tie

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79. Saunders, n.18, pp.48-49.

up the Carter Administration and turn the media attention and American public opinion against President Carter. It gave the Iranians more power, both within their own country and in the US. Subsequently, Carter's failure to obtain the hostage release by election day destroyed his credibility as the strong leader of a super power and resulted in his election defeat. Thus the result of 1980 election proved that American presidential elections has more to do with events in abroad than at home.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION: THE IMPACT

The analysis of the US-Iranian relations clearly shows that right from the Second World War America's policy towards Iran was consistently influenced by its perception of Iran's strategic and economic importance, excessive fear of Soviet threat to its interests in the Persian Gulf and the consideration that Iran had a vital role in defending American and Western interests in the region. This perception and fear shaped the new US Iranian policy in the late 1960's as Twin Pillar policy in the Nixon Administration. It aimed to promote a Gulf regional security system under the Iranian leadership by building up Iranian military capabilities to defend the US interests. It ran parallel to the Shah's own regional ambitions and desire for a huge modern arsenal. Thus American by infusing huge military aid into Iran to bolster the anti-communist Pahlavi regime, was actually making the military and strategic issue the central piece of US-Iranian relations. It helped the Shah to convert his own national security considerations into US' Iranian policy, by promoting a strong pro-Shah faction in the American foreign policy set up over the years. By relinquishing the responsibility for the US security interests in the region to the Shah and accepting his judgement and demands for arms without second thought the Nixon Administration virtually handed over control of its policy to the Shah. Since the Shah made all

major decisions, no American request stood a chance unless his demands were also met. He demanded that there be no official contacts with Iranian radicals, and the US accepted it. The mutual dependency grew over the years and the US became identified with Shah's misallocation of resources, the corruption and torture of its suspected foes and their execution. For successive American administrations, the Shah's defensive preoccupation with the Communist threat was a major justification for the thirty years of its support for the Shah's regime. It was at the cost of social and economic development in Iran. When the 1978-1979 revolution did occur, the Carter Administration believed that the movement was a Communist inspired one. Even in the post-Pahlavi period there had been an inclination among administration officials to see the religious right as Communist and Soviet agents. Carter also followed the same established policy of arms sales to Iran, without any reassessment of the Iranian situation. Its own image of Iran was based on the perception he had inherited from his predecessors that the Shah's regime was extremely stable. The Carter Administrations failure to understand the seriousness of the situation and subsequent developments in Iran triggered a foreign policy dispute among the administration officials. It invited a new foreign policy crisis.

When Iran was in the midst of revolutionary turmoil the administration's foreign policy officials were engaged in heavy infighting for policy preferences. The two major



policy set-ups, National Security Council and the State Department were pursuing divergent policies. The former constantly championed the military actions as the only alternative to restore peace and order in Iran. It was also trying to implement the same policy by setting up its own independent channels of communication through NSC staff Gary Sick and military liaison officer in Iran Robert E. Huyser. As against this the State Department was preoccupied with promoting democracy in Iran. Eventhough there was infighting between NSC advisors Brzezinski and Secretary Vance at every level of Iranian policy, they were in total agreement that the US policy should support the Shah and back him absolutely to thge end. They believed that the Shah's remaining on the throne was in fact the correct outcome and one that US policy should work to achieve. There was no disagreement at all on this.

This unanimous support to the Shah was against the advice of the American embassy in Iran. Even in the State Departement, some officials along with US' Iranian Ambassodor William H. Sullivan had concluded that the Shah was doomed, and that he was not going to survive the crisis. They suggested the need to look at other alternatives. But their message was ignored in the State Department, they had no other channel available to carry their argument to the White House. None of the Washington foreign policy makers were able to get these messages right and find out the seriousness of the situation until it was far too late. During this time, the administration was overloaded with

Camp David negotiations and top policy advisors were reluctant to concentrate on the Iranian crisis. They relegated it to the middle level foreign policy officials. There were lot of deficiencies at the bureaucratic level. Most of the people who had previously worked in Iran and who had redal doubts about the Shah's capacity were not there anymnore. It also included the intelligence staff. In the 1950's and 1960's American intelllignce officials in Iran were experts in internal Iranian politics, but by the late 1970's they were moved away from Iran, probably because in the policy context of total support for the Shah, their presence was not required. the new officials who were posted in Tehran were relatively ignorant about the intricacies of the Iranian political scene. Carter's Ambassador to Iran, Sullivan has admitted that he went to Iran with "supreme ignorance of the area".<sup>1</sup> Instead of forseeing the changes in Iranian political system, American officials were focused on the Soviet Union. Thus virtually Iran was used as the location for looking at outside threat and no attention was paid to Iran's internal problems. Americans relied more and more on the Shah to tell them what was going on in Iran and what they wanted to know. The Shah used this opportunity to build up an image that every revolutionary upsurge in Iran was Communist motivated threat to America's interest. Later, when the revolution engulfed

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1. William H.Sullivan, "Iran: A View from Iran", World Affairs (Washington D.C.), vol.49, no.4 (Spring, 1987), p.215.

Iran a desperate Shah asked for American directive, but the administration was unprepared to meet a crisis situation. Instead of providing concrete policy directives, the NSC and the State Department pulled the Shah into different directions. As a result the Shah left Iran in early January 1979. If the Shah lost the Iranian monarchy, the US lost the central pillar of its Persian Gulf Twin Pillar policy -- the Shah.

After the revolution, the State Department came to the conclusion that the US needed an alternative force in Iran to guard its interests. They were looking toward for the Western educated Iranian leadership who emerged into political prominence. Because moderates were well disposed towards the US and enjoyed the cachet of the revolution itself. Thus Americans started to have contacts with the Bazargan government. By November 1979, US resumed and increased, economic, diplomatic and military contacts. Government to Government meetings with NSC advisors Brezezinski and Bazargan, Vance and Yazdi were the best examples. At the same time, the administration admitted the Shah into the US ignoring the warnings of the US' Iranian embassy. It was the result of the political gambling of the American Pahlavites led by the Rockefeller-Kissinger-Brezzezinski group. Without considering the consequences of the decision, American Pahlavites used the misinformation, political bargaining and humanitarian appeal to the administration. Carter who had his own political and foreign policy motives succumbed to this pressure. Above all the

administration officials miscalculated that the real authority rested with the moderates not with the clerics led by Ayathollah Khomeini. The hostage crisis was thus the result of the misjudgement about the revolutionary Iranian political conditions and political manipulations. It was a Carter administration created crisis.

Scholars working in the sub-field of crisis management in foreign policy are of the view that the best management is its avoidance. It should not be allowed to begin. Once it begins it gets embroiled with other things and the crisis rapidly moves to a point where it becomes uncontrollable. The crisis management is like fire fighting. If it does begin the next stage is only damage limitation. The crisis, like fire in a building will not leave things as before. The failure of the US lay in allowing the hghostage crisis to begin. Those who gambled lost and the US had to pay heavily for the failure.

As an attempt to manage the hostage crisis the administration adopted the two-track strategy: negotiation with Iranians; and international economic, diplomatic, legal and political pressure. The US was negotiating throughout the crisis with the moderates, because the moderates were much more eager than the Americans to solve the crisis. They recognized the grave implications for their own political position in the continuation of the crisis. Therefore they believed that with the help of the US they would be able to defuse the crisis and strengthen their

political base against religious radicals. It was in accordance with Carter's own Iranian policy. But none of them either had mass support or the will to act decisively. Therefore their efforts to free the hostages were systematically used against them by the religious leadership to whittle down their power. From the first day of the crisis the negotiating efforts were concentrated on moderate Iranian governments of Bazargan and then Bani Sadr who were politically not in a powerful position to defuse the crisis. When it failed the administration tried to pressurise the religious revolutionaries who were in control of the hostages. But here again the US crisis managers failed to understand the psyche of revolutionary leaders. Their priority was not the Iranian economy but the consolidation of the revolution. Therefore the economic pressure could only be counter productive. The revolutionaries did not care much about international public opinion. The pressure therefore did not yield the desired result. The US association with moderate factions only eventuated in the extension of the crisis by Ayatollah Khomeini, until religious groups won the final battle against secularist, whom US was trying to strengthen politically. US's interaction with the moderates also cut off any possible channel of communication to the Khomeini and his clerics because the US had maintained no contacts with Iranian religious leadership since the 1970s. Instead it pursued a policy which was clearly antithetical to the interests of the traditional religious groups. Given this background and

the dominant national mood of suspicion towards the US, the religious leaders were reluctant to respond enthusiastically to American approaches. On the other hand the moderates were easily approached and did hold the government where they were obliged to deal with American officials. In this battle for political control between the religious groups and the moderates, Khomeini threw his critical support behind the clergy who had mass support, by hindereing any early solution to the crisis.

The administration was left with only one option, a rescue mission which was perpetually supported by the military group of the crisis management team headed by Brzezinski. It met with severe resistance from Secretary Vance and the State Department. They argued that it would endanger the life of the hostages and deepen the crisis. Carter overruled the objections and gave the approval to the mission. In fact President Carters decision to carry out the rescue operation was a response to many calculations. Especially, his perception of his responsiblity as the individual charged with protecting American national honour and hostages lives, dominant pressure from military group, political calculations of the White House staff and his strong desire for reelection. By giving extreme importance to the political consideration that a successful rescue operation would altogether enhance and ensure his reelection prospects. Thus many military requirements became a secondary one in the decision making

process. And so many fundamental technical mistakes of the rescue plan had slipped into the mission without any political scrutiny. It ended in the failure of the mission.

The hostage crisis not only got entangled in the raging factional battle for political supremacy in Iran, but also in the electoral politics of the US. The year 1980 was also a year of presidential election. Carter's management of the crisis was intended to derive maximum political benefit from it. Because his election strategy was only centered around the crisis. Instead of dealing with the crisis as a mere foreign policy dispute between two governments which involve a few foreign policy officials, Carter made it as a national issue by refusing to campaign until the hostages were released. Keeping the crisis in the central stage of 1980 American presidential election only helped to emotionally involve all the Americans and the media. It only helped to heighten the popular frustration over the failure of the US attempts to resolve the crisis, and also limited the administration's ability to deal with the crisis. In this extraordinary condition of popular involvement, the President could not down play the crisis. Therefore, the crisis management team was compelled to help the President develop support for policy in the Congress, the media and among the electorate. It also had to present proposals to the President that might have a chance of being workable in Iran as well as politically supportable at home. Furthermore it only served to convince the Iranians of the enormous value of the hostages, by extending the crisis and

exposing the impotency of Carter to deal with the crisis situation. Iranian radicals influenced the outcome of the 1980 American presidential election.

By mid 1980 religious groups gained control over the Iranian political system against the resistance of the moderate government by rallying the Iranian people behind them and diverting their attention from the internal political and economic problems of revolutionary Iran. It was also achieved by raising a constant spectre of forcible US intervention to reverse the establishment of the Islamic Revolutionary Government -- which was the militant's justification for the hostage taking. The hostage seizure was used by the militants to overthrow moderate political leaders like Bazargan, Yazdi and Ghotbezadeh. Later by the capture of the documents from the secret archives of the US embassy in Tehran, the militants succeeded in neutralizing many important leaders like Abbas Amir Entezam, Rahmatollah Moghadanmaraghe, Ayatollah Kazem Shariatmandari, Admiral Ahmed Mandani etc. Again several leaders lost their seats in the Majlis because of the publication of the secret documents from the US embassy which made it possible for them to be charged with collusion with US intelligence.

Later, the inauguration of the new clergy dominated Iranian parliament -- Majlis -- on January 28, 1980, followed by the election of the two powerful religious leaders, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, as the permanent Speaker of the Majlis, and Mohammed Ali Rajai as the



Primeminister of Iran, marked the final victory of the religious radicals under the Islamic Republican Party of the clerics. As a result of the consolidation power under religious radicals, President Bani Sadr became a mere figure head of the Iranian government.

Since then, Iranians started to consider the question of resolving the hostage crisis. It was later indicated by Iranian Prime Minister Rajai, that "the hostages are not really a problem for us; we are in the process of resolving it. The nature of hostage taking was important for us. We got the results long ago".<sup>2</sup> But many of early Iranian initiatives to solve the crisis were defeated by more radical elements in the Iranian parliament to influence the American presidential election. Meanwhile, the death of the Shah, the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war and the president elect Reagans' attitude towards Iran brought a new thinking in Iranian religious leadership. Shah's death simply eliminated the Iranian demand for his extradition, and argument that the US was trying to overthrow Iranian revolutionary government by supporting the Shah.

The subsequent outbreak of Iran-Iraq war on September 22, 1980, was a severe blow to Iran. It reinforced the impact of US economic and diplomatic sanctions more than ever. The same point was reemphasized in mid-October when prime minister Rajai travelled to the UN to seek world support against Iraq's invasion. He found that Iran was

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2. New York Times, 23 October 1983.

totally isolated as a result of the hostage crisis. Thus Iranians learned that keeping the hostages was disadvantageous than advantageous for the revolution and Iran's interests. In addition to Iranian political considerations, Iranian apprehension about the Reagan administration helped to resolve the crisis in the eleventh of the Carter administration, because throughout his election campaign and even after his election Reagan sent a clear message to the Iranians that he would deal with them not as the party in a dispute but as kidnappers and barbarians. Reagan's deliberate projection was that his administration would have been an unpredictable menace to the Iranians, helped Carter Administration's negotiating team to cut short many of the Iranian demands which stood as stumbling blocks on the way of the resolution of the crisis. In this direction, the most beneficial approach and effort of the administration was the formulation of a new policy approach to deal with Iranian crisis situation. It started immediately after the takeover of Edmund Muskie as Secretary of State. A full reassessment of the administration's past approaches underscored that a policy of Western style pressure could not produce a solution to the crisis. As a result the policy review group, under Muskie developed a new strategy. The main thrust of this strategy were: 1. the strict reinforcement of the economic sanctions, and giving time to the Iranians to judge its effect. 2. Stress on diplomatic effort to solve the crisis along with redoubled efforts to open channels to the religious leaders in Iran.

3. Follow up of quiet diplomacy until the Iranians formed their new Parliament and government.<sup>3</sup> This marked a drastic change in US policy by focusing its attempts on the religious leadership rather than the moderates. This helped the administration to a great extent. Thus, the solution of the hostage crisis was the result of the new understanding of the US and Iranian political leadership about the changed realities.

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3. Harold H.Saunders, "Beginning of the End", in Warren Christopher and others, American Hostages in Iran: The Conduct of the Crisis (New Haven, 1985), pp.284-5

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