The Weight of Decision:

An Analysis of the Iran Rescue Mission Attempt

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This sub-thesis is my own work
and all sources used have been acknowledged.

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This work is dedicated to those who sacrifice their lives and honor as individuals for the sake of the nation-state.

The Weight of Decision

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Chronology of Events:

November 4, 1979- Iranian militants storm the American Embassy in Teheran and take the staff as hostages. They demand that the United States send back the deposed Shah, who is in New York's Sloan-Kettering Hospital for cancer treatment. Carter refuses to comply with the demand.

November 19-20- On these two days, 13 black and women hostages are released.

November 29- The United States files suit in the International Court of Justice (World Court) in The Hague for an emergency ruling against the seizure of the hostages in Iran.

December 4- After three days of debate, the United Nations Security Council votes unanimously on Resolution 457, which demands the immediate release of the American hostages.

December 15- Panama's President, General Omar Torrijos, grants the Shah temporary exile.

December 21- Carter says the United States will ask the United Nations Security Council to impose economic sanctions on Iran.

December 24- The Soviet Union invades Afghanistan.

December 31- In the U.N.S.C., the first of two votes on Resolution 461 is passed 11-0, with four abstentions. This vote establishes January 7 as the day to vote on economic sanctions against Iran.

January 1- United Nations Secretary General Kurt Waldheim arrives in Teheran with the first United Nations Commission to listen to Iran's grievances against the Shah and the United States, and to attempt to gain the release of the hostages. Iran's Foreign Minister Sadegh Ghotbzadeh says that Waldheim's visit is only to listen to facts and not to mediate and negotiate. The Commission visit is deemed unacceptable to the United States because it does not require the release of the hostages before the investigation takes place.

January 7- The United States holds off on the sanctions vote of Resolution 461 at the request of allies.

January 12- The United States pushes for the United Nations Security Council vote on Resolution 461. It is subsequently vetoed by the Soviet Union. The final tally: 10 for, 2 against, and 2 abstentions.

January 20- Waldheim intimates that he has a way to resolve the hostage crisis. He confers with Washington and Iran to form a mutually acceptable United Nations Commission of inquiry into past United States-Iran relations.

January 30- Six Americans, who had a few days earlier escaped Iran with the help of Canadian Embassy officials in Teheran, arrive back into the United States.

February 7- Bani-Sadr is formally announced as head of the Revolutionary Council and President of Iran, second only in authority to Khomeini.

February 15- United Nations officials say the United States and Iran have agreed to Secretary General Walheim's proposal of a five member commission of inquiry
Chronology of Events, cont.

February 15, cont. into alleged past crimes of the United States and the Shah. The Commission will investigate the allegations without the pre-conditioned release of the hostages.


March 11- The United Nations Commission leaves Iran after 17 days. They decide not to present a report on the investigation of the Shah's and America's past relationship.

March 21- Hamilton Jordan, the White House Chief of Staff, and Lloyd Cutler, White House Legal Counsel, fly to Panama to try to settle a dispute between Panamanian and American doctors about the Shah's operation for a cancerous spleen.

March 22- At a National Security Council (N.S.C.) meeting, Carter and his Cabinet listen to a presentation on the feasibility of a rescue mission. The plan was improbable at the outset of the crisis, but, at this point, a seemingly more positive outcome could take place.

March 23- For several reasons, including the doctor dispute, the Shah leaves Panama for Egypt where he will undergo his operation.

March 31- Carter makes public an ultimatum he had made on March 25 to Iran's leaders to release the hostages within twenty-four hours of March 31 or harsh measures will ensue.

April 1- In what he calls a "positive development," Carter defers the ultimatum because President Bani-Sadr promises the hostages will soon be transferred to the government.

April 7- Khomeini rebuts Bani-Sadr's pledge and says the hostages must remain with the student militants. In response, Carter breaks diplomatic relations with Iran and imposes a series of economic sanctions.

April 11- During an N.S.C. meeting, at which Secretary of State Cyrus Vance is not present, President Carter decides to give the go-ahead to the rescue mission.

April 15- At an N.S.C. meeting, Cyrus Vance states his final opposition and arguments against the rescue plan, listing a threat to American interests in the Gulf and the world as a result of such a mission.

April 18- Carter orders new economic sanctions against Iran. He states to the public that if these new measures do not gain the hostages release, "the next step will be military action".

April 22- The European Economic Community meets in Luxembourg to vote on economic sanctions against Iran. If the Iranians do not release the hostages by May 17, the allies will impose sanctions.
Chronology of Events, cont.

April 24-25- Operation "Eagle Claw" begins. The rescue mission is aborted because three of eight helicopters could not continue with the mission. The minimum helicopter number required to perform the mission was designated by the military planners as six. As the abort operations begin deep within Iran, one of the five operable helicopters, positioning to refuel behind a C-130 tanker, collides with the plane. The result: Eight servicemen die.
Introduction:

The Weight of Decision

President Jimmy Carter recalls:

The first week of November 1979 marked the beginning of the most difficult period of my life. The safety and well-being of the American hostages became a constant concern for me, no matter what other duties I was performing as President. I would walk in the White House gardens early in the morning and lie awake at night, trying to think of additional steps I could take to gain their freedom without sacrificing the honor and security of our nation. I listened to every proposal, no matter how preposterous, all the way from delivering the Shah as the revolutionaries demanded to dropping an atomic bomb on Tehran.(1)

The takeover of the American embassy in Teheran by militant students on November 4, 1979 precipitated an international crisis involving the United States, Iran, and a host of other nations. Ultimately, pressures connected with the crisis led President Carter to authorize a military mission which attempted to rescue the hostages on April 24, 1980. This thesis will attempt to examine those pressures and to evaluate the way in which they influenced Carter's momentous decision.

Michael Brecher contends that there are three conditions which define a crisis situation. These three conditions are perceptions held by top-level foreign policy decision-makers that there is:

1.) a threat to basic values, with a simultaneous or subsequent-
2.) high probability of involvement in military hostilities, and the awareness of
3.) finite time for response to the external value threat.(2)

The first two conditions stipulated by Brecher are easy to comprehend, but the third element bears uncertainties, for it is difficult to decide what "finite time" is. A notable analyst of foreign policy decision-making, C.F. Herman, included in his conceptualization the element of "surprise" as an influence in the making of a
However, this element is not a necessary condition in deeming the embassy takeover to have been a crisis. The embassy takeover did threaten basic values and it did involve a high probability of military involvement, but it was not unanticipated. The takeover did, though, catalyze a crisis situation, adding stress to the Carter Administration which changed American behavioral responses and foreign policy decision-making processes.

The distinction of a finite period of time, Brecher states, does not require that decision-makers decide to use force within a day, a week, a month or even months, but rather that there is a realization that decisions for or against a military measure be made within some time-frame.

Moreover, the decision-maker not only manages a crisis, but he "copes" with it. In this respect, a most significant element included in this work is stress or pressure. The term pressure is alluded to several times within the text, and it must be remembered that pressure is a code-word for or synonymous with the perceptions of threat and/or time pressure and/or probability of a military venture. In this case, a linkage between threat, time, and likelihood of a military action are manifested in pressures on the decision-maker. Indeed, these stress-related factors added to the complexity and sensitivity for the President while he managed the Iran hostage crisis. Moreover, even though the rescue mission took place approximately six months after the outset of the crisis, the Carter Administration had long been warning the leaders in Teheran of the consequences of Iran's actions.

When reading or researching the analysis of decision-making processes, it should be remembered that any one single, analytical methodology is not necessarily applicable for all interpellation of the decision-making processes. Historical comparisons of one crisis and another usually are evident in work done in analytical methodology. But apart from elemental similarities and the more recent academic work done on interpreting the micro, or intrinsic bureaucratic/governmental influences on the chief decision-maker, each analysis
of an international crisis requires the researcher to formulate and acknowledge new components which face the decision-maker from one crisis situation to another. Acceptance of new methodological studies will enhance contemporary analysis of the complex study of foreign policy decision-making.

This thesis will concentrate primarily on five areas, to which individual chapters are devoted. Although there are other elements which contributed to the decision to undertake the Iran rescue mission, an examination of these five topics will aid the reader in comprehending the impetus behind the rescue decision. The five elements of foreign policy decision-making influences and pressures to be examined are: One, public opinion. Two, reactions by an adversary. Three, election considerations. Four, concerns of the allies. And five, de-centralization of the bureaucracy.

Included before the introduction is a chronology of events during the six months that led up to the rescue attempt. These are important dates, and most of them are referred to frequently within the paper itself. In the text, the dates are usually in order as events occurred, but there are several occasions when the dates referred to reappear when discussed in combination with other important dates.

To some extent, the five topics are interwoven with one another. For example, public opinion has a direct consequence on electoral results. Or, reactions by an adversary, in this case the Soviet Union, are related to the geopolitical concerns of America's allies. The head decision-makers, the Carter Cabinet, had to evaluate carefully the proposed contingencies for resolving the crisis, while at the same time keeping in mind the likely international and domestic consequences of a particular decision. In this light, it is important to become familiar with the bureaucratic element of decision-making.

In an examination of the bureaucratic element of decision-making, the roles of the central players become more evident. All of the department heads/secretaries pose contingencies to the President for what they consider the
Graham T. Allison calls these contingencies alternatives. In turn, these alternatives are viewed by the central decision-maker as different methods of achieving a goal; in this case, resolving the Iran hostage crisis.

Each of the departments believes its policy recommendations are paramount to resolving the crisis. In this context, the national interest is at the core of policy recommendations. Variations of opinion create administrative in-fighting. Therefore, the President must choose an alternative where the consequences of achieving a resolution to the crisis rate highest. Thus, the elements of public opinion; reactions by an adversary; the election; and concerns of the allies all become instruments of influence to use on the President by his subordinates to choose their desired course of action. These departmental influences are depicted on the following chart. Each of the departments funnels information, analysis, and recommendations to the President. The President must weigh the alternatives and choose what he ultimately deduces as the correct course of action, that which brings about the most positive results. In the model, many of the concerns of the individual departments overlap from one department to another. However, the fall-out in consensus is evidenced in varying policy recommendations of how to resolve the crisis.

The pressures to act are even more burdensome, because the longer a crisis runs, the more such forces come into play and complicate the decision-making process. Again, it was six months before the rescue mission took place. In this respect, research can be done to document the events which led to the rescue mission as a means of resolving the protracted nature of the Iran hostage crisis.
Crisis Pressures and Influences:

Chief Decision-maker/Arbitrator
President Jimmy Carter

Information/Analysis
Input
Alternatives


Department of State
Cyrus Vance

National Security Council
Zbigniew Brzezinski

Public opinion. Election considerations. Choice of nation or hostages.

White House Staff
Mondale, Jordan, Powell
Throughout the crisis, the Carter Cabinet was at odds concerning the degree to which the Administration and the United States should sacrifice American honor and interests. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance opposed any military measures as a means of resolving the crisis. The White House staff was preoccupied with the effect a protracted crisis would have on the President's re-election bid. And the National Security Adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, was anticipating the demise of America's politico-strategic interests in the Gulf and around the world. Carter had to weigh the consequences of his actions and inaction concerning the crisis, and on April 11, 1980 he directed the military to proceed as soon as possible with a rescue. The decision to attempt a rescue mission seemed like a balanced compromise between Vance's resistance to military resolutions and Brzezinski's push for military symbols and solutions. However, ultimately the mission was a policy decision made more to calm Middle East regional anxiety, as well as to establish domestic confidence in the Carter Administration, than applied as a measure to gain the safe release of the hostages.

The elements linked to the rescue mission decision reflect how complex foreign policy decision-making is during an international crisis. For varying considerations the Carter Cabinet reasoned that a rescue could not take place at the outset of the crisis. Moreover, as time went on, Cyrus Vance and the State Department believed that any military action, including a rescue mission, would jeopardize American interests in the Gulf and elsewhere in the world. To the National Security Council and the White House staff, the longer the crisis went on, the more deleterious effect it would have on the nation's interests and on the re-election of the Carter Administration. In this thesis I will focus attention on the problems which occupied much of the final year of Jimmy Carter's Presidency and reached their culmination in his decision to rescue the American captives in Teheran.
End notes: Introduction, The Weight of Decision


2) Michael Brecher, *Decisions in Crisis*, p. 1

3) C.F. Herman, *Crisis in Foreign Policy: A Simulation Analysis*, (Indianapolis, 1969) p.414. (The decision-maker tends to modify his actions in reaction to a surprise. Subsequently, the decision-maker's actions may be less rational than usual.)

4) Brecher, op. cit., p. 4

5) ibid., pp. 16-20

6) For more information on stress analysis, see Brecher 18-21


8) For differences in analysis of decision-making methodologies see Graham T. Allison's work in *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*

9) There is no specific reason as to why the topic of public opinion is the first discussed or the bureaucratic element as last. However, as the hostage crisis grew more protracted, each of the five elements discussed became more complex to manage. In this respect and in consideration to the reader in familiarizing themselves with the analysis, the depiction of public opinion may be more easily understood in the beginning of the paper than the more micro examination of the bureaucratic element.


11) ibid., achievement of goals is also known as the "payoff." "Each bundle of consequences will contain a number of side effects. Nevertheless, at a minimum, the agent must be able to rank in order of preference each possible set of consequences that might result from a particular action."

12) ibid., p. 30
When Kruschev shipped Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles (IRBM's) and Medium Range Ballistic Missiles (MRBM's) to Cuba in the October missile crisis of 1962, Kennedy was said by observers to say- "He can't do this to me!"(1) During the Iran hostage crisis of November 4, 1979 to January 20, 1981, President Jimmy Carter and the American public echoed the type of frustration Kennedy displayed in 1962. The result of the lingering frustration caused by the hostage crisis was an attempted rescue mission.

Scrubinisation of the presidential foreign policy decision-making process usually takes into account such elements as election considerations; bureaucratic arms of the government and their respective secretaries; reactions of allies; and anticipated responses by potential adversaries, particularly the Soviet Union.

According to Coral Bell, "The media and public opinion are a sub-class of determinant factors influencing a President."(2) But in the case of the Iran hostage crisis, the public was a primary consideration or influence pressuring the President to take a certain course of action.(3) Quite simply, the media can either help or hinder a president's standing with the public; the survivability and effectiveness of an administration depends on acknowledging public opinion.

As depicted in the memoirs of Jimmy Carter and his chief subordinates, there is little doubt that public opinion played a decisive role while managing the Iran hostage crisis. Indeed, initially some of Carter's Cabinet recognised that the hostage crisis could be turned into an asset, something to prove that the President could ride out a crisis situation and come out a winner.(4) As the primaries and the presidential election neared, a quick resolution to the crisis would add to Carter's
popularity. And the belief that the hostage crisis could be turned into an asset for the President was not unfounded. For during the Iranian Revolution of February 1979, the American Embassy had been taken over by militant students. But after one day the Iranian government forced the students to leave, and subsequently guarantees were arranged for enhanced protection of the embassy compound and staff. Hence Carter's Cabinet was confident the crisis would be resolved quickly.

There was a great difference in Iran between the February 14th 1979 and November 4th 1979 takeovers. The Shah had left Iran prior to the first takeover in the midst of the revolution and had set up residence in Morocco. Before the second embassy takeover, the Shah was admitted to the United States for medical reasons in October of 1979. The Ayatollah Khomeini was back in Iran at his residence in Qum. And the moderate government of Mehdi Bazargan was proving ineffectual in gaining the release of the hostages. On February 14, 1979, Bazargan was able to arrange the release of the hostages. But in late February Bazargan met with National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski in Algiers at a Middle East conference. The fateful meeting was taken by many of Khomeini's radical supporters to mean that Bazargan was either being coerced or manipulated by the United States. Their meeting was considered a threat to the revolution. The admittance of the Shah into the United States also constituted a threat. The Khomeinists reasoned that the Shah's presence in America was a prelude to an imminent coup attempt. Therefore, the prisoners were envisioned as hostages in the classical meaning of the word: The threat to their lives would protect the Iranian Revolution from American plans of intervention, and the hostages could be used as a demand for the return of the Shah. Consequently Bazargan, a moderate who wished to retain relations with the United States, resigned. The Khomeinists were in power and the United States had no direct American diplomatic contacts with Khomeini or his supporters.

Once the Carter Cabinet realised that the links to Iran were broken, it
began to implement a policy of slowly pressuring the Iranians to release the American hostages. This gradual pressure began with Carter cutting off oil imports from Iran, and asking the United Nations Security Council to condemn the takeover. In addition to the publicly known measures, it was at this early junction in time that President Carter called for military contingency plans to be drafted.(8) While the United States government had no direct links with the Iranian Revolutionary Council, the public did, through the media.

From the day of the embassy takeover, November 4th, 1979, the media were saturated with information and reporting about the hostage crisis. At first, the media reflected a strong backing for Carter and his crisis-management. As Cyrus Vance notes, Carter's popularity was actually increasing in the country:

By the end of November, President Carter's political standing had risen dramatically. The public and Congress strongly supported the president's restraint in dealing with the crisis, as well as his firmness in refusing to capitulate to Iran's demands for extradition of the Shah and for an apology... The news media kept an intense spotlight on the crisis.(9)

Restraint might have been admirable when there were no developments, but on November 17 the New York Times reported that Khomeini was threatening to put the American hostages on trial for espionage.(10) This was seen immediately as an attempt at intimidation, and the implications were all too clear to Carter and his Cabinet: if the hostages were tried, they would possibly be convicted and executed, regardless of their innocence under any standards other than those of revolutionary Iran. Following this Khomeini threat, Carter issued a statement on the possibility of a trial of the hostages; in that statement, he mentioned for the first time the possibility using force. Carter remembers in his memoirs Keeping Faith:
I was prepared to make a direct military attack on Iran. We (key advisers- Mondale, Brown, Vance, Brzezinski, Jones, Turner, Jordan, and Powell) pored over aerial photographs of oil refineries and many other targets of strategic importance there, and planned how best to carry out our threat to the Iranian leaders of quick punitive action.(11)

But despite this tough talk, Hamilton Jordan, the White House Chief of Staff, believed that Khomeini already saw Carter as highly ineffectual in his handling of the crisis. In the third week of November Khomeini ridiculed Carter's threats of military action as empty: "Why should we be afraid?... Carter does not have the guts to engage in a military action."(12)

Khomeini's public rebuff of Carter's statement of action was the beginning of a series of frustrations for the President and his Cabinet. The press was accentuating the dilemma.

... the Monday-morning quarterbacks would question the President's handling of the crisis in the early stages, arguing that we complicated the hostage problem by focusing so much public attention on it. They argued that Carter should have put the problem on the back burner. But that was never possible. From the very first day, the hostage crisis dominated the news: nightly networks showed interviews with the captors at the embassy in Iran or crowds of demonstrators in Tehran, flagellating themselves with chains and burning the American flags... but we never had the chance to 'control' the news, as many critics contended, and put the hostages on the 'back burner.'(13)

Invariably the question will arise asking why was there such expanded coverage of the hostage crisis. The explanation seems simple: the press-corps was already in Teheran, in force, at the time of the embassy takeover because they were covering the Iranian Revolution.

On December 11, Jordan and Vice-President Mondale spoke about the effect the crisis might have. Mondale expressed his surprise at the patriotic
...fervor surrounding the President, but stated that, "... if our people aren't out of there by Christmas, I'm afraid that an ugly mood will develop in this country, and we'll be in for a rough time."(14) A mid-December Harris Poll showed that two-thirds of the people supported President Carter's strategy of handling the crisis.(15)

Mondale's assertion that Christmas would be a turning point proved to be prophetic, for on December 24, 1979 the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan complicated matters even more for the President. The reasons for the Soviet action are beyond this study, but it seems likely that the overthrow of the Shah and the consequent loss of American influence in the region may have encouraged the Soviets. Some of America's allies realised that when the semi-neutral protective-belt of Turkey [from N.A.T.O.], and Iran and Pakistan [of S.E.A.T.O.] was broken, the possibility of Afghanistan acting as a buffer was diminished. The Carter Administration received the blame for this, and the Soviet expansion into the vicinity of the Gulf placed still further pressure on Carter.

In addition to handling the hostage crisis and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Carter was in the midst of the Democratic Primary race with Senator Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts. In the beginning of the primary race, the Teheran takeover dominated the news and editorials, even when Kennedy did a live television interview on November 5 issuing his sharpest challenge to Carter.(16)

The United Nations Security Council on December 4 passed a resolution that demanded the immediate release of the hostages. The hostages were still in captivity on December 31 when the Security Council passed a proposal to vote on Resolution 461, which established January 7, 1980 as the date to reconvene and vote to adopt sanctions. Yet the percentage of editorials favoring stronger action, such as a military deployment, added to Carter's problems. For example,
even after the United States decided to adopt sanctions, despite Europe's and Japan's wariness about complying, a Harris Poll survey in mid-April established that 68% of the population thought that sanctions were too little, too late. A Newsweek poll in April, before the rescue mission, found that the public disagreed with Carter's past strategy: 49% were now demanding stronger action.

Adding to the growing public unhappiness were reports from Teheran in February 1980 which indicated that the militant students would soon hand over the hostages to the government of Iran. But there was to be no such Revolutionary Council order until after Iran's elections for a new President had been confirmed at the end of February by Iran's General Assembly. It was all but certain that Bani-Sadr would be elected. Bani-Sadr was endorsed by the Ayatollah Khomeini.

It was also assumed by the United States Department of State that, once Bani-Sadr was elected and confirmed, direct negotiations for the release of the hostages would occur. In the meantime, in mid-December United Nations Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim received a proposal from Iran suggesting that a United Nations Commission be established to hear Iranian grievances against the United States. The Commission which left for Teheran on the first of January, was intended to provide an international forum which guaranteed that the complaints of the Iranians would be dealt with fairly. The United States disagreed with the proposal because it did not include the unconditional release of the hostages. Nonetheless, Waldheim's commission went to Teheran in the hopes of ironing out some of the differences between the United States and Iran. Upon arrival, it was treated roughly by the Iranians. The Iranians turned the whole affair around and said that the Commission had already condemned the United States. The Commission left Iran accomplishing little. A second commission visit was to attempt a trip again after Bani-Sadr's election as President was confirmed by the General Assembly on February 23.
A deal was struck between Bani-Sadr and Carter that stated the Commission would listen to Iran's grievances without the pre-condition of releasing the hostages. They were to be turned over to the government and then released after the findings of the Commission were published. But on February 20, three days before the United Nations Commission was to arrive in Teheran to make sure the hostages were safe and then to oversee the transfer from the militants to the Iranian government, the Iran News Agency published a report that "Khomeini supports the 'students' at the compound and calls for the return of the Shah as a condition for the release of the hostages." [It should be noted that President Carter believed that the transfer was to be completed upon the United Nations visit because of a formal guarantee by representatives of Bani-Sadr.]

Upon the arrival of the United Nations Commission on February 23, 1980, a Khomeini statement to the press indicated the hostages would be dealt with when the Iranian Parliament reconvened after the May elections. Negotiations were coming to a head.

The press articles on the failure of the United Nations Commission were starting to wear on the President's patience. Carter emphasized his frustrations in conversations with Hamilton Jordan, "Ham," Carter said, "I'm getting discouraged on the Commission visit. We're sitting here helpless, being buffeted back and forth by events, being kicked around in the press, just watching and waiting."

In a secret communiqué sent to Bani-Sadr on March 25, President Carter demanded that the hostages be transferred by April 1 and threatened that serious repercussions would ensue for Iran if the transfer were not effected. In the early morning of April 1st, Carter and most of his Cabinet were sitting in the Oval Office, waiting for a message confirming the transfer that Bani-Sadr had promised in a secret communiqué of his own on March 30. At 5:30 a.m. Hal Saunders, the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, called
to say that he had just heard from the Swiss Embassy in Washington, whose officials were acting as intermediaries, that Bani-Sadr had publicly announced that his government would take control of the hostages from the militants if the United States would stop the threats of sanctions and recognize the right of the Parliament (Majlis) to debate and resolve the hostage question. Less than two hours later, after Carter deliberated with his staff, he called a press conference and stated that Bani-Sadr's speech was "a positive step" and as a result he would delay the imposition of sanctions.

April 1st was also the day of an important Primary victory for President Carter in the state of Wisconsin. The people went to the polls after the "positive news" about a seemingly peaceful resolution to the hostage crisis and voted overwhelmingly for Carter. Later in the day, after it had appeared that Carter had won Wisconsin, the Mullahs, or clerical opponents of Bani-Sadr, destroyed the prospect of a transfer because the President apparently did not live up to the conditions set forth for the transfer. Moreover, the Mullahs appeared ready to scratch any deal proposed by the United States because on March 23 the Shah had fled Panama, where Iranian lawyers had filed extradition papers, for Egypt, from where the Iranians had little chance of seeing the Shah returned to Iran to stand trial for his past "crimes."

All in all, Carter was losing credibility with the public primarily because of the April 1 announcement. The Carter Administration's survivability was running out. And the American people were running out of patience.

By the first week of April, pressures to mount military action were increasing greatly. Khomeini was the only authority in Iran. The intransigence and delay in negotiating shown by Iran appeared deliberate, intended to guarantee that a majority of Mullahs would be elected to the Majlis and thus cement Khomeini's position as the supreme authority in the new Islamic republic. The State Department reported that it might take months before the Majlis could
complete its second elections. (33) With only so many months until the Presidential election in November and with the Kennedy challenge still pending, the Carter Administration was forced to weigh heavily the possibility of a rescue mission. In addition to the Administration's political survival, the survival of the hostages was once again in doubt- if Khomeini was the government, and if he and the militants were of one mind, then what was to stop the Majlis from proceeding with espionage trials?

On April 7, Khomeini made a public statement through his son that the hostage issue would definitely be handled by the Majlis after they reconvened in mid-May. (34) This confirmed the Administration's worst fears: there was to be no quick resolution to the crisis.

The American public was as frustrated as Carter. There had been demands, from the beginning of the crisis, that some military action be taken against the Iranians. (35) The public's anger was increased by the Iranians on-again/off-again negotiating stance. The outcries for teaching the Iranians "a lesson" continued. Carter's options had been reduced to three: he could wait, he could resort to a military action, or he could attempt a rescue mission. In Power and Principle, Zbigniew Brezezinski describes the changing attitudes of three key advisers to the President, Jody Powell, Hamilton Jordan, and Walter Mondale, as expressed at an April 7 National Security Council meeting called because of Khomeini's Majlis announcement.

All three were feeling increasingly frustrated and concerned about rising public pressures for more direct action against Iran as a whole... With the political climate heating up, and with our political opponents deliberately exploiting the Iranian issue to embarrass the President, public pressures on behalf of the second option (military strike) were clearly on the rise. (36)
It is apparent that President Carter was not one to act in haste concerning the fate of the hostages. In fact, he considered the safety of the hostages paramount. Carter's posture of restraint was in contrast to the public clamor for a military strike, which in all likelihood would have sealed the fate of the fifty-three American captives. However, there is little doubt the President and his key aides did not feel the weight of decision pressuring them from public opinion to take some "military" action. Carter weighed the military alternatives. And when it appeared negotiations had ended, he chose what amounted to a surgical military action: one which was the best alternative for a quick resolution of the crisis. Indeed, the hostage crisis was a desperate situation with the President having to weigh many considerations of which most members of the public were not cognizant. A rescue mission, while appearing to be a strong action, might have provided a measure of relief from public disenchantment with diplomatic negotiations; without some of the risks a full-scale military operation might ensue.
End notes: Chapter One, Public Opinion

1) Allison, *Essence of Decision*, see chapter one

2) Dr. Coral Bell, January 24, 1985 interview on influences on the decision-maker, at the Australian National University. I should note that Dr. Bell recognizes the media as an element of influence, but that it should not be taken overly serious as a prime element of influence.

3) The Iran hostage crisis, as well evidenced by the coverage of the Vietnam war and its effect on public opinion, is a contemporary example of the primacy with which a President regards the media. Most notably, a new way of dealing or handling of the media has been exhibited by President Ronald Reagan and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher while they managed the Grenada invasion and Falklands war respectively. Television coverage was virtually halted. And the effectivity of decision-making was less hampered by a negative press coverage. Indeed, the majority of reports published during each event was circulated by the respective government bodies. Consequently, the reports were more positive in nature.

4) Hamilton Jordan, *Crisis: The Last Year of the Carter Presidency*, pp. 19, 36, 53

5) All of the pertinent biographies state belief of an early resolution. See Vance, Carter, Brzezinski, Jordan and *New York Times*, November 5, 1979, p. 1

6) Barry Rubin, *Paved With Good Intentions*, p. 304

7) ibid., p. 303. See also Carter's, *Keeping Faith*, pp. 487-488

8) November 6, military contingency plans drafted.


10) Jordan, op. cit., p. 63


12) Jordan, op.cit., p. 63, taken from *New York Times*, November 9

13) ibid., pp. 55-56

14) ibid., p. 77

15) Rubin, op. cit., p.327

16) Jordan, op. cit., p 25

17) Rubin, op. cit., p. 330

18) *Newsweek Magazine*, taken from Rubin, p. 330

19) Iran News Agency, taken from Jordan, p. 154 and Vance, p. 404

20) Vance, op. cit., p. 398
22) Vance, p. 399
23) Jordan, op. cit., p. 176
24) ibid., pp. 193-4
25) ibid., p. 179, Vance, p. 404
26) Jordan, p. 183
28) Jordan, op. cit., p. 243
29) ibid., pp. 243-4
30) ibid., p. 245
32) Jordan, op. cit., p. 248
33) ibid., p. 247
34) New York Times, April 8, p. 1
35) See, for example, articles in New York Times of November 12, pp. 1 & A-10 and November 24, p. A-10
36) Brzezinski, op. cit., p. 490
Chapter 2:
Pressures From An Adversary

Just before the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in late December 1979, military options were becoming more and more attractive to the President as a means to resolve the hostage crisis. A military attack on Iranian oil-related installations or the mining of Iran's harbors was gaining favor in the White House in light of the inability of the United States to have its proposed United Nations Resolution for sanctions against Iran passed unanimously. Because Resolution 461's call for sanctions on January 12 was not unanimous in the Security Council, the Western allies did not favor economic sanctions as a means of procuring the release of the hostages. It was believed by the Western European allies and the Japanese, who receive a high percentage of their oil imports from the Persian Gulf, that diplomatic efforts should be continued to effect the peaceful release of the hostages. The State Department mirrored the allies' concerns over the immediate short-and long-term effects of a military strike. And in more defined strategic terms the Administration was hesitant concerning a military strike against Iran because it might contribute to political destabilisation of the Persian Gulf governments and destroy American efforts to establish a regional security framework.(1) Thus, the United States was hampered in its planning of a determined military strike because of two reasons: the threat that American and allied oil resources from the Gulf could be interrupted, and the risk that, in the absence of a powerful ally, Iran would turn to the Soviet Union for closer economic and military ties. And of course the latter threat was perceived as much more relevant after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the advent of Soviet proximity to the Gulf.
For Carter and his aides, contending with the Soviet presence in Afghanistan added to the already complex and sensitive nature of the hostage crisis. National honor and interest were at stake when the United States embassy staff was kidnapped and the American ties to Iran were lost. However, Afghanistan posed a greater threat- for the Soviets were in a position to promote a separate Baluchistan, which would give them access to the Indian Ocean while splitting up the sovereign states of Pakistan and Iran. Such a threat is not completely idle. For example, the Soviets have yet to abrogate a section of the 1940 Molotov Agreement with the Nazis which acknowledges a Soviet claim to oversee and control the Middle East region south of Batum and Baku; this could ultimately provide the Soviet Union with a warm water port in the Indian Ocean. Therefore, the approach taken by Carter was to propose a United Nations General Assembly condemnation of the intervention, and to promote a coalition of Islamic nations- thus solidifying a distrust for the Soviet Union. This latter maneuver appears to have worked in favor of the United States stance against the Soviet incursion into Afghanistan for Iraq's relations with the Soviet Union have since become strained or ambiguous and Syria- according to the United States, a Soviet Middle East surrogate- condemned the invasion. Moreover, the Carter Administration thought that, in light of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, new possibilities for cooperation between the United States and Iran might occur because of shared security interests. In this frame of thought, the United States did not wish to push Iran toward the Soviets through intimidation or through threats of military force. It was hoped, of course, that Iran might release the hostages in order to gain concessions from the United States in the form of military aid. As things transpired, however, the Khomeinists came to distrust the Soviet atheistic state as well as the American imperialists, and thus a resolution to the hostage crisis came no closer.

Before the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, Carter had stationed the aircraft carrier Kitty Hawk just outside the Persian Gulf, to join the aircraft
... carrier Midway already deployed there. This action was probably intended both to
give a sign of force to the Soviets and to intimate military action against Iran if
the hostages were not released.(7) These military actions, however, became less
viable as an option because of the Soviet element. As Zbigniew Brzezinski
outlines:

... Until the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the
trend was toward more and more serious
consideration of military action. The Soviet
taggression against Afghanistan arrested this
trend, and our strategy increasingly became that
of saving the hostages lives and of promoting our
national interest by exercising military
restraint. As a result, during the next three
months, the primary emphasis of our efforts was
in gradually intensifying the sanctions while
engaging in more active and indirect
negotiations.(8)

Carter and his Cabinet were united in the belief that a rescue mission was
a last resort, to be undertaken only if the hostages were tried and killed or were
about to be killed. Brzezinski favored a more generalized military response, such
as attacking Iranian coastal oil refineries, which would put Iran under immediate
pressure to release the hostages.(9) But, because of the Soviet element, a military
strike plan was shelved in favor of negotiations and implementing sanctions. This
latter position, however, was not the only option the National Security Adviser
wanted to depend on. Brzezinski articulates why a low burning flame of an idea
grew warmer.

After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan... I
came to the view that such a military action
would be strategically damaging, and would
simply give additional opportunities to the Soviets
in their drive toward the Persian Gulf and the
Indian Ocean... It was in this context that the
rescue mission started to look more attractive to
me.(10)

This was at the very time that public pressure was mounting in favor of a military
action, which would display American firmness in defence of her interests.
Another snafu which added to the pressure on Carter to engage in a firm action to gain the release of the hostages was the discovery of a Soviet brigade in Cuba. Ironically, the brigade crisis, so close to America's shores, added to Carter's pressures because of the need to show firmness in light of perceived global strategic thrusts by the Soviet Union. In the fall of 1979, just before the embassy takeover and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Senator Frank Church of Idaho, the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, announced the discovery of the brigade. The brigade itself did not pose any real threat to the United States, but Church felt obligated, or pressured, to announce the brigade's presence. [Perhaps because months earlier he had denied a report of its existence.] The result of the Church announcement was that ratification of the Soviet-American Arms Limitations Talks (SALT II) became linked to the removal of the brigade. The Soviets would not budge and the whole affair became counterproductive for the Carter Administration in demonstrating resolve in forcing the Soviet brigade out of Cuba. As Gloria Duffy states in her article for International Security, "Crisis Mangling and the Cuban Brigade":

... eventual U.S. retreat from its stated aim to ensure removal of the brigade, revealed to the Soviets an American administration unwilling or unable to exert leverage upon the U.S.S.R. U.S. policy in the brigade case failed to act as either an inducement or a deterrent towards the U.S.S.R.(11)

And in analyzing the linkage between the brigade crisis and the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan, Duffy remarks:

... U.S. behavior in the brigade case acted to remove any positive constraints that expectations for productive relations with the U.S. might have exerted on Soviet calculations in dealing with Afghanistan. This same U.S. behavior demonstrated the hollowness of American statements of commitment against Soviet policies.(12)
And it is with the failure of the brigade crisis, and the precipitation of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, that the Carter Cabinet viewed its credibility slipping both at home and abroad. To instill faith in Carter's leadership, the administration had to initiate new measures, the announcement of the Carter Doctrine, and the rescue mission.

The political linkage between America's national interests and the ongoing frustration of the hostage crisis is easy to comprehend. First, the political credibility of the United States in the Middle East was badly dented when the Shah fell despite the veil of American support. There may be some debate as to whether the Shah could have kept his monarchy in power even with United States armed assistance. But such an American effort would have been contradictory and perhaps counterproductive because Carter at the time was promulgating international human rights and any American force working to prop up the Shah would have been seen as assisting toward the maintenance of an authoritarian and oppressive regime. Moreover, in the face of internal pressures in Iran beckoning for the demise of the Shah, it is difficult to see how United States support could have sustained him for an extensive period. Indeed, American military intervention is far more likely to have resulted in further disruptions of the international oil market. (13) When it did come, the fall of the Shah was a serious setback for American interests and a slight to American honor. That honor was greatly imperilled by the hostage situation.

Soon after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Carter came under pressure to act. Though many of the Middle East leaders close to the United States did not wish to foster the outbreak of a war between the United States and Iran, there were indications that some of them were beginning to doubt American resolve. It was believed, suggested President Anwar Sadat of Egypt, that American passivity in reacting to the hostage crisis might echo an American unwillingness to aid her other Middle East allies in time of political unrest and threat from outside.
It is in this context that the President gave his famous Carter Doctrine speech on January 23, 1980.

An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.

Carter and his staff undoubtedly saw the need to show grit in front of their domestic audience, but they needed also to pacify the leaders of the Middle East, principally, Prince Fahd of Saudi Arabia, King Hassan of Morocco, and President Sadat of Egypt. Although the speech itself was apparently contrived in a short period of time, the formal work of negotiating access to regional ports and airfields had been begun in August of 1979 before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Cyrus Vance writes:

... the president approved actions by us to gain access to local ports and airfields during a crisis (including expansion of air and naval facilities on the tiny British-held island of Diego Garcia), and to pre-position combat equipment for support of American ground forces. All of this preceded the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. These steps stemmed not from the invasion of Afghanistan, as some have suggested, but rather from the turmoil in Iran. The hostage crisis and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan simply accelerated measures already under way.

Indeed, it was after the January United Nations Security Council meeting on Resolution 461, which attempted to gain a unanimous vote to implement economic sanctions of the strictest kind against Iran, that Carter decided to devote his January 23, 1980 State of the Union address to Soviet-American relations. Moreover, the Carter Doctrine, though based primarily on political deterrence rather than on military capabilities, provided a temporary remedy to some of the mounting pressures Carter was facing concerning the Soviet threat.
and the hostage crisis embarrassment. Although Carter's popularity was evident in the January 21 Iowa caucuses, it was apparent to him that the popularity would wane with time. In fact, he recognised the extra problems confronting him in February as a result of the Iran and Soviet crises, problems such as the doubling of world oil prices since the Iranian revolution; the draft-registration legislation; the intended boycott of the 1980 Summer Olympics in Moscow; and the growing restiveness of the public with each passing week because of American impotence in dealing with international crises. All of these problems already facing the President added to his pressures to effectively manage the hostage crisis and contend with Soviet incursions around the globe. Moreover, the Soviets and Iranians were complicating matters by discussing increased trade between the two countries in the event the United States and her allies implemented international codified sanctions.

If the President was to prove that his Carter Doctrine speech was not just rhetoric, he had to take action. His first action was the finalization of military facility access rights with Egypt, Somalia, Kenya, and Oman. [It should be noted that an airfield in S.E. Egypt and Oman's Masirah Island near the Persian Gulf were used as staging areas for the Iran hostage rescue mission.] The second course of action was shoring up his flanks around the Persian Gulf, most notably Pakistan. The third was the establishment of the Rapid Deployment Force (R.D.F.), composed of approximately 25,000 troops capable of quick deployment to the Middle East in the event of an outside threat to the Persian Gulf oil lifeline. The fourth and final ingredient to help re-establish regional confidence in the Gulf and domestic confidence at home, was to attempt a rescue mission. The rescue mission provided the best alternative to a major military strike. If it succeeded, it would give Carter an incredible domestic boost of confidence, as well as provide a symbolic gesture to any adversaries: The United States would be prepared to protect its national interests. The Soviets would always have to consider America's determination not to allow Soviet thrusts into the Persian Gulf.
End-notes: Chapter Two, Pressures From An Adversary


2) Brzezinski, op. cit., p. 427


4) Brzezinski, op. cit., p. 489


6) Vance, op. cit., p. 398. Also, note that Khomeini expelled many Soviets from Iran and imprisoned members of Iran's communist party (Tudeh)

7) New York Times, November 21, 1979, p. 1

8) Brzezinski, op. cit., p. 485

9) ibid., p. 488

10) ibid., p. 489


12) ibid., p. 84


14) Brzezinski, op. cit., p. 493

15) Carter, op. cit., p. 483


17) Vance, op. cit., pp. 369-70


19) Carter, op. cit., p. 483

20) See David D. Newsom's article "America Engulfed," for a more in depth analysis of military contingencies for the United States in the Persian Gulf, Middle East regions

21) Carter, op. cit., pp. 488-9

23) For more information on Middle East build-up, see *New York Times*, January 9, pp. 1 & A-8, and *Washington Post*, February 1, on aid to Pakistan and same date *New York Times* pp. A-1 & A-10
Chapter 3: Election Considerations

At the beginning, the hostage crisis provided a buffer between the President and his 1980 Presidential challengers. The crisis initially unified and rallied the public around President Carter. Any of the candidates who openly challenged the President would find himself being chided as speaking against the national interest and the safety of the hostages. After Senator Edward Kennedy derided Carter about United States relations with the former Shah, charging that such relations resulted in the seizure of the embassy, the Senator lost the early Democratic primaries resoundingy.(1) Hamilton Jordan had skillfully managed Carter's Presidential campaign victory of 1976, and in his early considerations of the hostage crisis and its affect on the Democratic primary campaign, he thought that the crisis would be an asset. "... the press will be looking at this in the context of the campaign. It'll be over in a few hours, but it could provide a nice contrast between Carter and our friend from Massachusetts in how to handle a crisis."(2) However, Jordan acknowledged that if it was not soon resolved the Iran hostage crisis could, instead of becoming a political asset in crisis management such as the Berlin Airlift was to Truman and the Cuban missile crisis was to Kennedy, be a political liability for Carter as the Mayaguez incident was for Ford and as Vietnam was for Johnson and Nixon.(3) Because the hostage crisis was continuing during an election year, Carter and his Cabinet had to take into account how the crisis would affect the President's campaign for re-election.

Public support for Carter and his crisis-management took a sharp turn for the worse in March. At the same time, the general consensus among Carter's political opponents that they had to leave out the crisis as a political issue began to break down. Three factors came together in March to contribute to the demise of Carter's image. First, Carter took a terrible beating at the primary polls in
New York and Connecticut because of an error in semantics about America's position concerning Israeli settlements in occupied territories. Second, there was the failure of the United Nations Commission on its visit to Teheran to implement the transfer of the hostages from the militant students to the Iranian government. Third, on March 23rd, the Shah left his sanctuary in Panama and headed back to the Middle East where his presence in Egypt further complicated negotiations for the transfer and release of the hostages. The three March "sub-crises"(4) of the hostage crisis illustrate some of the effects which the campaign had on Carter's decision to attempt a rescue.

After long and vigorous debate, the three participants of the Camp David Peace Accords- Israel, Egypt, and America as mediator- finally agreed on the appropriate language. The agreements themselves mainly contained specific details about the handing over of the Israeli-occupied Sinai back to Egypt in exchange for peace. Another reference in the accords dealt with autonomy for the displaced Palestinians of East Jerusalem and the West Bank. The issue of East Jerusalem and the West Bank was to be discussed in future peace negotiations by Israel and Egypt, after the Israeli Parliament (Knesset) had voted to ratify the agreement.(5) In the meantime, however, Israel continued to re-settle Jews in these areas of dispute. The consistent stand of the United States regarding the establishment of new Israeli settlements in the occupied territories was clear: the United States opposed the settlements, considered them illegal, and an obstacle to peace. When the Israelis continued to establish new settlements, it was proposed that the United Nations condemn the settlements. Normally the United States would either abstain or veto any resolution concerning the status of Jerusalem, because Israel had said prior to the accords that the sovereignty of Jerusalem was non-negotiable and that only after the accords were ratified by the Knesset would the privileges of the Palestinians and Arabs in East Jerusalem be negotiated.(6)
As the vote approached, however, Cyrus Vance led Carter to believe that the references to Jerusalem had been deleted from the United Nations resolution and that the proposed United States amendments referring only to the West Bank settlements were accepted by those proposing the resolution. Vance accordingly asked Carter's permission to vote "Aye" on the settlements resolution, and Carter gave his consent.(7)

As it turned out, Carter was embarrassed because the word "Jerusalem" was not in fact deleted from the United Nations text. When the United States voted "Aye" because of Vance's instructions to American Ambassador Donald F. McHenry, it had to retract its vote, stating that an error was made because of a breakdown in communications.(8) That breakdown error proved quite damaging to Carter early in the Democratic primary race. In Carter's own words:

... this episode was a direct cause of my primary losses in New York and Connecticut, and it proved highly damaging to me among American Jews throughout the country for the remainder of the election year.(9)

Even though Carter eventually retained the Democratic nomination, this setback prolonged the Carter-Kennedy contest, adding further difficulties for Carter to contend with while deciding on the fate of the hostages. Moreover, Cyrus Vance, the most influential individual in Carter's Cabinet and the man most clearly espousing restraint with regard to the hostage crisis, lost much prestige with the President. As Zbigniew Brzezinski explains, the settlements error and the increasing pressures of this period were doing little to enhance Carter's stature as a leader.

The President's political stock was low, and he was irritated by the Kennedy challenge and frustrated by our inability to break through on the Iranian hostage issue. The time of decision on the rescue mission was nearing, and that must have weighed heavily on his mind. Moreover, privately he gave increasing signs of
dissatisfaction with Vance, especially in the wake of the political fiasco of the U.N. vote on Jerusalem.(10)

Indeed, the United Nations vote error and the election challenge increased the weight of decision to attempt a rescue.

After the failure of the United Nations Commission visit to Teheran in March, the stark and frequent criticisms of the hitherto taboo subject of Carter's management of the hostage crisis came fast and furious from all corners of Carter's political challengers.

The United Nations Commission, which was led by Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim, flew to Teheran on the 23rd of February knowing that they were running into a brick wall regarding the release of the hostages. Negotiations could not take place until the Majlis was re-elected and reconvened, which was to be in mid-May at the earliest. Moreover, Khomeini continued to say that the United Nations Commission had first to condemn the United States and the Shah for past illegal acts.(11) This left Carter in a bind. He had fixed his hopes on each new development or proposal referring to the release of the hostages, seeing it as a vindication of his policy of restraint.

Amid the failures of United Nations resolutions, the International Court of Justice condemnation, oil import sanctions, and United Nations Commission visits, the challenging candidates must have anticipated the opportunity to exploit Carter's handling of the crisis.

Ronald Reagan was the first to capitalize on the Carter Administration's frustrations in attaining the hostages' freedom. While campaigning in New York for the Republican primaries, Reagan stated, "There must come a time, if we are to get them back, when we tell them this is the end of the road."(12) And he went on to say, "I don't know of anything our Government is doing now in regard to the hostages except praying for a miracle."(13)
Carter needed more than miracles when the Revolutionary Council announced on March 27th that the new Majlis elections would be postponed until sometime in the summer of 1980. "The new delay," as the *New York Times* reported, "raises, among other implications, the possibility that President Carter will go to the Democratic National Convention August 11 with the hostages still in captivity."(14)

Soon all of Carter's Republican opponents began to hammer home their criticisms and to bare their alternative methods for ending the crisis. The former Governor of California, Ronald Reagan, pushed the hostage crisis into the political arena as an emotional issue. While campaigning in Wisconsin, Reagan said that the President had "dillied and dallied" for nearly five months in unsuccessful manoeuvres to end the crisis.(15) Reagan suggested that "extreme pressure" in the form of a blockade of Iranian food imports and oil exports might break the deadlock.(16) George Bush, a former diplomat and once director of the Central Intelligence Agency, was also campaigning for the Republican nomination. Bush joined in the attack on Carter accusing him of "pussy-footing around" the Iranian crisis.(17) Bush urged that Carter cut off diplomatic relations with Iran and "tighten" up economic sanctions.(18) Senator Robert Dole, who had dropped out of the primaries and later supported Reagan, said in a Senate speech that Carter had responded to the crisis with "rhetoric and indecision" and that the President must soon impose economic sanctions or face political setbacks at home.(19)

The period leading up to the Wisconsin primary was a turning point for the President's popularity. In Milwaukee, George Bush and other Republicans accused Carter of appeasement.(20) The emphasis on the hostage crisis reflected a judgement by the challengers' strategists that voters were impatient with the deadlock in Iran and that the crisis which had earlier acted to engender public support for the President had began to dilute that support.(21) And, while Carter had earlier been widely respected for his commitment to the hostages because of his decision to forgo campaigning until they were released, the new tendency
among the voters was to insist that the President devote more public speaking to domestic issues instead of concentrating so much on the hostage issue. Mrs. Carter had been the one to spearhead her husband's campaign in the Democratic primaries, but even this began to wear. As one frustrated Wisconsin voter said, "I just don't want to be betrayed any more on the Presidency... The hostages should be home, inflation should not be what it is, and Rosalynn should mind her own business."(22)

Bush forces contended that the hostage issue helped them win the Connecticut primary. And in some states, such as Wisconsin, the public can "cross-over", that is, they can vote for another party during the primaries. Many traditional Democrats began to vote Republican. The cross-over vote was an indication of dissatisfaction with the failure of the United Nations Commission, the New York Times reported.(23) One Wisconsin voter remarked to that influential newspaper on his cross-over vote- "The President's not doing as much as he should in terms of the hostages. I always think, if the hostages were Russian, what would they have done? I'm sure they wouldn't still be there."(24)

Carter and his aides were not oblivious either to the accusations of his opponents or to the frustrations of the American public. In fact, Carter had proposed strong economic sanctions and the threat of a blockade to help expedite the release of the hostages, but at the behest of the allies Carter held off.(25) The continuing of the crisis through March was not a question of the President constantly appeasing the Iranians; he had to take into account the Soviet presence in the Middle East, the safety of the hostages, and the concern of the allies. Carter's initial reaction to the embassy takeover was to punish the Iranians, "really hit them hard."(26) This mood was reflected in public opinion also and on March 25, Carter issued an ultimatum to Bani-Sadr.(27) The ultimatum (made public on the 31st of March- a day before the Wisconsin primary) stated that the Iranian leaders had until April 1 to remove the hostages from the militant students control or Iran would face new economic and political retaliatory moves.(28)
The United Nations Commission failed in its efforts to secure the release of the hostages and Carter was beginning to realize the dimensions of the effect the hostage crisis would have on his campaign to win re-election in November. He was assured of beating Kennedy in the Democratic primaries, but many who traditionally voted Democrat seemed certain to vote for the Republicans in November. Pat Caddell, the President's pollster, acknowledged after the Wisconsin primary that any development raising the hostage crisis without solving it would work against President Carter.(29) As a consequence of the "positive steps" embarrassment, Carter broke diplomatic relations with Iran, just as George Bush had strongly advocated. And as Reagan had proposed, Carter imposed economic sanctions. In addition to criticizing Carter's handling of the crisis, the Republicans encouraged the Shah to leave Panama, which complicated the possibility of negotiating a release of the hostages.

An often overlooked aspect of the failure to negotiate the release of the fifty-three American hostages was the March 23rd flight of the Shah from Panama to Egypt, where the Shah had a longstanding invitation by President Anwar el-Sadat to take up residence. There are conflicting versions offered as to why the Shah departed Panama. First, Panamanian officials under the leadership of Brigadier General Omar Torrijos were said to be overcharging the Shah and his retinue for the facilities on Contadora Island off Panama's coast.(30) Second, Panamanian doctors were reported as arguing over who should do the splenectomy on the Shah, a Panamanian or an American doctor; the Shah's people apparently wanted Dr. William DeBakey of Houston to operate, and the consequent uproar over who should remove the Shah's cancer-riddled spleen was given as a reason to depart.(31) Third, it was reported that the Shah felt in danger of extradition from Panama because a French lawyer, Christian Bourguet, representing Iran's claims against the Shah, was about to file an extradition request.(32)
There is no evidence to substantiate the claim that the Shah was being over-charged for his residence on Contadora Island. Hamilton Jordan and White House Legal Council Lloyd Cutler looked into the grievance on the weekend of the Shah's departure. They were trying to smooth the differences over so the Shah would not leave. They asked the Panamanians for a complete accounting. The rent of the mansion the Shah was staying in, overlooking the Pacific Ocean, was as contracted and correctly balanced, as were the other bills, including several hours worth of overseas telephone calls per night by the Empress Farah and the Shah.(33)

The claim of the conflict between the Panamanian and American doctors was initially justifiable. The Shah did want the American team led by DeBakey to do the operation, and the Panamanian doctors were indeed insulted because of the implied lack of confidence in their skills, especially since most of the Panamanian doctors prepared to operate on the Shah had received their formal medical degrees from the United States. Jordan and Cutler solved the problem by having Torrijos "persuade" the Panamanian doctors to work with DeBakey and make it a joint-effort.(34) However, the Shah was not impressed. He and his entourage apparently felt that one of the Panamanian doctors might succumb to an Iranian bribe to botch the operation.(35)

The most likely of the reasons for the Shah's departure from Panama was the threat of extradition. Although Torrijos had promised Carter that the Shah would not be extradited, the Shah fled under the threat of Iranian attempts. It must be noted that after the Shah departed the United States in December 1979 for the treatment of lymphomic cancer, he was told by the American government that he could return if he wished; but he was discouraged by the State Department because of the threat to the hostages his presence in the United States might represent.(36)

The Shah was told that the extradition request was only a formality and that it did not have a chance of prevailing. It was reported in the New York
The Times, on Monday, March 24, 1980 that an unnamed United States Government source said, "...the extradition procedure was being followed in the hope it would provide some face-saving device to enable Iran to free the American hostages."(37) The move to Egypt was damaging to Carter politically because it probably eliminated the last hope of gaining concessions from the Iranians on the transfer of the hostages to the government. Moreover, United States officials acknowledged that the Shah was aware of the Administration's preference that he remain in Panama, and that the Shah's departure was a symbolic gesture to embarrass Carter.(38)

In his memoirs Keeping Faith, Carter recalls the consequences of the Shah's departure from Panama to Egypt:

Predictably, the Iranians held us responsible for moving him nearer to Iran and away from the possibility (never more than an Iranian dream) that the Shah might be extradited from Panama. They threatened again to hold trials and punish the hostages, and the Revolutionary Council voted to postpone indefinitely the run-off elections for the majlis. In effect, this further delayed any possible consideration of the transfer or release of the hostages.(39)

Sadegh Ghotbzadeh said he had received a conciliatory message from Carter to Khomeini. The letter spoke of common goals. Reportedly, the United States was willing to set up a bilateral commission between the two countries to investigate their past relations.(40) Carter denied sending the letter and said that it was fabricated in an attempt by Ghotbzadeh to generate a more positive attitude towards the United States.(41) Ghotbzadeh later admitted to the forgery on A.B.C. television's "Issues and Answers", but American reporters in the meantime remained cautious about the veracity of Carter's disclaimer.(42) Instead of conciliation, Carter gave the ultimatum of April 1st- stressing that he would impose stringent sanctions and possibly close Iranian seaports if a transfer were
The flight of the Shah and the forged letter of conciliation provided fuel for Khomeini's anti-American propaganda. Moreover, after Carter's ultimatum, Khomeini wrote a speech that his son delivered at a rally in Teheran. The text reflected Carter's inability to persuade and negotiate with Iran on the hostage issue.

... Threatening us with military occupation and landing paratroopers in the den of espionage and threatening economic blockade and isolation of the country and having failed to achieve anything, he [Carter] has now embarked upon a political plot and a satanic conspiracy. By expressions of moderation and flattery he is trying to win his political gamble against his rivals by playing a trick on our nation... Mr. Carter must realize that by sending the deposed Shah to Egypt and apologizing for the past mistakes, by admitting America's treacheries against oppressed nations, including Iran, and then asking me, as a member of the great Iranian nation, to find a solution for the espionage den, he is following the wrong path... By delivering the deposed Shah, this enemy of Islam and Iran... he has further complicated the way to a solution.(44)

On the 1st of April, Carter was firmly in the middle of the crisis because he had set his own terms for the release of the hostages. If he was seen as abandoning his hard stance and capitulating to the Iranians, it would have an adverse effect on his re-election campaign. Indeed, after his ultimatum date of April 1, Carter acquiesced to a last minute attempt by Bani-Sadr to finalize a transfer. The terms were for Carter to remain quiet about military retaliation and the threat of sanctions. And as noted, his "positive steps" address acknowledged that he would delay sanctions.

A fine example of the behind-the-door thinking of the Carter Cabinet with relation to the election campaign and the consequences of the hostage crisis comes from Hamilton Jordan. On March 22 the President called for a National
Security Council (N.S.C.) meeting. The Administration was anticipating at this meeting the departure of the Shah from Panama and the unlikely event of a rapid resolution to the crisis. Hamilton Jordan and Lloyd Cutler, who were making one last effort to keep the Shah in Panama, were the only high-ranking officials not at the meeting. Upon Jordan's return, General John Pustay, the top staff assistant to General David Jones, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (J.C.S.), gave a presentation of a proposed hostage rescue mission which he had given to Carter and his Cabinet at the March 22nd N.S.C. meeting. Jordan's reflections:

I began to be convinced that maybe it would work... Not to mention what it would do for the President and the nation. It would prove to the columnists and our political opponents that Carter was not an indecisive Chief Executive who was afraid to act.(45)

After the presentation, Jordan asked Pustay if the J.C.S. were recommending the mission. Pustay responded- "that's not our job, the President asked us to come up with a plan for a rescue... It obviously will be his decision if he decides to attempt it."(46) Jordan's appropriate side note to Pustay's answer- "It will be a great coup for the Pentagon if the mission succeeds- and Carter's ass if it fails."(47)

Carter did not firmly decide on March 22nd to go ahead with the rescue mission. He notes in his memoirs, however, that as the negotiations were proving fruitless, the rescue mission was more feasible than it had been at the outset of the ordeal.(48) And as election time neared with the hostages still in captivity, the rescue mission either must have looked very promising or was viewed as a positive alternative to the campaign challengers' assertions of Carter's passivity. In this context, the rescue mission was a quick-fix to the degenerating political survivability of the Carter Administration.
End-notes: Chapter Three, Election Considerations


2) Jordan, op. cit., p. 19

3) ibid., p. 25 verbatim "could this be Carter's Mayaguez or Vietnam?"

4) Michael Brecher, op. cit., Decisions in Crisis, Brecher defines "pre-crisis" as events which are difficult to cope with which, the decision(s) made, may lead to war and a crisis, pp. 35-7

5) Carter, op. cit., pp. 390-401

6) ibid., p. 492

7) ibid., p. 493

8) ibid.

9) ibid., p. 494

10) Brzezinski, op. cit., p. 437


13) ibid.


15) ibid., p. A-10

16) ibid.

17) ibid.

18) ibid.


21) ibid.

22) ibid.

23) ibid.

24) ibid.

25) Discussed in more detail in Chapter Four

26) Brzezinski, op. cit., pp. 482-3
30) Jordan, op. cit., p. 209
31) ibid., pp. 195-8 & 202-203
32) ibid., pp. 210, 218, see also, New York Times, March 24, 1980, p. 1
33) Jordan, op. cit., pp. 207-210
34) ibid., p. 220
35) ibid., p. 221
36) ibid., pp. 215, 217-19
38) ibid., p. A-11, because of his pride, the Shah did not wish to "ask" the United States if he could come back.
39) Carter, op. cit., p. 501
40) New York Times, March 31, 1980, see appendix number 2
41) Carter, op. cit., p. 502
42) ibid., p. 503
43) ibid., p. 501
45) Jordan, op. cit., p. 229
46) ibid.
47) ibid.
48) Carter, op. cit., p. 501
Chapter 4: The Allies

The allies were considered a major factor in the decision-making of the Carter Administration during the Iran hostage crisis. There were times, especially the first six months of the protracted crisis, when the Carter Administration was more than upset with the European and Japanese allies' reluctance to impose harsh sanctions on Iran. The United States wanted to isolate the Iranians from the international community as the Iranians had isolated the American embassy staff in Teheran. The allies were apprehensive about implementing trade sanctions because they feared their oil supplies would be cut by the Iranians in reciprocation. However, despite the Western allies' passivity, they recognized that holding the embassy hostages was a defiant breach of international diplomacy that could have repercussions for all embassies. Despite the fact that on December 4, 1979 the allies were quick to rally behind the United States in the United Nations and condemn Iran for its actions, it was not until April 22nd, two days before the rescue attempt, that the Common Market and Japan were prepared to give more than vocal support to the United States. This chapter analyzes the influence the allies had on President Carter's decision to refrain from sanctions and military action, and their lack of full support which led Carter to decide on the rescue mission.

Three questions concerning the allied influence on the President will be addressed in this chapter: One, did unsolicited measures taken by allies and non-allies negatively affect the negotiations for the release of the hostages? Two, were the allied interests in the Gulf instrumental in holding off the President from initiating sanctions? And three, did the allies' reluctant stance concerning sanctions and military force prompt the Carter Administration to attempt a rescue mission? Answering these points should enhance an understanding of the variable considerations Carter faced while managing the hostage crisis.
It could be said that some of the help in trying to gain the release of the hostages was detrimental to resolving the crisis. There are principally two instances which prolonged the crisis— even though the achievements were seemingly positive to many of the public who were impatient with the crisis. The first instance which proved politically disarming to Carter was the negotiation by the Palestine Liberation Organization (P.L.O.) for the release of the women and black hostages. The second instance delaying negotiations was the Canadian rescue and aided escape of six American embassy officials.

The move by Khomeini and the P.L.O. to implement the release of the "minority" hostages was entirely symbolic, done to embarrass Carter. The release was not intended as a humanitarian act. It only helped to emphasize an Islamic distrust of America— which the confinement of the remaining hostages represented. It should be noted that most of the thirteen released hostages did not want to leave their colleagues behind. But the Iranians told the released captives that the freedom of the remaining captives depended on their publicly detailing America's despotic relationship with the Shah of Iran. The whole episode was strictly a propaganda ploy by Khomeini: mud in the eye of Carter who advocated human equality.

The P.L.O. used the negotiations stunt to enhance their presence in the Middle East by adding Iran to the list of Middle East states pressing for an autonomous Palestine. Khomeini and the P.L.O. were working together to eliminate Iran's past posture in the Middle East under the Shah. For example, during the 1973 Arab-Israeli conflict the Shah provided oil to Israel, despite the Arab world's attempt to isolate that country. This action by the Shah alienated him from the Arab community, but the Shah downplayed the negative effects of such an action in order to gain closer ties with the United States in an effort to bring Iran into the twentieth century under the "White Revolution."

When Khomeini wrested power from the Shah, he did an about-face and condemned Israel's existence. Khomeini was completely sympathetic to the Palestinian cause, and the release of minorities from the embassy staff was thus
seen as antagonistic to the United States than as any positive gesture. This may explain why little was made of the Palestinian involvement in the negotiations documented in the public record.\(^6\)

If the P.L.O. was seen by Carter as only promoting their own cause by advocating the release of the women and black hostages, the Canadian government and embassy staff in Teheran bravely risked their own national interests for the United States. Although the rescue and aided escape of the six Americans was successful, the occasion eventuated negative implications.

Canada, no doubt, acted heroically during the hostage scenario— a true ally and friend to the United States in time of need. When the six Americans, who were away from the American embassy while the takeover occurred, attempted to gain entry into several allied embassies, they were turned down. The allies did not want to risk a takeover of any of their own embassies in the event the Americans were found.\(^7\) The six ultimately reached the Canadian embassy and immediately gained entry and were hidden for nearly four months. Later the Canadians acquired false passports, of non-American nationality, and whisked the Americans to the airport.\(^8\) The escape was successful. However, the embarrassment suffered to the Revolutionary Council provided ammunition for the Khomeinists to condemn the Canadians and to emphasize further that such a coup by the Americans could have only been accomplished by the C.I.A.— somehow proving that the American embassy was a base for espionage.\(^9\) As a consequence, Canada closed down its embassy in fear of an Iranian reprisal.

In retrospect, the Canadians may have been a keener influence on Iran by proceeding with American calls for allied sanctions while still maintaining a diplomatic presence in Teheran. Such an action would have been symbolic to the other allies. Of course, this position would have required the Canadians to keep the Americans hidden, at a great risk, until the crisis was resolved. However, despite the exacerbation of the crisis which the escape represented, the heroic measure by the Canadians was in stark contrast to many of the other allied actions taken, or not taken, during the crisis.
Since the Suez Crisis of 1956, the allies have approached dealings with the Middle East in different terms than the United States. The United States sees the problem of access to the Gulf in strategic terms. The West Europeans view the Middle East in more distinct political and commercial terms. Worried about the probable impact in Europe and Japan of an East-West confrontation in the Gulf, the allies seek to preserve access to the Gulf by answering to the political and trade concerns of the Gulf States. An apt description of West European concerns in their Middle East relationship is provided by David D. Newsom, former Under-Secretary of State for Political Affairs under Jimmy Carter. Newsom wrote in a Foreign Policy article,

Strong efforts to increase trade, including arms sales, to the states in the area reflect the economic needs of Western Europe as well as the belief that such activities will build a mutual interest protecting the concerns of both parties.

As an example of the different approaches, Newsom contends that if the Soviets were to move into Azerbaijan in northwestern Iran, an area rich in natural gas which the Soviets want, the Western Europeans would acquiesce, since such a limited move would not touch the Gulf itself. In strategic terms, such a move would be unacceptable to the United States. In this light, any precipitation of a military conflict with Iran would, in the eyes of America's allies, threaten the Gulf link and the intimate relationships built up in the area.

Carter of course was aware of the allied concerns regarding a military conflict, as well as its relevance to America's national interests. Carter did not wish to alienate the allies. But he was, to say the least, "miffed" by the allies' hesitance to help impose international sanctions against Iran. The allies urged the United States to continue to use diplomatic and political channels to attain the release of the hostages. The allies did not want to sacrifice their needs if it meant disturbing their relations in the Gulf. Undoubtedly, the allies could have
fulfilled their needs from sources other than Iran—just as the United States did by increasing purchases from Saudi Arabia. Admittedly, however, the sacrifice on the part of Europeans and Japanese would have been much greater, since so much of Japan and Western Europe's energy needs are derived from the Gulf. It is true that the allies might have been able to obtain oil from Gulf countries other than Iran, but the common European supposition was that any intimidation would cut off access to the Gulf itself.

With the advent of Soviet troops in Afghanistan, European fears were heightened by American intimations of military force and sanctions. Nonetheless, the hostage crisis was almost two months old when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, and Carter was already anxious to end the stalemate. The Administration pushed for firm action. On December 31, the United Nations Security Council passed 461 by an 11-0 vote, with four abstentions, Resolution 461, which established January 7, 1980, as the date when the Security Council would reconvene to adopt sanctions if by then Iran failed to obey Resolution 457 of December 4 which demanded the release of the hostages. There were so many ifs where the allied support was concerned. As Cyrus Vance articulates—

In failing to apply sanctions immediately, Resolution 461 underlined the disagreement between the allies and us. The Europeans and Japan, and other friends did not want to leave us in the lurch... but none of them wanted to risk a long-term disruption of their Persian Gulf trade and oil-links.

So Carter and America waited. Then, before the day the United Nations Security Council was to reconvene and vote on sanctions, Iran proposed the first United Nations Commission visit of inquiry. The United States put off the January 7th resolution on sanctions because the allies recommended waiting. But the United States then pressed for a vote on January 12 because the Iranian proposal did not include release of the hostages prior to the Commission visit.
The Soviet Union vetoed the January 12 vote on Resolution 461 calling for sanctions, thus helping Carter to decide to devote his January 23, 1980 State of the Union Address to Soviet-American relations. Yet despite the veto, the United States declared it would impose sanctions and asked its allies to join. But the allies argued for the United States to refrain from the sanctions because the Iranian presidential elections were slated for January 29. The allies wanted the Americans to hold off on sanctions until it could be decided whether the new government would enter into serious negotiations; it was hoped that the elections would produce a leader in Iran with the power to make his decisions binding. Carter, once again, held off on sanctions at the request of the allies.

After the failure of Resolution 461, the Special Coordinating Committee (S.C.C.), an arm of the N.S.C. headed by Zbigniew Brzezinski, commenced a meeting on January 18 to look into ways to gain the help of America's reluctant allies. Brzezinski's chief assistant, Gary Sick, was a member of the Carter staff dealing with the hostage crisis from the beginning to the end. Sick has written an intriguing account of the military contingency planning during the hostage crisis called "The Military Option". In it, he notes that Brzezinski and the N.S.C. recognized the objections to a "strategy of pressure." But the N.S.C. also believed that the Iranians would not give up the hostages "unless they faced the prospect of some unpleasant consequences". With this in mind on January 18:

...the S.C.C. (Special Coordinating Committee, arm of N.S.C.) discussed 'leaning forward' militarily through increased military deployments in the region and more belligerent public statements. Such a posture, it was felt, would accomplish two purposes: first, it would keep the Iranians off balance and uncertain of what the United States might do next; and second, it would help persuade our allies to adopt economic sanctions, which the administration considered vitally important to sustaining pressure against Iran. The allies, it was believed, would prefer the economic pain of sanctions to the much greater danger of a U.S. blockade or mining of Iranian ports.
The allies were hoping that the United Nations Commission would accomplish the transfer of the hostages. The allies implored the United States to hold off sanctions until after the Iranian presidential election on January 29, and then they asked that the United States wait another four weeks until Bani-Sadr's leadership was confirmed by the Iranian General Assembly in late February. Once Bani-Sadr was in "power", he helped to arrange the second United Nations Commission visit. However, when the Commission failed it was clear to the Carter Cabinet that new, more harsh and less conciliatory, measures needed to be adopted. In the wake of the Commission failure, Carter gave his ultimatum demanding the release of the hostages by April 1st. The Carter Administration did not want to intimidate the captors for fear they might harm the hostages, but at the same time it needed to gain the support of its allies in order to effectively isolate the Iranians.

Before the ultimatum of April 1, which demanded the release of the hostages and threatened that the United States would otherwise unilaterally impose sanctions and formally break diplomatic ties with Iran, the N.S.C. was planning ways to get the European Community and Japan to impose sanctions of their own. The N.S.C. was understandably anticipating that even Carter's ultimatum would carry little weight with the Iranians. In this context, it is important to understand the need of the Administration to receive support in its actions against Iran. The Carter ultimatum only espoused what had already occurred; that is, the United States had cut oil imports from Iran and, more importantly, had frozen Iranian assets of over $9 billion dollars in American banks and institutions. Moreover, American trade unions, such as the longshoremen's and railways workers' unions, had imposed their own embargo of Iranian trade flow into and around the United States. The most Carter could do was to cut diplomatic ties with Iran. Thus, Carter needed the support of his allies to back up the message of his ultimatum. As Gary Sick recalls, Brzezinski proposed that at a March 11 S.C.C. meeting:
The Carter Cabinet had dropped the idea of a blockade because it involved serious risks such as physical retaliation to the hostages, possible political repercussions in the Islamic world, pushing the Iranians into the arms of the Soviets, and increased problems for American allies. The rescue mission also constituted these risks and costs, but possibly to a lesser degree. The mission itself could easily bring about military escalation between Iran and the United States. Thus, Carter's best and safest alternative was to increase efforts to persuade the allies to impose economic sanctions against Iran as a way of levying more pressures on the Khomeini regime.

Despite Carter's pressure, the allies were still reluctant to impose sanctions or to break diplomatic ties with Iran. On April 11, the Common Market members met in Lisbon to decide on Carter's proposal to impose sanctions. The decision in Lisbon was to limit action to another "verbal condemnation of Iran." A spokesman for the State Department, said that the United States was dissatisfied with the decision and that "we have appealed to our allies for concrete action and concrete steps are what we expect to see... we look for more than rhetoric." But the allies felt they were being rushed into actions they considered neither in their own interests nor in those of the alliance, reported the New York Times on April 14. The article goes on to say:

The Europeans know that American public opinion has been influenced by the events in Iran and Afghanistan. They understand the pressure
Mr. Carter feels during an election year to do something fairly quickly. But they resent his tactics and that resentment reinforces their own reluctance to act— a reluctance that they consider prudent and that Washington considers pusillanimous.(28)

Moreover, the Europeans would not break diplomatic relations with Iran. They had too much at stake. The best they would do to try to pacify the President was to "recall" their ambassadors from Teheran for consultations. But the withdrawal was designed to be only temporary.(29) On April 17, Carter said at a news conference that an increase in sanctions would be imposed, including a ban on all imported goods, and that travel by Americans to Teheran became illegal.(30) Carter went on to say:

If this additional set of sanctions that I've described to you today, and then the concerted effort of our allies, is not successful, then the only next step available that I can see would be some sort of military action, which is the prerogative and right of the United States under these circumstances.(31)

The strong reference to military action made the allies stand up and take notice. For example, on April 20, two days before the Common Market and Japan were to meet in Luxembourg to decide whether to follow the United States and impose sanctions against Iran, West German Chancellor Helmut Schmitt stated that West Germany would support sanctions even if there "is no agreement among the European allies."(32) Schmitt went on to say he had a "very, very deep understanding for the nervous bitterness of the Americans and the frustration with the Iranian leadership,"(33) but he appealed to the United States to weigh the consequences of military action carefully, and that his appeals for understanding were not "pleas for irrational behavior."(34)
On April 22 the allies agreed to act on May 17th if there was no "decisive" gain made on the hostage crisis. The Common Market voted unanimously to impose "full" economic sanctions on Iran if it did not at least transfer the hostages to the government by May 17, 1980.(35) However, delaying the imposition of sanctions by three weeks meant that it would take a considerable period of time before the effects would be felt. Moreover, Carter stated that if the hostages were not free by mid-May, he would consider using force.(36)

What the public was not aware of in April was that the President did more than "consider" force- he decided at an April 11 N.S.C. meeting to proceed with the rescue mission. Carter was cognizant that the United Nations Commission was a failure; that the case of the intermediaries was a failure(37); and that the apprehension of the allies only ensured that the hostages would be released no sooner than at the end of May and that that might possibly become a failure with the uncertainty of when the Majlis would reconvene. Therefore, the elements of time, the allies' reluctance, public pressure, Soviet recognition of American passivity, election considerations and political survivability, all contributed to Carter's decision to attempt the rescue.

The Europeans were considering their own national interests in the hostage crisis. At the risk of being judgemental, it is obvious that the Europeans and Japanese would not have made concessions to the American appeals for sanctions unless they were pressured by Carter's threats of military reprisal in the Gulf.(38) And even against such a background the allies were reluctant to give full support. For example, before the rescue mission the main sanctions set for May 17 were the thinning of embassy staffs in Iran and the stoppage of Iranian oil imports. This latter sacrifice was not so incredible because Japan had already been denied oil by Iran over a price dispute, and the general Iranian production level was low after the revolution. Indeed, there was a glut of oil on the international market.(39) Not until after the rescue mission did the allies wholeheartedly support the American sanctions; the most effective measures were
the freezing of Iranian assets and the halting of future development contracts
with the allies. (40) Undoubtedly, the diplomatic and economic isolation of Iran
after the rescue mission was a factor that ultimately led the Iranians to negotiate
the release of the hostages. (41)

The final arguments against pursuing with the rescue mission were provided
by Secretary of State Cyrus Vance at an N.S.C. meeting of April 15. Vance's
objections to the rescue were the consistent lines he had represented at the outset
of the crisis:

1) The allies were being persuaded to initiate
more stringent sanctions. And launching a
mission without warning would be perceived as a
betrayal of their trust. 2) The mission risked a
very high loss of life among the rescuers,
hostages and Iranians. 3) The possibility of an
armed confrontation with the Islamic world. The
U.S and allies might be faced with an Islamic-
Western war. And 4) Even if the hostages were
freed, Iran could take more American hostages-
such as the many U.S. journalists. (42)

In response to Vance's first objection concerning the allies, Gary Sick provides the
reasoning of the Carter Cabinet to go ahead with the mission.

These risks were undeniable, and they were
addressed directly by President Carter and others
in taking the decision to proceed. It was true
that the allies had been pressured by the threat
of possible U.S. military action to take more
effective action against Iran. However, even
under that threat, the actions they were prepared
to take were minimal in terms of bringing
effective pressure to bear against Iran. They
were unwilling to institute sanctions voted by the
United Nations but vetoed by the Soviet Union,
and they were not prepared to break diplomatic
relations. If a rescue mission succeeded in
bringing the crisis to an end, the allies might be
annoyed at the lack of consultation but they
would be delighted to have the issue behind them.
If it failed, their criticism was predictable but
not unmanageable. (43)
Moreover, in addition to the extreme pressures of the election, the media, and the Soviet presence in Afghanistan, other factors were forcing Carter to decide on the mission quickly. If the decision were drawn out still further, the option itself would grow infeasible. The logistics of a rescue mission were acknowledged as extremely difficult under the best of conditions. However, the J.C.S. pointed out at the April 11 N.S.C. meeting that the mission needed to be carried out soon or, because of the approaching summer season and the shorter period of darkness it would bring, the mission would be almost impossible to conduct until winter; most certainly after the November elections. The allies' move to put off sanctions until the summer of 1980 forced Carter to make a decision he may not have had to make if the allies' assistance in imposing sanctions had occurred immediately after the first vote on 461 was passed by the United Nations Security Council.

2) Washington Post, April 23, 1980, p. 1

3) From the magazine, The Middle East, December, 1980, p. 31. The thirteen, however, were sworn to be quiet upon their arrival at the American base in Wiesbaden in West Germany, for fear that any public statements would jeopardize the remaining hostages lives.

4) Rubin, op. cit, Paved With Good Intentions, p. 140

5) For more on Iran's "White Revolution," and its origins, see Rubin, pp. 44, 91, on development, pp. 107, 109-10, 112, 195

6) The main memoirs barely mention the efforts of the P.L.O. The Administration did not make much of the release because they were pre-occupied with totally resolving the crisis; which, of course, meant release of all of the hostages.

7) See Pierre Salinger's, America Held Hostage

8) For a more in depth account of the six escapees experiences, see Salinger.

9) Jordan, op. cit., pp. 142-3


11) ibid.

12) ibid.

13) ibid.

14) ibid., p. 24, see also, New York Times, April 9, 1980, chart of oil imports of the West, from p. 1

15) Vance, op. cit., p. 383


17) Vance, op. cit., p. 400


19) ibid.

20) Vance, op. cit., p. 377-8


22) Sick, op. cit., p. 268
23) ibid., p. 272

24) The scenario—American fighter planes fly near Teheran to escort rescued Americans in C-141's. The Iranians could fire on the C-141's. Or, the rescue team could fail at the embassy compound, and the hostages might be killed. Although Sick notes on p. 272 "a rescue mission could be attempted which while risky, held out the prospect of terminating the crisis without a military escalation which could push Iran towards the U.S.S.R."

25) Washington Post, April 14, p. 1

26) ibid.


28) ibid.

29) ibid.

30) Washington Post, April 18, p. 1

31) ibid.


33) ibid.

34) ibid.


36) ibid.

37) Sick, op. cit., p. 273

38) Vance, op. cit., p. 407


40) The freezing of assets hurt the Iranians. They would have to buy in American dollars, services and goods the allies might provide. Since the American dollars Iran had were frozen in America, Iran had very limited buying power. In addition, American banks were calling default on American loans and some European banks followed. This hurt Iran as it could not progress with internal development because of the rising foreign deficit.

41) From personal correspondance with David D. Newsom, Dec. 4, 1980

42) Sick, op. cit., p. 277

43) See Col. Beckwith's, Delta Force, and also, Brzezinski, p. 489

End-notes: Chapter Five, The Bureaucratic Element and De-Centralized Coordination of Policy Decisions
Chapter 5: The Bureaucratic Element and De-Centralized Coordination of Policy Decisions

Burke once said,

"All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing."

John F. Kennedy replied,

"I am a good man. When I encounter evil, I will not do nothing. When people infringe upon our rights, I will stand up. I will not let them do it."

"What is the decision that is in the best interests of the nation?" That is the question frequently posed by the different bureaucratic departments making up a government. A complex government organization, such as the Carter Administration, is composed of various departments. Each department serves the government; and at the top of each department apparatus is a political leader who joins the leaders of the other departments, forming the central players. As Graham T. Allison depicts in his book, *The Essence of Decision: Explaining The Cuban Missile Crisis*, these central players:

... focus not on a single strategic issue but on many diverse intra-national problems as well; players who act in terms of no consistent set of strategic objectives but rather according to various conceptions of national, organizational, and personal goals; players who make government decisions not by a single, rational choice but the pulling and hauling that is politics.

And since government is a collage of so many departments, it is important that government be de-centralized, that each player or department secretary/head has some measure of "baronial" discretion. Allison's analysis helps one understand the bureaucratic element of the foreign policy decision-making process. Allison's work concludes that there is not an unitary actor or decision-maker who decides
on his own what is in the best interests of the nation, but that a set of actors, each with some independent power, jockey for the President's attention and hope that he will arbitrarily choose their policy recommendations.(4)

Major policy decisions are such that several departments are involved in separate analysis of how best to deal with a major foreign policy decision. Quite often the results of the various departments' recommendations on the formulation of policy are distinctly different. In the case of the Iran hostage crisis, the State Department considered it prudent to maintain diplomatic negotiations with Iran at any cost to desist from risking the lives of colleagues and, in a wider context, to desist from risking American influence in the Middle East and elsewhere. The National Security Council, too, was worried about the wider implications of a protracted crisis. The N.S.C.'s contention was that if the United States appeared passive and did not ultimately risk the lives of the hostages for the sake of the nation's interests, then America's global situation would deteriorate. The positions of the Department of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff were much more ambiguous. The heads of these institutions, Secretary of Defense Harold Brown and General David Jones of the J.C.S., generally maintained a low profile until a few weeks before the actual April 11 decision to go ahead with the mission. Though Brown and Jones were central players in the management of the hostage crisis, they seemed to defer, at least in part, to National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski.(5) The White House staff, predominately Vice-President Walter Mondale, White House Chief of Staff Hamilton Jordan, and Press Secretary Jody Powell were less in tune with implications abroad than were their other Cabinet colleagues; they appeared more concerned with domestic implications. They were particularly concerned with the President's public prestige and re-election woes. Each of these groups or protagonists believed their recommendations were paramount to resolving the crisis. And since the action that would be taken could be a wrong choice and as a consequence the nation might suffer long-term damage, it was imperative that the department heads were
prepared to fight for what they were convinced was right.(6) However, as Allison points out, though some groups may win a policy decision over the objections and recommendations of another group or department, many times the result of infighting is a "mixture of conflicting preferences and unequal power of various individuals distinct from what any group or person intended."(7) This process of a government's hierarchy of pulling and hauling can be described as resolving a policy decision by bargaining, compromising and forming coalitions.(8)

The Iran hostage crisis brought to the forefront the widely publicized feud or battle between Cyrus Vance of the State Department and Zbigniew Brzezinski of the National Security Council. Brzezinski's, Vance's and Jordan's memoirs contend that there was not the battle for influence over the President which the press emblazoned on headlines.(9) In fact, the only difference of opinion concerning foreign policy between Vance and Brzezinski acknowledged by the latter was how to deal with the Soviet Union. According to Brzezinski, Vance was promoting appeasement and mutual cooperation, while he himself asserted that the United States should maintain a hard-line approach in order to check Soviet thrusts beyond their borders.(10) Despite this claim, policies concerning the Soviet Union were not the only areas of dispute between Vance and Brzezinski.

The public image or conception of policy decision-making is of rational behavior and discussions. As Allison points out, the public perception is that "Issues vital to national security are... too important to be settled by political games."(11) As a consequence, Allison contends, the memoirs of former central role players tend to reinforce the public vision of "rational deliberation among a unified group of equals... What public expectation demands, the academic penchant for intellectual elegance reinforces."(12)

This chapter presents the elements of the inter-departmental infighting between the State Department and the National Security Council. This chapter also encompasses the eventual victory by the N.S.C. which led the President to choose the rescue mission as a means of resolving the Iran hostage crisis. The
relationship between the two departments was not as cooperative as Vance and Brzezinski have related in their biographies. For one thing, the Department of State and the National Security Council had a digression of opinion from the very beginning on how to resolve the crisis, and the struggle between the two institutions ultimately determined the Carter Administration's willingness to use force in defense of the nation's interests. In addition, an analysis of the impact that such "side-line players" as the Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Department, and the White House staff had on the hostage crisis battle evokes the effect that coalitions have on foreign policy decision-making; their positions played an important role in swinging the President's position from one of restraint to one accepting the N.S.C. proposal of a rescue. Without the other departments coalescing with the National Security Council, the battle between the State Department and the National Security Council may have gone beyond the April 24 date set for the rescue mission.

The first relevant dichotomy of opinion between the State Department and the N.S.C. was waged before the Shah of Iran was granted entry into the United States. State Department officials, led by Secretary Vance, Deputy-Secretary Warren Christopher and Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs Harold Saunders, informed the President that the State Department reports warned if the deposed Shah was admitted into the United States it could jeopardize American efforts to establish useful relations with the new Iranian government and might possibly risk the safety of American citizens in Iran. Brzezinski of the N.S.C. argued a different position stating that "... it would be a sign of weakness not to allow the Shah to come to the States to live. If we turned our backs on the fallen Shah, it would be a signal to the world that the U.S. is a fair-weather friend." The split was partially resolved when a State Department doctor examined the Shah at his temporary residence in Mexico and
confirmed what doctors for David Rockefeller and Henry Kissenger—long-time friends of the Shah—had earlier diagnosed: The Shah had lymphomic cancer. Rockefeller requested that the Shah be immediately admitted to the Sloan-Kettering Hospital in New York for treatment; the State Department acquiesced, and on October 23 the Shah was granted a visa into the United States. At a Friday morning Foreign Policy meeting after the Shah was admitted, the Carter Cabinet discussed the implications of the move. Hamilton Jordan recounts President Carter's prophetic apprehensions of the decision:

What are you guys going to advise me to do if they overrun our embassy staff and take our people hostage? (17)

Until the invasion of Afghanistan, the State Department and the N.S.C. recommended different methods to manage the Iran hostage crisis. The State Department, as throughout the crisis, wanted to slowly pressure the Iranians to release the hostages through peaceful negotiations. However, at a Foreign Policy breakfast meeting of November 9, Brzezinski portrayed to the President the dangers envisioned by the N.S.C. if a military action of some sort was not taken soon. Hamilton Jordan depicts as follows the November 9 meeting of the Carter Cabinet and the arguments for a direct military action by Brzezinski and the rebuttals against one by Vance:

Brzezinski: 'Mr. President, you can't allow this thing to settle into a state of normalcy. If you do,' he warned 'it could paralyze your Presidency. Yes it is important that we get our people back. But,' he argued, 'your greater responsibility is to protect the honor and dignity of our country and its foreign policy interests. At some point that greater responsibility could become more important than the safety of our diplomats.' (18)
Vance responded: 'The President and this nation will ultimately be judged by our restraint in the
face of provocation, and on the safe return of our hostages...' He harked to the Pueblo incident, which had plagued the Johnson Administration but which had finally been resolved honorably and without loss of life.

'But that went on for a year!' Brzezinski countered.

'And Johnson wasn't in the middle of a re-election campaign,' I added.(19)

As a result of Vance's and Brzezinski's individual prodding, Carter made two decisions at the November 9 meeting: The first was to maintain diplomatic pressure on Iran, the second was to order the J.C.S. to prepare punitive military actions against Iran and emergency rescue contingencies in the event the hostages were threatened or harmed.(20)

Vance's strategy of diplomatic pressure was pursued by Carter during the first months of the crisis. The strategy for resolving the crisis encompassed two goals, the protection of the nations' interests and the safe release of the hostages. However, the latter goal was complicated by the fact the United States would not adhere to most of the prerequisite demands of Iran for negotiating the release. These demands which were unacceptable to the United States and which compounded the problems of the hostage crisis, were as follows: the return of the Shah to Iran and an apology for past American policies in American-Iranian affairs, or permitting the Revolutionary Council to try the American hostages. To attain the objectives of gaining the release of the hostages and maintaining national honor at the same time, the United States followed a dual strategy. According to Vance, the United States

... would open all possible channels of communication with the Iranian authorities. It would try to build intense political, economic and legal pressure on Iran through the United Nations and other international bodies.(21)

Both Vance and Brzezinski shared the belief that the decision to be taken regarding the hostages would affect wider American interests. Both wanted the hostages returned safely to the United States. Both wanted the Persian Gulf to
remain a stable strategic and economic bulwark for the United States and its
Western allies. However, the two differed widely on how to resolve the crisis.
Vance linked the stability of the region to the safe and peaceful release of the
hostages. Brzezinski on the other hand differentiated between the safety of the
hostages and America's interests in the Gulf. Whereas Vance related the release
of the hostages to national interests, Brzezinski felt that a choice between the
two would ultimately have to take place. (22) Brzezinski articulated his point of
view at the N.S.C. meeting of December 4- one month after the take-over:

I expressed the fear that the issue was becoming
increasingly a matter of America vs. Islam
(because of increasingly frequent anti-American
demonstrations in the region, generating in turn
anti-Moslem feelings in America) and that we
faced a general deterioration of the situation in
the Persian Gulf. As a result, we had to focus
not only on how to save the hostages' lives but
also on the larger strategic issues... In effect, I
felt that the question of the lives of the hostages
should not be our only focus but that we should
examine as well what needed to be done to
protect our vital interests. I was painfully aware
that at some point perhaps a choice between the
two might even have to be made... (23)

Interestingly, from the end of December through January, the choice
between the hostages' safety and national interests, and the possibility of military
action, were not hotly debated issues between the State Department and the
N.S.C. Soviets troops were in Afghanistan, and Brzezinski's attempts to make
Carter a tough Truman-like president had to be deferred. (24) The situation as
envisioned by Brzezinski now dictated that Carter take a more Wilsonian approach
pursuing solely diplomatic channels. The N.S.C.'s serious consideration of military
action was arrested with the Soviet aggression against Afghanistan. (25) According
to Brzezinski, "... our strategy increasingly became that of saving the hostages' lives and of promoting our national interest by exercising military restraint." (26)
The Soviet presence in Afghanistan did not, however, stop Brzezinski from seeking a quick resolution to the crisis. He recognized that a military strike on Iranian oil sites or the mining of Iran's harbors would be strategically damaging and might give the Soviets opportunities to advance to the Persian Gulf. Brzezinski's last option, if the negotiating track became fruitless and since the military strike option was dropped, was the rescue mission.

The mission, if it coincided with the forming of an anti-Soviet Islamic coalition, would, according to the N.S.C., provide a viable counter to the embarrassment that the hostages' presence in Teheran represented to American honor.

Vance's and the State Department's perceptions of what would be acceptable to the international and domestic communities differed from the N.S.C. view. With the Soviets near the Gulf, Vance felt that the safe release of the hostages was even more imperative. The obvious conclusion was that any use of force might throw the Iranians into the arms of the Soviet Union. Vance would not vacillate. Even after the failures of the United Nations Commission, Vance's position regarding the hostage crisis remained constant. Vance recalls his opposition to military options, including the rescue mission, from the March 22 N.S.C. meeting at Camp David:

We discussed a wide variety of options, including the use of military force. I expressed my opposition... as long as the hostages were unharmed and in no imminent danger. My judgement... was that the hostages would be freed only when Khomeini was certain all the institutions of an Islamic republic were in place... As painful as it would be, our national interests and the need to protect the lives of our fellow Americans dictated that we continue to exercise restraint.

Since the State Department is such a huge organization, there was bound to be some disagreement within it on how to resolve the crisis. However, on the whole,
Cyrus Vance's position on non-belligerent actions was supported by the majority of the State Department. As Harold Saunders reaffirms, the difference between Zbigniew Brzezinski and Cyrus Vance was analogous to:

... a difference between impatience with a crisis that dragged on and the determined perseverance of a marathon runner who sets his sights and tried to maintain a balanced and steady course... It was the belief in the classic use of force to change adversaries' minds versus questioning what point force would make in a society where leaders made decisions on any but a classic basis... It was a tendency to assess shorter-term developments and to propose frequent mid-course adjustments versus setting a long-term strategy and potentially grinding out one step after another on that course.

Saunders has elaborated that Vance's strategy was widely supported within the State Department. However, the N.S.C. staff supported Brzezinski, and because of domestic pressures, the White House staff was losing patience with State's "underemphasizing of American moods."

It can be reasoned that much of the discontent among the White House staff with the State Department's dual-track strategy regarding the hostages can be attributed to Cyrus Vance's mistake concerning the United Nations vote on Jerusalem. As noted in Chapter 3, President Carter had privately intimated to Brzezinski that he was losing confidence in Vance because of the Jerusalem vote fiasco. In turn, it seemed that the White House staff was not so much impatient with Vance's hostage crisis management tactics, as with the fact that the Jerusalem blunder jeopardized the President's re-election bid. Moreover, it appeared to Carter and Brzezinski that Vance had lost his vigor and tenacity, which he displayed so well during the Camp David Peace Accords, and was preparing to resign after the United Nations-Jerusalem embarrassment.

Another failure that reflected on Vance and Carter was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Vance and Carter were under the belief that with trust and
cooperation the United States and the Soviet Union could live side by side in peace. The sudden appearance of a Soviet military presence in Afghanistan came as a rude awakening to them. Vance was a man of principle, but in a revolutionary age his excessive faith in compromise, as Brzezinski notes, tended "to be exploited by the Qaddafi's, Khomeinis, or even Brezhnevs or Begin's of our age."(34)

Brzezinski believed that Vance could not properly balance power politics so that principle could prevail in the end.(35) Indeed, Brzezinski further states Vance's greatest weakness was that:

... he was at his worst in dealing with the things in this world. His deep aversion to use of force was a most significant limitation on his stewardship in an age in which American power was being threatened on a very broad front.(36)

Of course, Vance's greatest asset to foreign policy decision-making in a nuclear age was his resolve in abstaining from the use of force. Brzezinski recalls that, "Carter found Cy's restraining influence useful, since, as he said, both he and I were activists and needed someone like Cy to rein us in."(37) And before the Soviet move nearer the Gulf, Carter generally accepted Vance's recommendations regarding policy towards the Soviet Union over Brzezinski's three out of four times.(38) But, as noted before, Brzezinski saw Vance as visibly distraught over the United Nations condemnation of Israel and as bereft because of the unanticipated Soviet move into Afghanistan. As a consequence, Vance was losing his influence over the President.

After the Soviet aggression and the Jerusalem vote, the policy struggle between Vance and Brzezinski became a one-sided match. And Brzezinski did not ease off under those circumstances. Carter himself stated at an April 7 N.S.C. meeting that in his view it had been a mistake to have not acted more "assertively" sooner.(39)
At the March 22nd N.S.C. meeting, J.C.S. Chairman General David Jones and his assistant General John Pustay informed the President that the technical, logistical, and intelligence inadequacies of the rescue option had been worked out and that the mission capabilities were much greater than they had been earlier in the crisis. (40) The specialized team, called Delta Force, was trained specifically for anti-terrorist activities and had been preparing for the rescue contingency since November 10, and had practiced under conditions similar to those they would encounter while in Iran. The President did not give a firm go-ahead because he was waiting for the outcome of secret negotiations, over the transfer of the hostages to the government, between his White House Chief of Staff Hamilton Jordan and lawyers representing Iran. (41) However, it was at this N.S.C. meeting that Carter decided the United States would resort to strong "unilateral actions" if the allies did not seek to impose sanctions against Iran. (42)

After the April 7 N.S.C. meeting in which Carter admitted he should have acted more assertively, sooner, N.S.C. aide Gary Sick drafted a memo on April 8 to Brzezinski entitled "Getting the Hostages Free". (43) Brzezinski asked Sick to re-draft it in Brzezinski's name. On April 10, Brzezinski submitted the five-page memorandum to the President. Brzezinski argued that the negotiating track still advocated by Vance had come to an end and that the United States was left "essentially with the choice of either the rescue operation or direct application of force." (44) Furthermore "... we have to think beyond the fate of the fifty Americans (sic) and consider the deleterious effects of a protracted stalemate, growing public frustration, and international humiliation of the U.S." (45)

On April 11, Carter quickly called for an N.S.C. meeting. The meeting included the President, Brzezinski, Defense Secretary Brown, C.I.A. Director Stansfield Turner, J.C.S. Chairman David Jones, Press Secretary Jody Powell, Hamilton Jordan, Walter Mondale and Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher, sitting in for Vance who was in Florida for a weekend rest. At this fateful meeting, without Vance in attendance, Carter gave his go-ahead for the
Christopher gave the State Department's standard objections and was taken aback by the decision, not least because up until the April 11 meeting itself he had no idea that the rescue was under serious consideration. The Carter go-ahead on the rescue mission without the presence of Vance at such a serious policy decision meeting is indicative that Vance had lost his influence with Carter. Brzezinski's constantly hammered point of the need to choose between the lives of the hostages and the credibility of American honor finally resulted in the cracking of Vance's influential shell over Carter.

The obvious conflict of opinion concerning the fate of the hostages was exhibited by Vance's and Brzezinski's inter-departmental fighting. But Brzezinski's increasing influence with Carter was not strictly a so-called "one-on-one" battle between himself and Vance, but rather the consolidation of opinion among other Carter Administration departments which ultimately backed Brzezinski's line of reasoning. The coalition was formed from elements of the White House staff, including Vice-President Walter Mondale, Hamilton Jordan and Jody Powell. To a nominal degree, Brzezinski was eventually backed by Defense Secretary Brown and C.I.A. Director Turner. Brown and Turner wanted the rescue to take place, but declared their apprehension of the technical feasibility and risk of the effort. Throughout the N.S.C. discussions of the rescue option, it does not appear from the public record that Brown and Turner agreed forcefully for or against a mission. They were biding their time or playing it safe. As Richard Neustadt points out in his analysis of foreign policy decision-making in Presidential Power, agreement on what should be done does not suffice to guarantee action. The difference in roles, responsibilities, priorities, and perceptions of the key role players, each focusing on different elements of a complex issue, account for the fact that each player expects someone else to take a stand. Neither Brown nor Turner initially supported Brzezinski's military
options. The swing in position took place when some of the White House staff outwardly began to favor a quick resolution to the crisis.

The strong shift of strategy from actively pursuing a diplomatic means of resolving the crisis to leaning towards a military option was exhibited by the White House staff at the March 22 N.S.C. meeting. Cyrus Vance noted:

"Discussions about a range of military actions were accelerating. They included a naval blockade and mining of Iranian ports. Within the White House there was growing impatience with the diplomatic approach. Increasingly, I heard calls for 'doing something' to restore our national honor." (50)

Brzezinski was in a better position, literally, to gain the support of the White House staff. Vance's office was in the State Department complex, whereas Brzezinski occupied his N.S.A. office in between the Vice-President's office and the White House Chief of Staff's office. Brzezinski had more contact with the President and his staff than Vance-and he took advantage of it. For example, Hamilton Jordan would occasionally observe Brzezinski go into the President's office, place his own memo on the top of the "In-Box", and put Vance's down at the bottom. (51) Moreover, if Brzezinski saw Vance leaving either Mondale's or Powell's office after a Foreign Policy meeting, he would invite himself in, after Vance had left, and speak about actions the President should take regarding the hostages. (52) In a sense, Brzezinski was lobbying his recommendations to the White House staff. Brzezinski himself acknowledges that there was a great deal of back-stabbing in the White House. (53) He is too modest, however, to mention any of his own extracurricular activities.

With Cyrus Vance in Florida during the April 11 N.S.C. meeting, the White House staff actively took a stand for the rescue mission. Vice-President Walter Mondale, who early in the crisis came up with the idea of holding the frozen Iranian assets as a possible negotiating bargaining chip, suggested simply and
forcefully that the rescue offered the best way out of a situation that had become intolerably humiliating for the United States.(54) Brzezinski states that during the meeting Carter spoke of his private discussions "with Rosalynn, Ham, Fritz, Jody, and Brzezinski" and that the President's conclusion was that the United States had to take strong action.(55) Carter remarked, "Our national honour is at stake," and that "Sadat has told me the United States international standing was damaged by its excessive passivity."(56)

The most clear statement of the White House swing over to the N.S.C. proposal for a rescue mission is provided by Brzezinski from his observations of working in the corridors of the Oval Office. Except for Warren Christopher and the absent Cyrus Vance, the decision of the rescue was unanimous among those at the April 11 N.S.C. meeting. The one problem facing the April 11 decision would be Vance's opposition to it. But as Brzezinski elaborates: "It is to be remembered that the rescue mission decision was taken in the context of growing bitterness between Vance and the White House over the U.N. vote flop."(57) Vance could attempt to stop the decision, but it appeared that there was not much chance of success without the support of other key advisers.

Hamilton Jordan, who had been working closely with the State Department in deliberations with representatives of Iran, formally endorsed the mission in an April 12 memo to the President which stated: "Once you are satisfied with the soundness of the rescue plan, I believe you should proceed with the mission."(58) Jordan's side-note to the memo was- "["I felt better after putting myself squarely on the side of the mission- advisers are no good if they don't advise.""](59)

At the request of Cyrus Vance in a final attempt to persuade Carter to drop the mission, the President called an N.S.C. meeting on April 15. Vance spoke of allied efforts, of the risk of a high loss of life, of an Islamic back-lash, and of the Iranians retaliating by seizing more Americans.(60) The allied element has been dealt with in Chapter 4. The remaining risks of military escalation, anti-American uprisings, and an Iranian retaliation against American citizens still in
Iran were addressed by Vance's Cabinet colleagues. On the risk of death, they acknowledged concern and recognized that Vance had long been worried about this. However, meticulous planning had been done and the mission could be terminated at any point. (61) And as Gary Sick points out:

It must be remembered that the student guards were in fact students, not trained military personnel. After nearly six months of guard duty, activities had settled into a comfortable and generally relaxed routine. How would these individuals react in the wee hours of a weekend night when confronted suddenly and without warning by seasoned combat troops? (62)

As for the possibility of anti-American uprisings in the Middle East, Sadat had stated, and reports from other sources in the Middle East backed him up, that a rescue would cut the Iranians down to size; many Islamic states would exult privately. (63) On Iranian retaliation by seizing other Americans still in Iran, the Carter Administration had, weeks before the mission, made it illegal to conduct any business in Iran, and warnings were issued that any Americans travelling in Iran did so at their own risk. (64) Vance ran out of steam, and on April 17 he handed Carter his formal resignation on the basis of principle. (65) The coalition forged ahead with the rescue mission. If it was a success, as Brzezinski had hoped, it would "give the U.S. a shot in the arm, which it has badly needed for twenty years." (66) If it failed...
End-notes: Chapter Five, The Bureaucratic Element and De-Centralized Coordination of Policy Decisions

2) ibid.
3) ibid., p. 145
4) ibid., pp. 148-9
5) Brzezinski, Power and Principle, p. 46
6) Allison, op. cit., p. 145
7) ibid.
8) ibid., p. 146
9) Jordan, Crisis, p. 48
10) ibid.
11) Allison, op. cit., p. 146
12) ibid.
13) Although Vance appears to be the most critical of the relationship between himself and Brzezinski, as evidenced on pp. 35-6 of Hard Choices, he does relate much information of the departmental infighting that was taking place. Brzezinski refers to mutual cooperation on p. 478 of Power and Principle and Jordan makes note of it on p. 48 of Crisis.
14) Vance, op. cit., p. 370
15) Jordan, op. cit., p. 29, also, Brzezinski, pp. 472-4
16) Vance, op. cit., p. 371
17) Jordan, op. cit., p. 32
18) ibid., p. 44
19) ibid., p. 45
20) ibid., pp. 52-3
21) Vance, op. cit., p. 377
22) Brzezinski, op. cit., p. 480
23) ibid., p. 484
End-notes: Chapter Five, The Bureaucratic Element and De-Centralized Coordination of Policy Decisions, cont.

24) There are several references to Brzezinski's wanting to mold or have Carter become a tough Truman-like President while preserving his more Wilsonian-type qualities in Brzezinski's memoirs, see pp. 350, 432, 448, 459-460

25) ibid., 485

26) ibid.

27) ibid., p. 489

28) Vance, op. cit., p. 408

29) Sick, op. cit., "The Military Option," pp. 266-7, see also, appendice letter of David Newsom on support of Vance's position


31) ibid., p. 4

32) Brzezinski, op. cit., p. 496

33) ibid.

34) ibid., p. 42, see also, Sick, op. cit., pp. 275-6

35) Brzezinski, op. cit., p. 43

36) ibid., p. 44

37) ibid., p. 42

38) Jordan, op. cit., p. 48, see also, Sick p. 275

39) Brzezinski, op. cit., p. 491

40) Carter, op. cit., pp. 227-9, see also, Brzezinski, p. 493, or for an in-depth analysis of the preparations for the rescue see Beckwith's Delta Force

41) Vance, op. cit., p. 407


43) Brzezinski, op. cit., p. 492. Also, Freedom of Information request on minutes and memos of meetings is still pending

44) ibid.

45) ibid., p. 493
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End-notes: Chapter Five, The Bureaucratic Element and De-Centralized Coordination of Policy Decisions, cont.

46) The preparations were so secret that only a few knew of the mission because of the fear of press leaks, which would result in abandonment of the option

47) Vance, op. cit., p. 406-7

48) Jordan, op. cit., pp. 250-1, see also, Sick, p. 272


50) Vance, op. cit., p. 407

51) Jordan, op. cit., pp. 42-3

52) ibid., p. 43

53) Brzezinski, op. cit., p. 30

54) ibid., p. 493

55) ibid.

56) ibid.

57) ibid., pp. 442 & 496

58) Jordan, op. cit., pp. 251-2

59) ibid.

60) Sick, op. cit., p. 277

61) ibid.

62) ibid.

63) ibid., p. 278

64) ibid.

65) Vance, op. cit., p. 410

66) Brzezinski, op. cit., p. 496
"Clear thinking and sound decisions are the result of balance and perspective." (A)

In the early morning of April 25, 1980, the Iran rescue mission was aborted. The complete story of the failure is yet unknown. Many of the details of the mission have not been de-classified. However, there are a number of public records which give a fair account of what has been described as the "Debacle in the Desert." (1)

On April 24, eight RH-53D helicopters took off from the aircraft carrier Nimitz while at approximately the same time six C-130 transport/refueling planes took off from Masirah Island near Oman on route to a meeting point some 600 miles into Iranian territory. Prior to the mission, it had been estimated that a minimum of six helicopters were needed to lift out the rescued and soldiers, and two additional RH-53D's had been added as back-up. (2) The helicopter's mission capabilities were the greatest concern of the military commanders coordinating the mission. The Sea Stallion RH-53D, with a range of 400 nautical miles, is normally used as a mine-sweeping helicopter. It was believed that because of the Sea Stallion's size and durability it could carry out the difficult mission of transporting the Delta Force to the Desert One site and then on to Teheran if it were modified with extra fuel tanks. (3) Two hours into the mission, Helicopter Six indicated that it had a rotor malfunction and then landed. (4) The helicopter was left behind while the crew was recovered by Helicopter Eight. Much later into the mission, Helicopter Five, only an estimated half-hour from the refueling site, turned back to the Nimitz after its instrument readings experienced problems during a cyclonic sandstorm. (5) This left only the pre-determined minimum of six helicopters to proceed to the Desert One site. Upon arriving at the refueling
point, Helicopter Two reported that it had hydraulic problems and was irreparable. (6) Thus, the mission, with only five helicopters, had to abort.

As the mission, now aborted, was getting ready to leave the Desert One refueling site, a catastrophe occurred which compounded the failure. While Helicopter Four was preparing to re-fuel, it moved to the port side of an EC-130 fuel tanker. As the chopper was hovering to the rear of the plane where the fuel is transferred, the tanker began gunning its engines. This air burst from the plane, combined with the low altitude of the helicopter, resulted in the chopper careening into the plane. Amazingly, most of the soldiers in the plane escaped harm. However, eight members of the rescue team, mostly Air Force personnel, perished in the fire-storm that engulfed the two craft. (7)

After the Bay of Pigs failure in 1961, Kennedy mused, "the worse I do, the more popular I get." (8) The American people tend to rally around a President in a crisis, even if it is a failure as the Bay of Pigs was for Kennedy. However, Kennedy was new to office and was able to gain from the Bay of Pigs fiasco by building up the military, starting the race to the moon, and withstanding the subsequent October 1962 Cuban missile crisis. Carter, on the other hand, was in the final year of his four-year term before re-election, and the voters were likely to contend that the rescue mission was yet another failure for the President.

Though many apparently supported Carter for his effort in the rescue mission, the first test of his electoral resilience after the effort occurred during the Michigan Democratic caucuses, when Kennedy edged Carter by 71 delegates to 70. (9) A former Reagan aide responded to the mission with: "some will say at least he tried. But others feel that if we didn't know already he was inept, this proves it." (10)

Interestingly, those who could have gained most significantly from the rescue mission failure, the Presidential challengers, did not attack the President. In fact, at least initially after the rescue attempt, Carter was supported in his
action by his political opponents. For example, Senator Kennedy said, "Whatever our differences, we are one nation in our commitment to the hostages, our concern for their families, and our sorrow for the brave men who gave their lives trying to save their fellow citizens."(11) Ronald Reagan, an early critic of Carter and an advocate of stronger actions during the crisis, echoed Kennedy's sentiments: "It is time for us as a nation and a people to stand united. It is a moment when words should be few and confined essentially to prayers."(12) George Bush told a high school rally, "... Support your President. That's what I'd do. I have broken with the President on other things, but let me tell you, he made a tough decision."(13) A tough decision, indeed. As Henry Kissinger, a sometime critic of Carter stated: "... the country is better off now... this is what happens when you push the U.S. too far. This mission failed, but next time we will make it work."(14)

Unfortunately for Carter and his Cabinet, there was not going to be a next time. Throughout the crisis, Vance and the State Department advocated a peaceful resolution. Brzezinski, Jordan, Powell, Jones, Turner, Cutler, Mondale and Carter, also hoped for a peaceful resolution, but as time passed and the Administration's re-election chances began to fade, they could not accept protracted inactivity. The struggle between the White House staff and the State Department focuses attention on the main lessons to be learned from the Iran hostage crisis.

The clash between State and the N.S.C. over how to deal with the crisis exemplifies the compounding of the issue. Certainly, differences between departments in a bureaucracy act as a balance mechanism for those departments which lean too heavily in one sphere in a way which may endanger the national interest. On the other hand, the differences between the State Department and the N.S.C. acted as a detriment to resolving the crisis. It was not so much the differences that harbored problems for the Administration, but the practices by the individual departments which virtually split the Administration in half.
Management of the hostage crisis did not exhibit the compromising between departments that is typical of foreign policy decision-making. Of course, there was the usual "leaking" of classified materials by one department that usually jeopardizes the position of another department. However, the State Department went beyond the so-called traditional interdepartmental fighting by releasing a report of the rescue mission to Jack Anderson of the *Washington Post* even before the mission was staged. Though State Department officials may have believed that leaking the mission plan may have stopped it, it was hardly a respectable action in light of State's posture of safeguarding the hostages. State's action was contradictory in nature for it risked the lives of all the commandos flying into Teheran, the lives of the hostages, and American honor. If the Iranians were made aware of the mission, the outcome would have been militarily and politically catastrophic for the United States.

The White House staff bears much of the blame for the failure of the crisis as well. Though the Shah was a valued friend and ally of the United States while he was in office, the White House staff, in particular Brzezinski of the N.S.C., pushed for the Shah to be admitted into the United States for medical treatment. Undoubtedly, some of the finest cancer research and medical facilities in the world are located in the United States but, as Carter argued at a foreign policy meeting before the Shah's arrival,

... it makes no sense to bring him here and destroy whatever slim chance we have of rebuilding a relationship with Iran. It boils down to a choice between the Shah's preferences as to where he lives and the interests of our country.

After the State Department determined that the Shah did have cancer and needed an operation, they requested he be given an entry visa on humanitarian grounds. Brzezinski took the line of Kissinger and Rockefeller, stating that the United
States would not enjoy a favorable relationship with its Middle East friends if it turned its back on the fallen Shah.(18) At this point, the President stood alone in not wanting the Shah admitted, but under White House pressure and State Department agreement, he acquiesced. The embassy was taken over within two weeks of the Shah's entry into the United States. It is easy, of course, to look back in hindsight, but if the Carter Cabinet had not vacillated on the issue of admitting the Shah, the takeover may not have occurred.

Positive coordination of policy decision-making between all departments may have resulted in a brighter outcome for the Carter Administration. Neither the arguments for nor that against the use of force is absolutely compelling. Brzezinski, though an excellent historian of East-West relations, was visibly too aggressive in wanting to use force. His analysis that at some point a choice between the lives of the hostages and the interests of the nation had to be taken was extremely dramatic. In the course of a diplomat's career, he or she is aware of the dangers to be faced in a hostile world. Chance has it that at any given time a diplomat's life may be threatened while living abroad. If the United States was in a state of war with Iran, then it is conceivable that force would have been used to extradite the release of the hostages. But officially the United States was not at war with Iran.(19) Thus, any physical action resembling an attack, as the rescue may well have been interpreted by the Iranians, could have resulted in a protracted military conflict. In this context Vance was correct in his predilections.

However, Vance and the State Department not only should have attempted to quell the calls for military action within the Cabinet, but they also should have joined the other Cabinet members calling for sanctions and the international isolation of Iran. Vance, of course, reiterated to the allies Carter's desires, but it is clear from his memoirs that Vance, like the other ranking members within the State Department, did not push enough of the right diplomatic buttons that would have helped bring about codified sanctions before the threat of military action.
The complete record of the events leading to the rescue attempt has yet to be made public. With this in mind, one can only surmise what State's actual intentions were. Were they only concerned in their advice to the President to refrain from heeding the demands of military action by the more hawkish Brzezinski? And in this context, did they hope to "buy time", as it were, so that a military operation would become impracticable? If this were the case, then the State Department was concerned more about the safety of the hostages than their release. State's suggested measures for implementing the release of the hostages provide the reader with little else than rhetoric.

An examination of the hostage crisis invariably becomes an analysis of political elements that led to the rescue mission; the decisions to plan a rescue, wait on it, and then take it were related to political considerations.

The planning of the rescue began early. Carter gave the order to form contingencies only a few days after the embassy take-over. When Khomeini publicly began to denounce the United States, Carter saw fit to announce an American military increase near the Gulf, which presumably signalled to the Iranians that the United States would not be intimidated by the Islamic extremists.

However, though the Carter Administration appeared willing to use force to attain the release of the hostages, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan substantially squelched this trend. The Administration had to tread lightly, lest the Iranians move closer to the Soviet Union and further imperil American influence in the region. In this respect, the mission itself represented a solution to two problems: If carried out successfully, it could resolve the crisis through rescuing the hostages and at the same time act as a signal to the Soviet Union that the United States was resolutely prepared to defend its interests in and around the Gulf.

The Carter Cabinet also decided to hold off on a mission because of diplomatic encouragement from the allies. The rescue mission was capable of
moving by mid-January.(21) But the allies' concerns and pleas for appeasement during the crisis swayed Carter to refrain from the mission. If he did not recognize the allies' judgement and interests regarding the Gulf region, Carter's leadership in foreign policy would have been criticized even more than it was at the outset of the crisis. Carter followed the allies' and State Department's advice until it seemed that cooperation and negotiations were futile.

The decision to go ahead with the mission was brought about by the March-April sub-crises, which included the Waldheim Commission failure; the embarrassment of the United Nations vote on Jerusalem; and the April 1st "positive steps" announcement before the Wisconsin primary. Moreover, without the full support of the allies to impose sanctions on Iran, which Carter had deemed necessary to gain the hostages' release, the rescue mission promised a quick resolution to a crisis which seemed certain to drag on through the summer Presidential race and perhaps beyond the November 4 elections. [November 4 being the date of the one year anniversary of the embassy takeover.]

Some great ironies arise from the hostage crisis. For one, the hostages were ultimately released on January 20, 1981, which coincidentally was the changing of the Presidency from Carter to Reagan. During the inauguration, negotiations were being finalized and the hostages were in a plane taxiing at Teheran's international airport. Carter was hoping the hostages would be released while he was still President. He justifies this in his memoirs:

The release of the American hostages had almost become an obsession with me. Of course, their lives, safety, and freedom were the paramount considerations, but there was more to it. I wanted to have my decisions vindicated. It was very likely that I had been defeated and would soon leave office as President because I had kept these hostages and their fate at the forefront of the world's attention.(22)
The greatest irony of all from the outcome of the hostage crisis and its resultant end of the Carter Administration was that despite the antagonism between the United States and the Khomeini regime and the attempted rescue mission, all of the hostages were released. The United States did not apologize for alleged past crimes nor did it send the Shah back. [The Shah eventually died in Egypt in July of 1980.] Carter did, however, release the frozen Iranian assets. This factor proved instrumental in negotiating the hostages release because of the Gulf war with Iraq which began September 22, 1980. The Iranians were finding it hard to gain international support in their claims against Iraq because they continued the detainment of the Americans in Teheran. This lack of support for Iran occurred despite the fact that Iraq was the first to attack. Thus, the frozen assets became a most essential bargaining chip once the Iran-Iraq war threatened an already economically troubled Iran.

The hostage rescue mission alarmed the Europeans into imposing sanctions. The initial plan by the Carter Cabinet to have the Europeans and Japanese join in sanctions seemed justified when the allies were faced with the reality of America's declaratory threats of the use of force. A protracted military conflict with Iran could block Persian Gulf oil routes to the West. Thus, a resolution by the allies to try to quell American aggression by imposing sanctions and de-emphasizing their diplomatic presence contributed to a resolution of the crisis.

In the end, the rescue mission was not a strategic-political failure. Carter's overall crisis management ultimately gained the release of the hostages and maintained, if not enhanced, America's position in the Middle East. Of course, the rescue mission was a military foul-up, one coordinated solely by the military brass; that is, there was no White House interference once the mission was under way. But since Carter was Commander-in-Chief, he had to accept responsibility for the mission's failure.
As time and opinion judge Carter and the Iran hostage crisis, one should contemplate the lessons to be learned by contemporary students and scholars of international politics. The decision to attempt the rescue mission was a classic example of choosing between a nation's honor versus the lives of individuals. Where is the line drawn in a crisis which states that national morality and honor are more important than the individual? The distinction between the priorities of the two in any study of the mechanisms that manage the nation-state is ambiguous; an internationally accepted definition of morality usually is. Undoubtedly, the Iran hostage rescue mission is an example of a decision that dictated national honor and interests should supercede the lives of a few individuals.

Public, strategic, electoral, allied, and bureaucratic elements weighed heavily on the President prior to the Iran rescue mission. All of these contributing factors pressured the President to choose the mission as a way of alleviating the burden of the crisis.
**End-notes: Conclusion, Priorities**

A) Beckwith, *Delta Force*, p. 298


2) Beckwith, op. cit., pp. 218, 232, 277

3) ibid., p. 216

4) ibid., p. 283

5) ibid., also, note, helicopter number 5 carried all the spare parts. However, it did not have parts for the helicopter at Desert One with hydraulic problems

6) ibid., p. 276

7) ibid., pp. 278-9

8) *Time Magazine*, "Debacle in the Desert," May 5, 1980, p.31

9) ibid.

10) ibid.

11) ibid.

12) ibid.

13) ibid.

14) ibid., p. 25

15) On news leaks as a weapon or tool to eradicate the influence of another department over the chief decision-maker, see Allison, the Bureaucratic Model, pp. 149-178, see also, *Asian Defence*, "Iran Rescue Mission- One Year Later," by Gene Jacobs, April 1981, p. 39

16) Hearing Before The Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate, 96th, Congress, Second Session, May 8, 1980, p. 34

17) Jordan, op. cit., p. 29

18) ibid., p. 30


20) F.O.I. request pending.

21) Beckwith, op. cit., in fact, he acknowledges,
21, cont.) "Delta was ready to undertake the mission in mid-January when the weather favored us. Political considerations delayed it until mid-April. National resolve is weakened by many forces. The longer the crisis is allowed to run, the more such forces come into play. The longer a government waits to respond to a terrorist incident, the harder is the rescue by military means."

22) Carter, op. cit., p. 594

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