

Forum:	Crisis Committee
Issue:	Resolving the Iran Hostage Crisis (1979-1981)
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Position:	President and Deputy President of the Crisis Committee

Introduction

Currently, 53 Americans remain as hostages under Khomeini. President Jimmy Carter has recently attempted to negotiate; however, due to Khomeini's refusal, they returned empty-handed. The US must figure out a method to return all hostages back home quickly and safely. It is up to the delegates of different major parties to negotiate a deal best for their own legitimacy and global strength.

Definitions of Key Terms

Hostage

A person seized or held as security for the fulfillment of a condition.

OPEC

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries is an intergovernmental organization of 13 countries. Founded on 14 September 1960 in Baghdad by the first five members, it has, since 1965, been headquartered in Vienna, Austria, although Austria is not an OPEC member state.

Sunni and Shia Conflict

Though the two main sects within Islam, Sunni and Shia, agree on most of the fundamental beliefs and practices of Islam, a bitter split between the two goes back some 14 centuries. The divide originated with a dispute over who should succeed the Prophet Muhammad as leader of the Islamic faith he introduced.

British Petroleum

BP p.l.c. is a British multinational oil and gas company headquartered in London, England. It is one of the world's oil and gas "supermajors" and one of the world's largest companies measured by revenues and profits.

Social Bias

Social bias is the tendency of a person to trust information received from a person they know or identify with over information from other sources.

Echo Chamber

Within the context of social media, an echo chamber is used to refer to the tendency of an online platform to suggest content aligning with the user's established beliefs. Thus, it is as if their views are "echoing" back at them, rather than exposing them to opposing perspectives.

History & Developments

The Iranian Revolution

This hostage crisis is part of a larger rapid sociopolitical revolution in Iran. During the 1960s and 70s, under Shah Pahlavi's rule, Iran underwent a White Revolution, rapidly westernizing. However, many Iranians were discontent with the Shah's oppressive rule. Many protests and riots occurred throughout the entirety of 1978, causing the Shah to flee to Egypt and then seek refuge in various countries in 1979. Shortly after, the leader of the Iranian Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini, returned to Iran after years of exile. Khomeini and his Islamic Revolutionary Council were conservative in belief, striving to change Iran to conform more to Muslim values. This movement received great support from Iranians, and by August, a new constitution was finished. However, opposition to the revolution still existed. Although the Shah, now no longer in power, is debilitated from cancer, the Pahlavi dynasty still exists and is receiving support from the US due to the pro-Western stance it had. The original provisional government, with more liberal beliefs, underwent mass resignation as an act of opposition to the hostage crisis and the current trajectory of the revolution. Hence, as the revolution is still in progress, it is undecided which party would be able to consolidate authority over Iran.

Iran-Iraq Tensions

Iran is a Shia majority state, while Iraq is a Sunni majority state, one of the reasons that are causing many tensions over the Sunni-Shia divide to develop between the two nations. With a more religious force currently taking over Iran, the possible implications of the increased religious tensions between the two countries cannot be ignored.

Oil Crisis

Due to the unrest caused by opposition to the Shah's rule, oil prices were already becoming unstable in late 1978 as Iran's oil output drastically plummeted. The following Iranian Revolution is causing global oil prices to increase rapidly. This instability in global oil prices leaves a possibility for other OPEC nations needing to make up for the decreased oil production in Iran. Additionally, inflated oil prices could mean complaints from US citizens, further compelling Carter to resolve the hostage crisis quickly without causing too much price inflation. Moreover, major oil companies are expected to make huge losses due to the Iranian Revolution. The previous Pahlavi dynasty favored the West and allowed Western oil companies such as British Petroleum (BP) to extract oil from Iranian sites. However, the new revolutionary movement is anti-Western, meaning that permission may not be given to Western oil companies, leading to losses.

Timeline

Throughout 1978 – displeased Iranians riot against the Shah

Jan. 16, 1979 – the Shah flees to Egypt

Jan. 22, 1979 – the Shah arrives in Morocco and stays for three weeks before leaving to the Bahamas.

Feb. 1, 1979 – Ayatollah Khomeini returns to Iran

Feb. 14, 1979 – The US embassy in Tehran is attacked by crowds, but the crisis alleviates soon afterwards

Mar. 30, 1979 – A referendum for the foundation of an Islamic Republic is held. An overwhelming majority of voters show support for it.

Aug. 3, 1979 – A new constitution is written for the Islamic Republic.

Oct. 22, 1979 – The Shah leaves to the US for cancer treatment.

Nov. 4, 1979 – Students at the University of Tehran storm the US embassy in Tehran. They take 90 hostages, among which 66 are American, and demand the extradition of the Shah.

Nov. 5, 1979 – The Iranian government cancels military treaties with the US and USSR, withdrawing permission for the US or USSR's military intervention.

Nov. 6, 1979 – The provisional government resigns. Iran is fully in the hands of Ayatollah Khomeini and the Revolutionary Council.

Nov. 7, 1979 – US president Jimmy Carter sends Ramsey Clark and William Miller to negotiate the release of the hostages. Khomeini refuses to meet with them.

Nov. 14, 1979 – Carter orders all Iranian assets in US banks frozen.

Nov. 17, 1979 – Khomeini orders the release of all female and African American hostages. A total of 13 hostages were released.

Geopolitics

The United States

Jimmy Carter's tenure as the 39th president of the United States began with his inauguration on January 20, 1977, and ended on January 20, 1981. A Democrat from Georgia, Carter took office after defeating incumbent Republican President Gerald Ford in the 1976 election.

Iranian Revolutionary Hostage Takers

On November 4, 1979, 52 United States diplomats and citizens were held hostage after a group of militarized Iranian college students belonging to the Muslim Student Followers of the Imam's Line, who supported the Iranian Revolution, took over the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and took them as hostages

Iranian Revolutionary Council

The Council of the Islamic Revolution was a group formed by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini to manage the Iranian Revolution on 10 January 1979, shortly before he returned to Iran.

The Pahlavi Dynasty

The Pahlavi dynasty was the last Iranian royal dynasty, ruling for almost 54 years between 1925 and 1979. It is allied with the United States.

Big Oil

Oil tycoons including OPEC Secretary General, Iran Minister of Petroleum, and Chairman of BP.

Possible Solutions

The possible solutions for this hostage crisis would vary greatly depending on perspective. For the US, it would be of utmost priority to return the hostages back home, meaning that negotiations with Khomeini would be favored. However, it is also a priority for the US to prevent losing a valuable ally, and therefore, encourage the return of the Pahlavi dynasty. Moreover, the US government must remember to balance its goals with the satisfaction of US citizens.

Sine the goal of the hostage-takers is the extradition of the Shah, negotiations would also be the favored solution. As for the Khomeini and his supporters, it would be favorable to execute their political goals of establishing an orthodox Shia Muslim republic and removing foreign influences during this opportunity where they have the upper hand over USA. Similarly, the other half of the revolutionary council supporting Bazargan would also benefit from carrying out their own political agenda. For the other foreign nations, this hostage crisis could act as an opportunity for them to carry out their diplomatic agendas, gain more international power, or commence economic growth. It would be beneficial to utilize this situation to accomplish one's countries' own goals.

The accompanying oil crisis would be resolved if the situation in Iran is stabilized. However, in the viewpoint of the major oil companies, it would be significantly more favorable if the situation was resolved to be under a pro-Western government, and not under an anti-Western nationalistic government.

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