The Crises Research Project

Iranian Revolution

(chapter seven)

1. Interview with Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, 7 October 1979, organized by the infamous Italian Journalist Oriana Fallaci, published by *The New York Times*.[1]

FALLACI: Imam Khomeini, the entire country is in your hands. Every decision you make is an order....

KHOMEINI: Iran is not in my hands. Iran is in the hands of the people, because it was the people who handed the country over to the person who is their servant ... It also shows that the people only follow men of God.

FALLACI: Forgive me if I insist, Imam Khomeini. I meant that today, in Iran, you raise fear, and many people call you a dictator ... How do you comment on that? ...

KHOMEINI: On the one hand I'm sorry to hear that. On the other hand, I couldn't care less, because I know that wickedness is a part of human nature, and such wickedness comes from our enemies....

FALLACI: O.K., then. Let's talk about freedom and democracy, Imam.... In one of your first speeches at Qum, you said that the new Islamic Government would guarantee freedom of thought and of expression for everyone, including Communists and ethnic minorities. But this promise was not kept...

KHOMEINI: ... the left never cooperated with us, they only gave us problems. During the Shah's regime they were against us as much as they are now, so much so that their hostility toward

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[1] Oriana Fallaci, "An Interview with Khomeini," *New York Times*, October 7, 1979. https://www.nytimes.com/1979/10/07/archives/an-interview-with-khomeini.html.

us was worse than that of the Shah himself, much deeper.... My view is that it is not even a real left, but an artificial left, created by the Americans.

FALLACI: Do you mean a left made in the United States, Imam?

KHOMEINI: Yes, created and supported by the Americans to launch plundering against us, to sabotage and destroy us.

FALLACI: So, when you speak of "the people," you refer exclusively to the people connected with the Islamic movement. And I ask you: The people who were killed by the tens of thousands, did they die for freedom, or for Islam?

KHOMEINI: For Islam. The people fought for Islam. And Islam means everything, also those things that, in your world, are called freedom, democracy. Yes, Islam contains everything. Islam includes everything. Islam is everything.

Justification: *This article is a key addition to Hunt's Crisis chapter 7 since it sheds light on Khomeini's ideological basis. The interview gives readers details about the motivations behind the Iranian Revolution, and its opposition to Western, or U.S. involvement in Iranian affairs by discussing his justification for opposing foreign powers and explaining Islam's role within government and politics.*

2. Special Assistant for Counter Intelligence George T. Kalaris to Director of Central Intelligence Stansfield Turner, memorandum of 5 December 1979, weighing possible economic and military responses to Iran hostage crisis.[2]

I don't think there is anything new in what I have to say in the balance sheets. The stark presentation, however, leads to the conclusion that our long-term national interests call for decisive military action.

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[2] U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977-1980*, vol. 11, pt. 1 (Washington: 2010), 227-228, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v11p1/d85.

a. Gains/Losses in pursuing present direction for the following three months:

Gains for the U.S.:

—It will permit economic measures we are taking to have their impact on Iran.

—It will probably ensure that hostages are not executed.

Losses for the U.S.:

—It will not secure the release of all the hostages.

—It will compound the chaos that prevails in Iran and will give determined and organized groups, such as the Tudeh, an excellent opportunity to gain influence to the long-range detriment of the Western world.

—It will give opportunity to Khomeini to fractionize Western world public opinion.

—It will give Khomeini opportunity to gain support in Moslem world.

—It will affect adversely our image and influence in the third world and in particular the Gulf states.

—It could lead to the disintegration of Iran with dire consequences for the region.

—It can adversely affect our relationships with key Western allied nations and Japan.

b. Gains/Losses in pursuing a military solution:

Gains for the U.S.:

—It might save the lives of some of the hostages.

—It can restore a sense of stability in an area which is highly volatile.

—It will seriously undercut OPEC.

—It will bring a degree of order back to international relations.

—It will enable Iranians to sober up and decide on their future in a rational manner, thus preserving the integrity of Iran.

Losses for the U.S.:

—It will accelerate temporarily anti-U.S. actions in other Moslem countries.

—It might bring about Soviet intervention and a splitting up of Iran.

—It will offer the Soviets and other leftist elements a propaganda leverage against the U.S. for

a certain period of time.

***Justification**: This memorandum summarizes President Carter's meetings with his security council, detailing the deliberations leading to the decision for a military rescue operation. Unlike Hunt's chapter 7 (Document 23), which notes Carter's reaction, it provides an analysis of the strategic factors shaping the administration's chosen course of action.*

3. Minutes of a National Security Council Meeting, 11 April, 1980, discussing rescue operations.[3]

THE PRESIDENT: The likelihood of hostage release is remote. We need to review our options. Diplomatic moves not likely to be productive....

WARREN CHRISTOPHER: There are some non-belligerent options we should consider: no more exports/imports of any kind; blacklist Iranian ships; blacklist airline companies that service Tehran; embargo telecommunications; remove all items from pipeline; go back to the UN. We need to give the Europeans some time to respond to our request for embargo....

STANSFIELD TURNER: The negotiating option is not really open. The only non-belligerent option is to get Khomeini's advisors to convince him that it is immoral to retain the hostages....

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Rescue is the best option. We are in an intolerable situation which is humiliating to the United States. A blockade will enhance the humiliation while increasing Soviet influence in Iran.

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: Rescue is the best of the available action alternatives. If undertaken, it should be undertaken as early as possible; ... if the rescue fails; and we should consider taking prisoners to Egypt (as protection against new hostages being taken by the Iranians).

PRESIDENT: ... We may have damaged our country by not acting sooner.... We have to go now on a stronger course of action. Our national honor is at stake. We have to go with the rescue. To do so we will have to keep it clandestine, even from people here in the White House. In the meantime, ... we could tell the Iranians that we are prepared to consider Khomeini's demands in

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[3] U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977-1980*, vol. 11, pt. 1 (Washington: 2010), 677-679, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v11p1/d250.

order to provide a cover for the rescue. We should also tell the allies we need more support and indicate that we may have no choice but to blockade. We need to move quickly—by the 24th if ready.

***Justification**: Hunt's Chapter 7 does not explicitly reference this source. However, it offers an in-depth analysis, revealing that Operation Eagle was not the only option available. The chapter emphasizes the necessity of safeguarding national honor and argues that pursuing a blockade would likely strengthen Soviet ties with Iran, further complicating diplomatic efforts.*

4. Iranian Student Massoumeh Ebtekar details her experience in tending to hostages during the Iranian Hostage Crisis, 01 January 2000.[4]

Over time, the students developed seemingly friendly relationships with many--perhaps most--of the hostages. Some of us spent our watch chatting with them, discussing everything from the quality of the food to international politics. The women students were assigned to the two women hostages who had remained after the release of the first group. We often chatted, particularly when we took them for fresh air and exercise.

The Western media had successfully depicted our relationship with the hostages as one of jailers to inmates. We believed otherwise at the time. Had we not done our best to treat them as human beings? We had to maintain security, of course, but we tried to be as flexible as possible in meeting the needs of the 50 or so Americans. However, I cannot deny today that the hostages were our captives, that we were holding them against their will, and that this fundamental reality was bound to influence the way they responded to us . . .

Considering the strong anti-U.S. government feelings which we experienced during those years, even that could prove difficult at times. As days passed and we pieced the shredded documents together, we found more and more stark evidence that the embassy had transgressed diplomatic norms and had quite consciously involved itself in attempts to undermine the Islamic Revolution. As it became clear that many of the hostages particularly those at the higher levels had been deeply implicated in these maneuvers, we experienced the greatest difficulty in maintaining a civil attitude. We had to keep reminding ourselves that we had captured the embassy and taken the hostages out of principled opposition to a grievous offense to our country,

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[4] Massoumeh Ebtekar, "Hostages and Students—Life on the Inside" in *Takeover in Tehran: The Inside Story of the 1979 U.S. Embassy Capture* (Burnaby, B.C.: Talonbooks, 2000), 139-140. https://archive.org/details/takeoverintehran0000ebte/page/138/mode/2up

motivated by our religious convictions and with a view to restoring our rights. We had not acted out of revenge against a handful of spies and guards.

***Justification**: This excerpt from Ebtekar's memoir offers a different look into the Hostage Crisis. While most Western sources paint the crisis as an "us vs. them" idea, this source displays how hostages and students were somewhat amicable towards each other given the circumstances.*

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