

The Iranian Hostage Crisis

Kat Martinez

Historical Paper

Junior Division

Word Count: 1747

On November 4th, 1979, 63 U.S. Embassy members in the capital of Iran were taken as prisoners by Iranian Revolutionists. This would then start the 444-day hostage calamity case in Tehran, Iran. The Iranian Hostage Crisis was a mass hostage situation that caused a conflict between Iran and the United States. This resulted in the compromise whereby the United States would unfreeze Iranian assets and the Iranian Revolutionists would release the captured American hostages. This would change the future of the United States' government and its way of leading forever.

Overall Background

The relationship between Iranian citizens and the United States government was unpleasant for many years. Since the government of the United States supported the Shah of Iran, who presided over the country from 1941 to 1979, and because the United States and Iran had a close relationship over the trade of oil, the citizenry of Iran disliked the USA. The Shah was a ruthless leader for the three decades he ruled over the Republic of Iran. The Shah was notorious for his secret police, SAVAK, that would terrorize the people of his country, angering the citizens of Iran greatly.¹ His power and wickedness made the Iranian citizens fearful of him. This fear eventually led to hate and pushed many to want his blood and wealth altogether. Once The Shah was diagnosed with cancer and transported to the United States for treatment, Iran's

¹ History.com Staff. "Iran Hostage Crisis." History.com, A&E Television Networks, 2010

hate for America only grew.² Many Iranians were angered and irritated with the United States government for, in their view, helping to try and save the monster they learned to hate for the last 38 years.

Prelude to the Time of the Attack

Iranian Revolutionists pounded on the gates as time narrowed down until the metal would give and open its way for them to make it to the interior of the U.S. Embassy. The workers' safety would be in peril once the Iranians would break through the gates and storm for the embassy. The American workers from the embassy's windows watched history unravel before them as the gates combusted open and the revolutionists would be spat out into the embassy's territory. Iranian Revolutionists, mostly college students³, scrambled toward the interior of the embassy as American workers tried their hardest to get rid of documents and anything of value with United States government information on it. The workers burned as many documents as they could, shredded rosters of the embassy worker's names, called for help, and destroyed as much other valuable information as they could before the Iranian Revolutionists made it into the embassy.⁴ The Iranian police were called but never arrived to help. During the time the mob raided the embassy, they looked for any important documents from the U.S. and took as many

² Ibid

³ Ibid

⁴ Foot, Richard, and Norman Hillmer. "Canadian Caper." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 16 Sept. 2016, www.britannica.com/event/Canadian-Caper.

hostages as they could. This all unraveled in front of U.S. eyes as the future of the United States changed forever.

Canadian Caper

The Canadian Caper was the name given to the rescue mission that liberated six American embassy workers who escaped before the Iranian revolutionists could capture them.⁴ The six Americans found protection at the Canadian Ambassador's house in Iran and stayed there for over a year. The six embassy workers that escaped prior to the Iranian citizens seizing the American embassy included: Bob Anders, Cora Lijek, Joe Stafford, Kathy Stafford, Lee Schatz, and Mark Lijek.⁵ The name, Canadian Caper, was given to the liberation because the six escapees were helped and saved, in large part, by the Canadian government. The Canadians helped them by giving the Americans fake passports, fake identities, and alibis to help them escape Iran⁶ and make it back safely to the United States. Later, after many records and documents were declassified by the Clinton administration, it was revealed in 1997 that the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency)⁷ was part of getting them home safely in partnership with the Canadian government.

Argo

⁵ Government of Canada, Foreign Affairs Trade and Development Canada, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Communications, E-Communications Communications Products and Services. “.” *GAC*, 10 July 2013, international.gc.ca/history-histoire/people-gens/ken_taylor.aspx?lang=eng.

⁶ Foot, Richard, and Norman Hillmer. “Canadian Caper.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 16 Sept. 2016, www.britannica.com/event/Canadian-Caper

⁷ www.quora.com/What-does-the-CIA-stand-for.

The six embassy workers claimed to be a Canadian film crew⁸ looking for an exotic, foreign place to film their movie and found themselves liking Iran. The movie would be named *Argo* and raised to be a “real” film. The alibis included casting of random actors, John Chambers as their makeup artist,⁹ a studio to film in, and producers. The actors casted into the movie, as well as some others associated with the film, had no idea how much of a role they had outside of the movie as well as inside, not knowing that the movie was fake and a part of a CIA mission. *Argo* would be cancelled after the six hostages were returned to the United States and the rest would be history until 2013 when actor/director Ben Affleck told the lost history of the Canadian Caper and more into the award-winning movie, *Argo*.¹⁰

The Hostages

As hard as the people in the embassy tried, unfortunately, 63 hostages were captured the first day when the revolutionists invaded the United States Embassy.¹¹ After a couple days passed, three more people were added to the hostage count, turning the number of prisoners to 66 helpless people. Thirteen excruciating days passed when 13 prisoners were released since they were either female or African-American¹², making a total of 53 prisoners left. Iranian’s hatred toward the United States government caused them to release the 13 women and

⁸ Foot, Richard, and Norman Hillmer. “Canadian Caper.” Encyclopædia Britannica, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 16 Sept. 2016, www.britannica.com/event/Canadian-Caper.

⁹ Bearman, Joshua. “How the CIA Used a Fake Sci-Fi Flick to Rescue Americans From Tehran.” *Wired*, Conde Nast, 24 Apr. 2007, www.wired.com/2007/04/feat_cia/.

¹⁰ “*Argo* (2012).” IMDb, IMDb.com, www.imdb.com/title/tt1024648/.

¹¹ History.com Staff. “Iran Hostage Crisis.” History.com, A&E Television Networks, 2010, www.history.com/topics/iran-hostage-crisis.

¹² “Iran Hostage Crisis Fast Facts.” *CNN*, Cable News Network, 20 Oct. 2017, www.cnn.com/2013/09/15/world/meast/iran-hostage-crisis-fast-facts/index.html.

African-Americans because of their Islamic Beliefs and due to the fact the U.S. was led, at the time, by white men. Another captive was released a year later for medical reasons, leaving 52 prisoners held in Iran.¹³ The 52 hostages would, unknowingly, be in Tehran for the remaining 444 days.

What Happened in Captivity

The 52 prisoners would endure the next year and three quarters with no knowledge about what was going on around them, only knowing the walls that guarded them from the outside. None of the prisoners were killed during their time of captivity, but they were beaten in multiple diverse ways throughout the 444 days. Examples of the beatings include them being whipped with rubber hoses and being held over elevator shafts for minutes.¹⁴ Several of the men were also included in mock executions alongside the beatings they endured, written in the previous sentence above. An example of one of the mock executions they bore through would be having the men pulled from their sleep with bags over their heads and then placed somewhere secluded with other hostages while blanks were shot at them for minutes at a time.¹⁵ Day after day, the captives woke with a new horror awaiting them.

What Was Happening in The United States

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Affleck, Ben, et al. *Argo*. Distributed by Warner Bros. Entertainment Australia, 2013.

Yellow ribbons danced in the breeze as they were tacked to trees and tied to poles for awareness of the hostages still in Iran between 1979-1981. Signs were written in crayon by school children that were taped up on store windows saying to get back soon around 1979-1981 too. Not everyone was civil when the hostages were taken, multiple riots were held over the 444 days(See Appendix A). Once the hostage crisis started, former president Jimmy Carter acted by cutting any ties that were left between the U.S. and Iran. Ten days after the hostages were taken, Carter ordered Iranian assets in U.S. banks to be frozen immediately.¹⁶ If the hostages weren't going to be handed back, Carter would try to take them back somehow, some way. By April seventh, 1980, Carter discontinued the diplomatic ties the U.S. had with Iran and forced all Iranian diplomats in America to leave.¹⁷ On April 25, 1980, a rescue attempt of the hostages failed miserably, killing eight U.S. servicemen and permanently damaging the Carter administration.¹⁸ Finally, by January 19, 1981, after newly elected President Ronald Reagan took office, Iran and the United States signed an agreement to the compromise of releasing the hostages in Iran and unfreezing Iran's assets in American banks.¹⁹

What Was Happening in Iran

¹⁶ "Iran Hostage Crisis Fast Facts." *CNN*, Cable News Network, 20 Oct. 2017, www.cnn.com/2013/09/15/world/meast/iran-hostage-crisis-fast-facts/index.html.

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

Streets in Tehran were already a labyrinth of riots when the Iranian revolution started in 1979. The riots grew to double their size when the Iranian Hostage Crisis began (See Appendix B). Riots were continually held as the Iranian Revolutionists voiced support of their supreme religious leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini,²⁰ as well as demanding that the United States needed to “return The Shah”²¹ if they wanted the hostages returned to the U.S. safely. Iranian security looked for as many Americans they could all throughout Iran to add to the number of hostages and executions. They looked for people who had any kind of alliance with the United States and the former leader of Iran, The Shah. Airports were swarmed with security looking for anyone trying to escape and leave for the U.S., and anyone who had an English name in their phonebook was taken and/or killed.²² The people of Iran would be hung by cranes, shot in the street, killed behind their house, and shot in dark alleyways for any alliance to the prior leader, The Shah, or to the United States.²³ Iran thirsted for any American blood they could find in their country.

Ripple Effects

In conclusion, when the Iranian Hostage Crisis ended, the effects left the United States’ relationships and government crippled from their inability to get the hostages returned earlier.

²⁰ “Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.” *Biography.com*, A&E Networks Television, 13 Oct. 2014, www.biography.com/people/ayatollah-ruhollah-khomeini-13680544.

²¹ History.com Staff. “Iran Hostage Crisis.” *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 2010, www.history.com/topics/iran-hostage-crisis.

²² Affleck, Ben, et al. *Argo*. Distributed by Warner Bros. Entertainment Australia, 2013.

²³ Ibid

Even though all the hostages were returned to the United States, the effects between Iran and the U.S. could not be undone. Other countries of smaller and bigger size/power could see the weakness that the United States still had since the Vietnam War, which ended four years prior to the start of the hostage crisis, and the weakness of the United States had overall. The weakness the U.S. portrayed to the other countries came from the decades of them losing numerous amounts of resources such as wars, soldiers, and money. The trust the United States had with other countries decreased alongside the trust American citizens had with their own country. The collaboration between Iran and the United States barely had any time to heal, as ties held between them were cut by Jimmy Carter. The relationship between the U.S. and the whole region of the Middle East was, and still is, practically unfixable from the calamity between these regions and numerous terrorist activities still exist today. Well into the 21st century it will be interesting to watch to see if the United States and Iranian government remain irreparable. One would hope that the future holds a better relationship between these two countries. Only time will tell.

Appendix A



In this picture shown, riots were occurring across United States protesting Iranian Revolutionists who still held the American captives.²⁴

²⁴ The Hostage Rescue Attempt In Iran,
www.theodoresworld.net/pages/hostage_rescue_attempt_in_iran.htm.

Appendix B



In this image shown, riots were occurring across Iran after The Shah's authorization rule in 1978. This image shows the Iranian citizens protesting by setting furniture and documents on fire in the country's streets.²⁵

²⁵ Chun, Susan. "6 Things You Didn't Know about the Iran Hostage Crisis." *CNN*, Cable News Network, 16 July 2015, www.cnn.com/2014/10/27/world/ac-six-things-you-didnt-know-about-the-iran-hostage-crisis/index.html.

Appendix C



In this image shown, former president, Jimmy Carter, is meeting with his advisors about the Iranian Hostage Crisis.²⁶

²⁶ *National Archives and Records Administration*, National Archives and Records Administration, catalog.archives.gov/id/848194.

Works Cited

Primary Sources

Chun, Susan. "6 Things You Didn't Know about the Iran Hostage Crisis." *CNN*, Cable News Network, 16 July 2015, www.cnn.com/2014/10/27/world/ac-six-things-you-didnt-know-about-the-iran-hostage-crisis/index.html. Ibid

One of the most vastly used source I used was this one at such for giving me information on how the crisis would unfold in the 444 days of captivity. The information given were on how Iranian Revolutionists took action when their uprising stimulated, when Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini returned to Iran after years in exile and the affect it left on Iranian citizens, primary sources of what it looked like as the United States' embassy was rushed, and what ensued inside and outside of imprisonment for the embassy workers. My knowledge growth from the timeline would allow me to see inside the life of Iranian and American inhabitants during the 444-day period.

National Archives and Records Administration, National Archives and Records Administration, catalog.archives.gov/id/848194.

National Archives provided me with my third appendix and evidence of former U.S. president Jimmy Carter meeting with his administrators about finding a compromise for returning the 52 hostages back to the United States. I then knew how much Jimmy Carter met with his colleagues on trying to liberate the hostages overseas due to the fact this was one of my first primary sources of seeing Carter acting upon trying to receive the hostages in the Middle Eastern country.

The Hostage Rescue Attempt In Iran, www.theodoresworld.net/pages/hostage_rescue_attempt_in_iran.htm.

My first appendix was found at this site and gave me a wider knowledge of protest examples in the United States. I was provided with a primary source of a picture during the time between 1979 to 1981 and a showing of the anger that flooded through American veins due to the fact 52 captives in Iran were yet to be released by Iranian Revolutionists.

Secondary Sources

Affleck, Ben, et al. *Argo*. Distributed by Warner Bros. Entertainment Australia, 2013. "Argo (2012)." *IMDb*, IMDb.com, www.imdb.com/title/tt1024648/. Ibid

This source offered information that incorporated specifics on what was occurring while the Iranian Hostage Crisis thrived. The film covered on the inside job of Argo mostly while also following Tony Mendez, a CIA agent at the time, helping with the Canadian Caper launch. This helped me learn how the six embassy workers apart of the Canadian Caper struggled in Tehran, Iran and how the citizens were affected/incorporated with the Iranian Movement striking.

“Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.” *Biography.com*, A&E Networks Television, 13 Oct. 2014, www.biography.com/people/ayatollah-ruhollah-khomeini-13680544.

This article summarized who Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini was by including his role in Iran’s government, how he sparked the Iranian Revolution, and how long he lead for. This source would then help me understand the extent of who he was and his impact on the Iranian Hostage Crisis while leading the Middle Eastern country.

Bearman, Joshuah. “How the CIA Used a Fake Sci-Fi Flick to Rescue Americans From Tehran.” *Wired*, Conde Nast, 24 Apr. 2007, www.wired.com/2007/04/feat_cia/.

This source clarified what the Argo mission was with who helped, the absorbedness that the fake film was, the people apart of the Canadian Caper that would be rescued, and the chaos the CIA was in while trying to retrieve the escaped embassy workers. This information allowed me to further understand what the Argo mission itself was and the specific tactics taken during that over year long mission.

Bergen, Peter. “American Hostages More Likely to Die than Others from the West.” *CNN*, Cable News Network, 8 Jan. 2017, www.cnn.com/2017/01/08/opinions/us-hostages-worse-off-bergen-mellon/index.html.

This site included how most American hostages were taken care of when captured overseas, the history of occurrences of U.S. citizens being imprisoned in foreign places, what further caution the United States’ government should take when citizens should be wary of when visiting different countries. The information would allow my knowledge to expend on different cases of Caucasians and U.S. citizenries being captured throughout history in multiple dissimilar republics.

Foot, Richard, and Norman Hillmer. “Canadian Caper.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 16 Sept. 2016, www.britannica.com/event/Canadian-Caper. Ibid

The encyclopedia site covered the flight of the six American Embassy personnel during the Iranian Revolution finagled by Canadian Administration and the CIA and giving information on how the removal of the citizens would be planned and followed through. Enabling me to have in-depth knowledge of the Canadian Caper, I would have further context in my fourth paragraph rather than just having information from my first citation.

Government of Canada, Foreign Affairs Trade and Development Canada, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Communications, E-Communications Communications Products and Services. “.” *GAC*, 10 July 2013, international.gc.ca/history-histoire/people-gens/ken_taylor.aspx?lang=eng.

Roles of who the escapees of the hostage crisis and the names of them were given inside the global affairs of Canada site as well as following more of Canada’s role in the Canadian Capar rather than just the Central Intelligence Agency influence. The names of the Americans would allow me to have them included in my fourth paragraph while also making the information more thorough.

History.com Staff. “Iran Hostage Crisis.” *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 2010, www.history.com/topics/iran-hostage-crisis. Ibid

By far, this documentary, but also site, gave me the most summarized information of what the Iranian Hostage Crisis was. Information such as another timeline of the unfolding the crisis had was given, then allowing me to receive the knowledge of what The Shah’s relationship with American interests were, how many captives were taken when the revolutionists over through the embassy barriers and seized the workers, the priorities of former president Jimmy Carter had around the hostages in Iran, and the leading up to as well as events of the 1980 election were given. My understanding of the Iranian Hostage Crisis grew quite widely as this was one of my first articles I read during my research.

“Iran Hostage Crisis Fast Facts.” *CNN*, Cable News Network, 20 Oct. 2017, www.cnn.com/2013/09/15/world/meast/iran-hostage-crisis-fast-facts/index.html. Ibid

Another timeline I read through from CNN’s website was the fast facts article that went over notable events throughout the 444 days and prior. Knowledge gained from the source was ones such as the compromise between America and Iran, valuable events in Iran such as Khomeini releasing African-American and female hostages, valuable events in America such as Jimmy Carter freezing Iranian Assets, and slight summaries of the events in the two-year timeline.

National Archives and Records Administration, National Archives and Records Administration, catalog.archives.gov/id/848194.

National Archives provided me with my third appendix and evidence of former U.S. president Jimmy Carter meeting with his administrators about finding a compromise for returning the 52 hostages back to the United States. I then knew how much Jimmy Carter met with his colleagues on trying to liberate the hostages overseas due to the fact this was one of my first primary sources of seeing Carter acting upon trying to receive the hostages in the Middle Eastern country.

www.quora.com/What-does-the-CIA-stand-for.

This question and answer site included what the acronym CIA stood for, rather than using Wikipedia as a citation. I now know what CIA stands for when I need it for future references in informational projects.