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CARLETON UNIVERSITY

OPERATION EAGLE CLAW:
EXPLAINING A FOREIGN POLICY FAILURE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

BY

KEITH COULTER

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OTTAWA, ONTARIO

MAY 1995

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**OPERATION EAGLE CLAW:
EXPLAINING A FOREIGN POLICY FAILURE**

submitted by

Keith A. Coulter, B. Eng., B.A., M.A.

in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Chair, Department of Political Science

Thesis Supervisor

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Carleton University
May 25, 1995

ABSTRACT

In April 1980 the Carter administration launched a military operation to rescue 53 American hostages who had been held for nearly six months by a group of militant Iranian students at the US Embassy in Tehran. This rescue attempt ended in total failure at a desert staging base deep inside Iranian territory. Rather than bringing the hostage crisis to the sudden and dramatic conclusion that President Carter had hoped for, the operation was, in terms of both international and domestic politics, an enormous setback for him and his entire administration.

Using an adaptation of "the political process model" proposed in the recent work of Roger Hilsman, this study examines the decision-making process within the Carter administration from the time the hostages were seized to the point where the rescue operation failed. After setting the stage with an examination of the overall political context and the US-Iran policy context in which the hostage crisis began, the study takes a close look at the way in which the rescue option was developed, considered, chosen and implemented. It then offers comprehensive political process explanations for both Carter's decision to launch the rescue mission and the subsequent failure of the actual operation in Iran.

By focusing on the decision making that took place concurrently at the political and military-operational levels during this period, this study highlights the factors which contributed to the president's decision to launch the rescue mission, including the specific ways in which decision making at the military-operational level influenced decision making at the political level. The study also highlights the factors which contributed to the failure of the operation, including the specific ways in which decision making at the military-operational level was, in turn, influenced by decision making at the political level, ultimately impacting the final shape of the rescue plan and limiting its prospects for success.

The study concludes by arguing that the Carter administration was divided and weak at a key moment in its history and by challenging the more sympathetic, revisionist approach that scholars and other analysts have recently tended to take when looking at the Carter years.

FORWORD

This dissertation is the final step in a process which began when I entered the M.A. program in International Affairs at the University of Oklahoma in the Fall of 1983. Since that time, my postgraduate studies have been nearly continuous and, except for a six-month leave of absence from work, done on a part-time basis. This dissertation is thus the final step in an academic journey that has been an inextricable part of my life for nearly twelve years.

During this period, my career in the Canadian Forces has involved six moves and extremely demanding jobs that have ranged from Commander of a CF-18 fighter squadron to my current job as Executive Assistant to the Deputy Minister at the Department of National Defence. Most of these jobs have required extensive time away from home, particularly during 1991-92 when I attended the National Defence College in Kingston, Ontario, where the curriculum included a heavy schedule of domestic and international travel. This period has also been one of constant flux at a more personal level as I went through a separation and divorce, overcame long distances to visit my children and terminally-ill father and, after several years of living on my own, took custody of my teenage son.

At times during these busy years it was difficult to maintain momentum in my studies. Indeed, looking back, I am amazed that, given the other demands on my time, I was ever able to get this far. Although I understood from the outset that sustained commitment and hard work would be required to reach this point, for reasons I am not able to fully explain, this did not deter me. On the contrary, the further I progressed in my postgraduate education, the more I felt compelled to write a dissertation; and the further I progressed in this final project, the more I felt compelled to complete it. Thus, despite the many changes and other pressures on my time over the past several years, I have never once seriously thought of abandoning this academic enterprise before taking this final step. Indeed, in many ways, my PhD work has been an important constant in a period of incredible change.

In writing this dissertation, I have been very fortunate to have had unwavering encouragement from the members of my supervisory committee: John Sigler (Chair), Harald von Rickhoff and Michael Dolan. I do not see

how I could possibly have chosen a better mix of talent and friendship. I will always remember and appreciate John's powerful intellect and penetrating insights, Harold's sophisticated analytical skills and sage advice, and Michael's unique appreciation of theory and open approach. Each of them has had, in their own unique way, an important influence on my intellectual life over the past few years, and I hope that both this dissertation and my future endeavors will do justice to the many things they have taught me. At this stage, I would simply like to thank them for their interest, guidance and, above all, support.

I would also like to thank Bob Fowler and John McLure for allowing me to take time off from one of the most demanding jobs in Ottawa to finish this dissertation. More than that, I would like to thank them for the hands-on education they have given me in national security decision making at the highest levels of government. Many of the things I have learned from them about government process – how it works and how to work it to, in Hilsman's words, "move a nation" – have informed this study and grounded it in the reality that confronts decision makers dealing with tough issues in an uncertain and unforgiving world.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the two most important people in my life: my daughter Dorie, who has now completed the second year of her own university studies, and my son, Keegan, who will begin his final year of high school this fall. Their image of me as someone always struggling to balance the demands of parenthood, career and university studies will inevitably be a part of their memories of the past twelve years, as well as it is a part of my own. Now, as this long journey in postgraduate education draws to a close and I look back at it, it is clear to me that I could not have sustained my sense of direction and therefore would not have reached this point had I not been able to count on the love and acceptance of Dorie and Keegan. As one small gesture of my gratitude, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to them.

Keith Coulter
Ottawa, Canada
May 1995

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KEY DECISION MAKERS AND ADVISERS

OPERATION EAGLE CLAW

LEGEND

C130s ———→
Helicopters ———→

Vehicles
Extraction Force ———→

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

<u>AWACS</u> :	Airborne Warning and Control System - four-engine jet aircraft with airborne radar surveillance capability
<u>CIA</u> :	Central Intelligence Agency
<u>C-130</u> :	Four-engine turboprop transport aircraft ("Hercules")
<u>AC-130</u> :	Special operations version of the C-130 equipped with heavy guns capable of highly accurate air-to-ground fire
<u>EC-130</u> :	Special airborne command and control version of the C-130 also capable of carrying fuel bladders
<u>MC-130</u> :	Special operations version of the C-130
<u>C-141</u> :	Four-engine jet transport aircraft ("Starlifter")
<u>DoD</u> :	Department of Defense
<u>JCLD</u> :	Documents from the Jimmy Carter Library
<u>JTF</u> :	Joint Task Force - the military organization tasked to develop and implement the rescue option
<u>KC-135</u> :	Four-engine jet aircraft capable of refuelling other aircraft in the air
<u>MPG</u> :	Military Planning Group - the small interorganizational group which supervised planning for military options
<u>NSAD</u> :	Documents from the National Security Archive
<u>NSC</u> :	National Security Council
<u>RH-53D</u> :	Helicopter used in the rescue option ("Sea Stallion")
<u>SATCOM</u> :	Satellite Communications - radios which use satellites to relay signals between stations
<u>SCC</u> :	Special Coordinating Committee - subcommittee of NSC chaired by the National Security Adviser and responsible for crisis management

CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

In April 1980, the Carter administration launched Operation Eagle Claw, a military operation designed to rescue 53 American hostages who had been held for nearly five months by a group of militant Iranians at the US Embassy in Tehran. This rescue operation ended in complete failure at Desert One, a remote staging base deep inside Iranian territory. Rather than bringing the hostage crisis to the sudden and dramatic conclusion that President Carter had hoped for, the operation was an enormous political setback for him and his entire administration. In terms of international politics, the failure was a severe blow to both the reputation of the US military and the credibility of US foreign policy. In terms of domestic politics, the failure fuelled criticisms that the administration was incompetent and inept and contributed to the image of a "failing presidency" which had already emerged as the main obstacle to Carter's bid for reelection.

The central objective of this study is to provide an in-depth analysis of both the decision to launch the rescue mission and the failure of the actual operation. To do this, the study will examine closely the decision-making processes that took place at the political and military-operational levels during the period between the seizure of the embassy in early November 1979 and the failure of the rescue mission in late April 1980. It will examine the way in which diplomatic efforts to resolve the hostage crisis and planning for a rescue operation proceeded simultaneously during the early months of the crisis and the way in which, once the negotiations with the Iranian government collapsed in early April and the rescue plan had been developed to the point where those responsible for it believed it had a reasonable chance of success, the administration considered and eventually chose the rescue option. It will also examine the way in which this decision was implemented by looking at the decision-making process during the conduct of the actual operation.

The conceptual approach used in this study is based on the recent work of Roger Hilsman (1987, 1990, 1992, 1993) who has developed a "political process model" to explain specific foreign policy decisions and outcomes. As will be shown when the model is presented in Chapter 2, this model focuses the attention of the analyst sharply on the actual decision-making process and can be readily adapted to the task of exposing the specific dynamics that took place within the total political and military-operational decision-making context in which the rescue attempt took

place. As such, it can be used to develop explanations for both why the decision to attempt the rescue operation was taken and why the operation failed. This study will show that applying this conceptual approach to this particular case allows us to highlight the specific ways in which the decision-making processes at the political and military-operational levels interacted and combined to produce both the decision and outcome. Indeed, the political process approach that will be applied in the following chapters will facilitate not only an examination of the dynamics of the decision-making processes which took place concurrently at these two levels, but also an examination of the dynamics of the complete process in which, at key junctures, decision making at one level touched and influenced decision making at the other.¹

As will be readily apparent by the time that the comprehensive political process explanations for the rescue decision and outcome are presented in Chapter 7, the use of this conceptual approach will result in a specific interpretation of Operation Eagle Claw. It is an interpretation which, it will be argued later in this study, takes us beyond previous explanations to a broader understanding of the rescue attempt, particularly with respect to the failure of the operation. What will be argued, in other words, is that the explanations developed in this study by applying the political process model will help improve our understanding of this particular historical event.

With respect to the decision to launch the rescue operation, this study will argue that it is best explained as the product of a number of specific factors. Some of these relate to the president's changing image of the international system, his personal style of leadership and the process that he set in place to deal with the hostage issue. Others relate to the political context in which the decision took place, such as the fact that the negotiations had collapsed and the reality of growing pressures on the president "to do something." Still others relate to military-operational considerations such as the knowledge that the window of opportunity for implementing the rescue plan was rapidly closing due to the decreasing hours of darkness in Iran during this time of year. By examining closely the entire decision-making process, including the separate dynamics at the political and military-operational levels and the way in which they touched and influenced each other along the way, this study will identify the key factors involved and assess their importance to the decision.

In the case of the actual operation, this study will argue that the failure must also be explained in terms of a number of factors. Some of these, such as the way in which military units were chosen and prepared for the mission, were operant primarily at the military-operational level of decision making. Others, such as the pressure exerted on the rescue force to remain ready at all times and the restrictions placed on the planners with respect to staging bases, were operant primarily at the political level. Since this second category of factors has been largely ignored in the literature to date, one unique contribution of this study will be to use the political process approach to highlight the way in which decision making at the military-operational level was influenced by decision making at the political level, ultimately determining the shape of the rescue plan and limiting its prospects for success. While the operation was a total failure and the US military deserves much of the harsh criticism it has received for the way it developed and implemented the rescue plan, there is more to the story than this. Indeed, in light of the significant political restrictions that overarched the whole planning effort, this study will argue that it was a poor performance by the entire administration, not just the military, which culminated in the failure of the rescue operation. Simply put, the explanation for the outcome of the rescue attempt that is developed here is one which points to problems of political as well as military-operational judgment.

This introductory chapter will begin with a brief overview of Operation Eagle Claw. It will then define the key questions raised by this operation, explain why they are important and review previous attempts to answer them. It will conclude with a brief outline of the way in which the study is organized.

The Rescue Attempt: Operation Eagle Claw

In April 1980, the Carter administration, frustrated to that point in its efforts to obtain the release of 53 American hostages being held in Tehran since November 1979, decided to rescue them by means of a military operation. During the previous five and a half months, an elaborate rescue plan had been developed and practised by a Joint Task Force assembled for the purpose, and the president and his closest national security policy advisers had developed considerable confidence that the operation had a reasonable chance of freeing the hostages without inflicting heavy casualties to either them or the rescue team. The rescue

operation, code named Operation Eagle Claw, took place under cover of darkness during the evening of 24-25 April.

At dusk on 24 April, a rescue force consisting of six C-130 (Hercules) transport aircraft, eight RH-53D (Sea Stallion) helicopters, and over 200 military personnel launched from an airfield on Masirah Island, Oman and from a US aircraft carrier in the Gulf of Oman, the *Nimitz*, penetrated Iranian airspace without detection and flew to a carefully-selected location in the Dasht-e-Kavir Desert, called Desert One. The purpose of this rendezvous was to refuel the helicopters and to transfer an assault force from the transport aircraft to the helicopters for the next leg of its journey to a remote hiding location in the mountains southeast of Tehran. From there, again under cover of darkness the following night, the assault force would travel by vehicle to Tehran, where they would storm the two locations where the hostages were being held: the American embassy (50 hostages) and the Iranian Foreign Ministry building (3 hostages). These assaults had been carefully rehearsed for several months and were the part of the mission in which the rescue planners were the most confident.

Due to the complexity of the mission, it had been designed to permit termination and the withdrawal of US military forces at several key points if major difficulties were encountered. One of these points was Desert One. During the planning stage, it had been established that a minimum of six helicopters were required to go forward from this staging point to the next phase of the operation. By the time refuelling operations began at Desert One, one helicopter had been abandoned en route with mechanical problems and another, having experienced serious problems with key flight and navigation instruments while attempting to navigate in the unexpected poor visibility conditions encountered along the way, had returned to the *Nimitz*, leaving the rescue force with only six helicopters. During refuelling operations, one of these remaining helicopters, which had also experienced some mechanical difficulties on the way to Desert One, was declared unfit to continue by the helicopter flight leader. In accordance with the plan and after consultations with both the helicopter flight leader and the assault force commander, the on-scene commander recommended that the mission be aborted. Within minutes this recommendation was supported by the Joint Task Force Commander in Egypt and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington, and was approved by Carter.

The withdrawal operation from Desert One began immediately following the decision to abort. During this withdrawal phase, as one of the

helicopters was being repositioned, it struck one of the C-130 refuelling aircraft, resulting in a fiery crash that killed eight American servicemen and severely burned several others. With a series of fiery explosions lighting up the Desert One site and daylight rapidly approaching, an emergency evacuation was carried out. The bodies of the eight servicemen trapped in the burning wreckage, the helicopters and some secret information about the operational plan were left behind.

The political effects of the failed rescue mission were immediate and devastating for the Carter administration. The Iranians promptly displayed the bodies, the secret information and pictures of the charred wreckage to a global audience, underlining in a most dramatic way the inability of the Carter administration to resolve the hostage problem and reinforcing impressions that American military forces lacked the leadership, combat skills and equipment needed to conduct successful operations. Thus, far from resulting in the heroic rescue of the hostages that those who had planned and approved the operation had envisaged, the rescue mission resulted in total political as well as military failure.

The Key Questions and Why They Are Important

The most fundamental questions that this study will address are why the decision to launch the rescue attempt was taken and why the operation itself failed. Why, in other words, did an administration, whose strategy for the first five months of this hostage crisis had been one of restraint and negotiation, attempt to solve the crisis by conducting a military operation before returning to its previous strategy, which ultimately led to the release of the hostages nine months later? And why did the operation fail? Was it, as many critics have charged, poorly-planned and predestined to fail right from the outset or was it a reasonably well-planned mission that was poorly executed or simply ran into bad luck? There are three major reasons why these particular questions are worthy of in-depth scholarly analysis: providing answers to them will help to set the historical record straight; the rescue attempt is an important and relevant case that, if it is well understood, can contribute to a broader understanding of decisions by US presidents to use force; and this case is one that has important implications for the emerging debates on the Carter administration's foreign policy.

One of the most compelling reasons why this case needs to be examined is that the historical record is still incomplete and inaccurate. To this point, analysis of the rescue decision and operation in the

academic literature has been rather shallow. The major published accounts have been written by those involved in the crisis at the time, each with their own perspective and agenda. These accounts are incomplete and sometimes even contradictory, and most of them were written within a few years of the experience, when much of the information was still considered sensitive (Carter, 1982; Brzezinski, 1982 and 1983; Jordan, 1982; Vance, 1983; Powell, 1984).² Moreover, until very recently, the only first-hand account of the military planning and development of the rescue operation that was available was that of Beckwith (1984), the commander who would have led the assault on the embassy in Tehran, which focused on the training for a part of the operation which was never conducted.³ Nevertheless, those who have attempted the analysis that has been done to this point have largely accepted as their point of departure the accounts of these participants and of others who were close to the decision-making process but not immediately involved in it, most notably Gary Sick (1985).⁴ In addition, most have relied heavily on newspaper articles and public statements made in the immediate aftermath of the rescue attempt for their information about both the planning for the rescue mission and the mission itself.⁵

It is now possible to go beyond these early accounts. The most recent published accounts of key players in the decision and operation offer considerably more information about both the decision-making process at the political level and about the development of the rescue plan and execution of the mission at the military operational level (Turner, 1991; Kyle, 1990).⁶ This information is just now beginning to have an impact on scholarly analysis (Vandenbroucke, 1993). Also, it is now possible to review considerable original documentation about both the planning and the actual operation at the National Security Archive in Washington.⁷ Even a cursory reading of this material makes it obvious that there are gaps and distortions in earlier accounts of both the rescue decision and operation. This new information has not yet had a major impact on the academic literature and thus needs to be integrated with the earlier information to form a more sophisticated and complete picture of both the political and the military decision-making processes and how they interacted and combined to produce the major decisions and outcomes in the rescue drama. The time is ripe, in other words, to synthesize all of the information that can be obtained about this case to date, to try to fill in the gaps in previous accounts, and to resolve the contradictions and ambiguities in

them with the greatest possible historical precision in order to develop a better understanding of this case.

A key question here is whether the rescue decision was some sort of "fuzzy gamble with history" (Dror, 1990), a well-informed one that simply fell victim to what David Aaron, Deputy National Security Adviser at the time, called "Allah's will" or something in between. Given the failure of the rescue operation, many analysts have concluded that the decision to undertake it was fatally flawed, that the operation was preordained to fail before it ever got off the ground and that Carter was poorly informed and therefore made a grave error in taking the decision to launch it. Indeed, to a large extent, this view has become "conventional wisdom" (Reichard, 1990: 614). However, even if one were to accept this conclusion, it does nothing to help pinpoint precisely where, how and why the president went wrong. Moreover, as the analysis presented in this study will show, it is not as simple as that. The early critiques of the rescue decision, upon which this "conventional wisdom" is based, do not survive scrutiny in light of the evidence now available; the record needs to be set straight.

A related question, which is also a key one, is whether the outcome of the rescue attempt can be explained in terms of "military incompetence" (Gabriel, 1985). To a considerable degree, this view has also become "conventional wisdom." However, as the analysis presented in this study will again show, this harsh view of the role of those involved in the operational planning and in the execution of the actual mission needs to be reassessed in light of the new evidence. Indeed, when one takes the full body of evidence now available into account fully, this view is demonstrably superficial and inaccurate and therefore in need of revision. Kyle's account, for example, shows very clearly that Gabriel's widely-cited critique in his book on "military incompetence" is full of misunderstandings and misjudgments (Kyle, 1991; Gabriel, 1985).

Second, an examination of the hostage rescue decision and operation can contribute to our understanding of decisions by US presidents to use force. The use of military force or the threat to use it for political purposes on the global stage has been a constant theme in the practice of American foreign policy since World War II (Meernik, 1994: 121-138; Maynes, 1995), and the broadest possible spectrum of cases needs to be examined if we are to understand fully this phenomenon. All modern presidents since Franklin Roosevelt have had to face difficult choices regarding the use of force and all have made the decision to use it at

least once, seeking some sort of military solution to achieve their objectives rather than reformulating these objectives or attempting to achieve them by other means. Their decisions have resulted in a broad range of outcomes ranging from eventual geopolitical defeat (in Vietnam in the early 1970s) to quick achievement of the immediate objective (for example, in the Dominican Republic in 1965 and in Grenada in 1983). The decisions of the Bush administration to take military action in Panama, the Persian Gulf and Somalia and the decisions of the Clinton administration to do so in Iraq and Haiti are simply the most recent examples of this.

Unfortunately, during the entire Cold War period, there was a tendency by both scholars and practitioners to consider a very limited number of cases involving decisions to use military force as the classical ones, giving them so much attention that they crowded out serious consideration of other cases in textbooks and journals. Cohen, for example, writing during the last years of the Cold War, argued that in many respects we made the Cuban missile crisis "the paradigmatic politico-military event of our age," rather than developing a broader and richer understanding of the dynamics of decision making and crisis management by confronting a broader spectrum of cases (Cohen, 1986: 3-13).

The same danger presents itself in this post-Cold War period where, for example, the 1990-91 Persian Gulf crisis and war has received an enormous amount of attention, perhaps to the point of replacing the Cuban missile crisis as the new paradigmatic event. To the extent that analysis of other events suffers, the attention paid to the Persian Gulf experience is unfortunate because, as Mandelbaum points out, that war may have been "less the harbinger of the future than the last gasp of a morally and politically clearer age" (Mandelbaum, 1994: 3). Indeed, while the threat of traditional forms of interstate conflict still exists (invasion of South Korea by North Korea, another conflict in the Persian Gulf, resurgent Russia in Eastern Europe, and so on), the end of the Cold War has already demonstrated the need for US presidents to consider the use of force in a wide variety of other less traditional circumstances (Haass, 1994). Simply put, the tendency to use too narrow a spectrum of cases or to use any single one in a paradigmatic way inhibits development of an understanding of the broader phenomenon of decisions to use force as an instrument of foreign policy and, conversely, a broad base of case studies results in a firmer foundation upon which to base both scholarly analysis and foreign policy practice.⁸

This study thus makes an important contribution to the data base on decisions by US presidents about whether to use military force by bringing the tools of rigorous scholarly inquiry to bear on the unique and fascinating case of the hostage rescue attempt.⁹ Although Carter's decision to launch the rescue mission certainly did not involve the commitment of US forces on a grand scale like, for example, Johnson's decision to escalate American involvement in Southeast Asia or Bush's decision to commit troops to combat in the Persian Gulf, it did involve an intense decision-making process which resulted in a clear-cut decision to turn to a purely military action, with all of its inherent risks and complications, to solve a foreign policy problem. Moreover, this case is a particularly interesting one since Carter was one of the most, if not the most, reluctant of the post-World War II presidents to consider the use of force. Despite this visceral aversion, on this one occasion he chose, as all other post-World War II presidents have done at some point in their presidencies, to attempt a solution based solely on the use of US military power.¹⁰

In terms of foreign policy practice, to the extent that a fuller and more accurate understanding of the past can contribute to more informed decisions, it is important to make every possible effort to learn from this failed operation. There is always a great deal at stake in decisions to use force. In this particular case, success of the operation or the choice of another option, such as continuing the efforts to negotiate or taking other military actions, might have resulted in a different outcome with respect to the fate of the hostages, US-Iran relations, and the military-strategic reputation of the US on the global stage. While the outcomes of other possibilities cannot be established with any degree of certainty, it is clear that the lives of innocent people, the future of US foreign policy in the Persian Gulf and the reputation and moral authority of the US were at stake. As events unfolded, the failure of this military operation resulted in further hardships for the hostages, dealt a damaging blow to the reputation of the armed forces of the US and further undermined the position of the US in the region. In short, the attempt was the kind of total failure that both political and military leaders would wish to avoid repeating.¹¹

One aspect that makes the case of the hostage rescue attempt especially interesting and relevant is that it involved many of the specific dilemmas that will inevitably confront US presidents now that the Cold War is over. In this new geopolitical context, it is already clear

that there will be situations where American lives and interests are at stake which, like the Iranian hostage crisis, will be driven by the logic of regional or local instabilities. The Persian Gulf crisis and war, the complex crisis in the Balkans, the humanitarian disaster in Somalia, the tragedy in Rwanda and the recent situation in Haiti are vivid examples of this. In the case of the hostage crisis in Iran, some unique difficulties arose from the very nature of the confrontation, since it was one which involved a state and society absorbed in an internal power struggle, inspired by a revolutionary fervour, guided mainly by a non-Western system of values, and contemptuous of the norms of international law. This confrontation also involved difficulties that arose from the nature of the tactics being used, since both state and non-state actors used or sanctioned the use of unconventional methods, including terrorist tactics and manipulation of the Western media, to try to put pressure on the US political system. Finally, it involved a fundamental choice for decision makers about means, since it forced them to decide whether political and economic sanctions or the use of military force would best achieve the objectives they sought. Similar choices have confronted subsequent administrations in the years since the Iranian hostage crisis and will no doubt continue to confront them in the future.¹² The hostage rescue decision is relevant in helping us to understand some of the realities that limit the menu for choice and some of the uncertainties involved in making choices of this nature.

Related to this, the case of the rescue attempt also highlights the profound and painful dilemmas that presidents have to face when they are forced to confront the choice between values in conflict with each other. During the hostage crisis, in a very practical way, the senior national security decision makers in the Carter administration were forced to confront what they saw as a trade-off between the risks to the lives of the hostages and the longer-term national interests of the United States.¹¹ Many of those involved in the decision-making process, including the president, agonized daily over the moral as well as tough political issues at stake. The administration was forced to make many difficult decisions during the 444-day ordeal, but what was so significant about the hostage rescue one is that it was an attempt to find a way out of the dilemma that was quick, complete and satisfying. How realistic and justified this decision was is, of course, an important question that will be addressed in this study. The point here is that, as Sick argues very eloquently in his account of the rescue decision (1985: 302), it is "the lessons to be

derived from such stark choices that draw the historian, the policy maker and the scholar back again and again." An accurate analysis is essential both to improve our understanding of cases in which values clash and to achieve more effective policies, decisions and outcomes when these clashes do occur.

Finally, it is important to consider the rescue decision and operation because it turned out to be such an important moment for the Carter administration. Indeed, since it had an enormous political impact, it was, in many ways, a defining moment for this administration. The immediate result was that Carter's secretary of state, Cyrus Vance, resigned over the decision, becoming the first secretary of state to resign over a policy difference with a president since William Jennings Bryan during the first Wilson administration in 1915 (Kegley and Wittkopf, 1987: 354; Dumbrell, 1993: 172).¹⁴ In the longer term, despite some patriotic support for the president's decision in the immediate aftermath of the failed attempt, the image of failure, displayed frequently and prominently in the media over the following months, contributed to the growing dissatisfaction with the administration's inability to find a solution to the hostage crisis, and thus to an erosion of Carter's chances for reelection later that year.¹⁵

At a time when serious scholarly assessment of the Carter presidency is just beginning (Reichard, 1990; Kaufman, 1993: 1-4; Dumbrell, 1993: 8-17),¹⁶ a close look at this critical moment, when the president turned completely against the advice of his secretary of state on a foreign policy issue of such great importance to the country and to his presidency, has obvious relevance for the emerging debates on the Carter administration's foreign policy. Indeed, understanding this particular moment is crucial to the development of a fuller understanding of the tensions and contradictions in the substance and process of Carter's foreign policy. Even on this basis alone, it is an important case to study.

Previous Attempts to Answer These Questions

There have, of course, been many attempts over the past 15 years to answer the two fundamental questions addressed in this study: why the decision was taken to launch the rescue attempt and why the operation itself failed. To date, once one sets aside the apologetic accounts of those involved in the decision-making process, answers to the first question, why the decision was taken, have tended to begin with the

assumption that, given the total and ignominious failure of the rescue operation, the rescue plan must have been so flawed that it was predestined to fail and to conclude with a highly critical assessment of Carter's decision. The general thrust of this work is thus to explore reasons why the president could have taken such a poor decision; to examine why, in other words, he did not realize that the rescue plan was doomed to fail. Answers to the second question, why the operation failed, on the other hand, have tended to begin with the assumption that the military, not the president, was to blame for the failure of the rescue operation and to conclude with criticisms of the military's performance in specific areas such as the number of helicopters involved, the complexity of the plan or the way the Joint Task Force prepared for the mission. The general thrust of this work is to explore reasons why the military could have performed so poorly; to examine why, in other words, senior military leaders could have recommended such an ill-conceived mission and why the military units who participated in the mission could have performed so poorly once it was launched. Neither of these two thrusts effectively integrates the entire story by exposing all of the links between the political and military decision-making processes. Rather, they have tended to produce two separate debates: one at the level of political decision making, where some of these links are examined, and one at the level of military-operational decision making, where these links are almost entirely ignored.

The question of why the decision was taken has, of course, been addressed by the participants in the decision-making process and their supporting cast. Their accounts, however, tend to be highly parochial and cannot automatically be taken at face value since many of these individuals have a vested interest in portraying history in a certain way. One has to be very careful, in other words, about how much of this ex post facto "oral history" to "swallow" (Kramer, 1990: 212-216). Nevertheless, these first-hand accounts do provide us with a great deal of valuable information about the decision-making process, particularly about the details of the thinking of the key decision makers as they considered the rescue option.

These first-hand accounts of the decision make a number of different arguments in order to reach a variety of conclusions. Some of them have tried to present the decision as a rational and logical one in the circumstances. Brzezinski, for example, argues that not to have tried a rescue operation would have been "shameful and unworthy of America"

(Brzezinski, 1983: 500) while Sick concludes that the rescue operation "was a failure of military execution, not of political judgment or command" (Sick, 1985: 300). Others, while sympathetic to the president's decision, seem to be far less sure about the ultimate wisdom of it. They see it, at best, as the most attractive of "a lousy set of options" (Jordan, 1982: 249). Still others are openly critical of the decision. Vance was convinced all along that "the decision was wrong" because it carried great risks for both the hostages and the US national interest (Vance, 1983: 410) and Turner who, unlike Vance, supported the rescue decision at the time, has recently concluded that Vance "may have been more right than the rest of us in how to approach this problem" (Turner, 1991: 133).¹⁷

The accounts of those who were not part of the Carter administration tend to be much harsher, generally beginning with an assumption, either explicitly or implicitly, that the decision to launch the operation was the wrong one. These accounts thus focus on trying to explain why the president could have taken such a poor decision. A broad spectrum of explanations and partial explanations have been advanced over the years. A common theme that runs through most of them is that the president and his inner circle of advisers did not fully understand either the basic situation or the risks involved with the rescue option.

Some of these accounts focus directly on the president. Thus, for example, Glad argues that Carter himself allowed "non-rational variables" to constrain his choices throughout the Iranian hostage crisis. For Glad, the rescue decision can be explained by Carter's partisan political interests, decision-making style and personality. Eventually, she argues, Carter's inflation of the hostage issue gave the clerics in Iran a hold over the United States and made at least some sort of military action politically necessary once the negotiations had failed. At the same time, the process he had set up for planning a rescue operation virtually guaranteed the risks would not be fully examined (Glad, 1989: 58).

Other accounts focus more generally on the inner circle of decision makers. Again, however, the general thrust of these accounts is to argue that the decision was a poorly-informed one. Thus, for example, Cogan argues that the Carter administration was not able to penetrate and understand "la nebuleuse" that masked the way in which the revolutionary Iranian state, led very purposively by an astute Ayatollah Khomeini, manipulated the United States to promote its own agenda. Having never really understood the nature of the situation in the first place, he

argues, the administration became confused and reactive, and essentially followed Khomeini's scenario. In this context, once the negotiations broke down, neither continued patience nor the use of conventional military action was seen to be politically acceptable, and the rescue attempt therefore stood out to almost all of Carter's senior advisors as the best option under the circumstances (Cogan, 1990).¹⁸

Some of the accounts that focus on Carter's inner circle conclude that process problems, mainly attributable to the role played by National Security Adviser Brzezinski, were largely responsible for the ill-advised decision. David, for example, argues that one of the main causes of the failure was that the operation was planned by a small group led by Brzezinski. The problem, he argues, is that this group developed a conformist atmosphere in which no dissension was tolerated and those who had doubts were quickly excluded. The result was not only an operation which was based on a weak concept, but poor coordination and a number of serious inadequacies and oversights. The implication of David's critique is that the president was not only poorly served by the process but, ultimately, by the advice he received. The problem, in other words, was that the process supervised by Brzezinski, which culminated in his recommendation to launch the rescue mission, was fatally flawed (David, 1994: 332).

Most accounts suggest that domestic political considerations related to Carter's bid for reelection had an important, perhaps even decisive, influence on the rescue decision. Since no evidence of this political influence on the president is contained in the memoirs of the participants, these accounts stress that the context in which the decision took place was an election year one in which the president's popularity had plunged and he was embroiled in a bitter fight with Senator Kennedy for the Democratic Party nomination. Despite explicit statements by many of these participants, including Carter, that reelection prospects were never part of the decision-making calculus, most independent accounts, at some point in the analysis, make the point that, in Cogan's words, "the president, after literally months of tergiversations, plunged ahead, precipitously, through the last window of opportunity that remained open before the upcoming election" (Cogan, 1990: 427).¹⁹ Some analysts even try to explain the decision exclusively on the basis of domestic politics (Gartner, 1993).²⁰

By far, the best scholarly account of the decision to date is that of Vandenbroucke who explains the decision in terms of several factors:

the "anger, frustration and humiliation" inherent in the situation; the breakdown of the negotiations; the growing concern in the White House about the safety of the hostages; "wishful thinking" on the part of the president and his senior advisers that coloured their judgment; and mounting political pressure on the president to "do something" to end the crisis in the context of sliding popularity in an election year (1993: 141-143). Unfortunately, his analysis of the decision is far too brief and ignores many other factors, particularly those related to the process dynamics and to president's decision-making style.

Some more theoretically-oriented work has also been done on the rescue decision. Smith, for example, has used the rescue decision to evaluate the performance of the bureaucratic politics model, but his research does not add much to our understanding of the rescue mission (Smith, 1984-85). While he does argue that the bureaucratic politics model does better than the rational actor model in helping us to understand certain aspects of the rescue decision, even he is so dissatisfied with the result of his effort that his subsequent work leads him into new theoretical explorations of the same case (Smith, 1985 and Hollis and Smith, 1986 and 1990). In an attempt to apply another conceptual model to the rescue attempt, Janis, Smith, Glad and Waugh have all made forceful arguments that "groupthink" had a significant impact on the decision-making process, especially in terms of excluding critics and leading to overly optimistic assessments of the risks involved with the rescue plan (Janis, 1980; Smith, 1984; Glad, 1989; Waugh, 1990).²¹ Unfortunately, they draw on an extremely narrow range of sources for empirical information and so their research does not push to anywhere near the limits of the available data on the case.²² The detailed case they make therefore needs to be critically reevaluated in light of the new evidence available. That said, they do raise an issue which is highly relevant to this study and therefore must be directly addressed: whether the "groupthink" dynamic was present in the decision-making process and, if so, the extent to which this influenced the decision and the outcome.

Some of those involved in the planning and implementation of the rescue operation have tried to answer the second question: why, once the decision was taken, did the rescue operation fail? The best of these accounts, by far, is by Kyle (1990), who was personally involved in the development of the rescue option from the outset and was the on-scene commander at Desert One.²³ Another account by Beckwith (1983), the commander of the special unit, Delta Force, that was assigned to assault

the embassy in Tehran as part of the operation, is an important source of information, although it focuses more parochially on the development of the actual assault plan rather than on the broader effort to put the entire rescue option together. It was also written much earlier, when there was greater sensitivity regarding certain aspects of the operation. Both of these accounts limit their focus to a discussion of the military planning and execution and both are extremely critical of many aspects, especially the lack of integrated training and the poor performance of the helicopter pilots. They do not address issues about how the rescue planning effort was influenced by decision making at the political level.

Two important studies that also look at the rescue attempt from a purely military-operational point of view do so in a somewhat more systematic way. The report of the Holloway Group (1980), the official group tasked to do a post-mortem on the rescue mission for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, attempts to explain what went wrong in military terms by looking at a broad spectrum of issues ranging from the organization, command and control and training for the mission, to the tactical decisions that were made during the actual operation.²⁴ Similarly, with less access to information but with the objective eye of an outsider, Ryan does essentially the same thing, concluding that "the facts suggest that the operation exposed serious deficiencies in the military decision-making system that may require substantial changes" (Ryan, 1985: xi). Both of these accounts focus on defining ways in which the planning, organization, coordination, direction and control of operations of this type could be improved. Neither of them probe the way in which political and military factors combined and interacted in the decision-making process, ultimately affecting both the shape of the rescue option and its chances of success. Indeed, in the case of the Holloway Group, its specific mandate was to look at the rescue operation from a professional military point of view and not from a national decision-making one (Ryan, 1985: 107-109, JCLD 51, NSAD 102).²⁵

In addition to these accounts, there now exists a prodigious volume of literature that, in one way or another, attempts to analyze various aspects of the rescue operation. The trouble with much of this literature is that it is shallow or so full of errors about how the rescue operation was planned, organized and conducted that many of the conclusions drawn often do not hold up even to a first-glance analysis. Most of these attempts to explain the failure of the mission take place in the context of critical appraisals of military performance such as those of Gabriel

(1985) and Hadley (1986), or in the context of an evaluation of counterterrorist capabilities and strategies such as those of Rivers (1986), Martin and Walcott (1988) and Antokol and Nadell (1990). These are, of course, issues of vital importance to students of US foreign policy, but the quality of most of this work suffers because many of the facts related to the rescue attempt are not clearly understood. Unfortunately, one of the most widely-cited of these accounts is one written by Gabriel (1985) which, as Kyle correctly points out based on his own intimate involvement in the planning and execution of the rescue mission, is so full of factual errors that it gets almost nothing right (Kyle, 1990: 71). In light of the information now available, it is clear that most of the early accounts of the rescue attempt have so many errors in them that they should be used only if the information in them is confirmed in other ways.²⁶

The specific reasons given for the failure of the operation in the vast literature on American foreign policy which, however briefly, deals with the rescue attempt are now extremely diverse, focusing on virtually the entire spectrum of the JTF's activities during the planning and preparation stage and on its actual performance on the night of the operation. Some typical themes that run through these explanations are that the training program was inadequate and that the planners underestimated the risks, imposed excessive secrecy on the decision-making process, allowed interservice rivalries to shape the rescue force and, in Dumbrell's words, possessed "a naive faith in technology" (Dumbrell, 1993: 172). With respect to the actual operation, some common themes are that command and control was not exercised properly and that some decisions, particularly the fateful one not to go on with less than the planned number of helicopters, were made without all of the facts. Some of these accounts also suggest that political leaders in Washington allowed what Waugh calls "the tendency to micromanage" to take over during the operation, resulting in political interference (Waugh, 1990: 34 and 38).

Although it too contains a number of errors and oversights, Vandenbroucke's recent account of the rescue operation marks a significant improvement in the quality of analysis, mostly because it is the first major scholarly work that draws on both Turner (1991) and Kyle (1990). As he does in the case of the decision, he attributes the failure to a number of factors, most of which he describes as the "accumulated mistakes" of the planners, including assigning too few helicopters to the mission, providing inadequate guidance on potential mechanical problems to the

helicopter pilots and not planning adequately for contingencies. He also argues that a poor performance by the intelligence community and interagency and interservice cooperation problems weakened the rescue attempt. Unfortunately, his analysis is again far too short and contains some significant inaccuracies and misinterpretations on issues ranging from the membership on Brzezinski's small planning group to some of the specific responsibilities and technical capabilities of the Joint Task Force during the actual operation (Vandenbroucke, 1993: 114-151).²⁷

In short, efforts to date have essentially produced two types of analyses with very different purposes. One type focuses on trying to explain the rescue decision at the political level and the other focuses on trying to explain the failure of the operation at the military-operational level. Given the total and ignominious nature of the failure at Desert One, when one sets aside the apologetic accounts of those who were involved in the decision-making process, most attempts to explain the rescue decision at the political level consider the failure of the mission to have been somehow inevitable and the decision therefore to have been a mistake. From this point of departure, these accounts advance reasons as to why the president could have made such a bad decision. On the other hand, given that the senior military decision makers recommended the rescue attempt and it went so badly, most attempts to explain the failure at the military-operational level, including those of the main participants, assume the failure was entirely the responsibility of the US military. Without challenging the wisdom of the president's decision, these accounts advance specific operational reasons for the failure.

Certainly, at least when taken together, these accounts tell us a great deal about the rescue decision and operation. However, when one considers this entire body of literature in the context of the new evidence available, a significant lacuna is apparent. Nowhere in the vast literature on the subject are all of the links between the political and military-operational decision-making processes fully defined and examined. Nowhere, in other words, are all of the ways in which decision making at the political and military-operational levels interacted and combined at various points in the November-April period given the kind of rigorous examination that this case deserves. The result is that, while the ways in which decision making at the political level was influenced by decision making at military-operational level have been given some attention over the past fifteen years, the ways in which decision making at the military-

operational level was, in turn, influenced by decision making at the political level has been left almost entirely unexplored.²⁸

This study is an effort to address directly this significant shortcoming. As will be explained in the following chapter, using a conceptual approach which draws heavily on the work of Roger Hilsman, this study will rigorously examine the entire decision-making process from top to bottom as the rescue option was developed, debated and chosen. Then, based on this analysis, it will develop comprehensive political process explanations for both the decision and the outcome which bring into sharp focus the ways in which the political and military-operational decision-making processes touched and influenced each other throughout the November-April period. By the time that these explanations are developed in Chapter 7, not only will these links be exposed, they will play a vitally important part in the explanations themselves, particularly in the explanation for the failure of the operation.

Clearly then, there is significant room to improve on previous accounts of the hostage rescue attempt. First, most existing accounts are based on inadequate and inaccurate information. This study will attempt to overcome this problem by drawing on the broadest possible spectrum of sources, including personal interviews with many of the senior decision makers who were involved in the rescue planning, decision and operation and original documents from the National Security Archive and Carter Library as well as published sources. Second, existing accounts do not take into account all of the top to bottom and bottom to top dynamics that occurred within the decision-making process. This study will address this deficiency by applying Hilsman's political process model to the total decision making environment. Indeed, the main thrust of this study will be to examine the nexus between decision making at the political and military-operational levels, to examine, in other words, how decision making at each of these two levels touched and influenced decision making at the other and the impact of this on both the decision and outcome.

Outline of the Study

In the next chapter, the conceptual approach that will be taken in this study, one based on Hilsman's political process model, will be outlined and examined. Following some general comments about the role of models in political science, the broader political process approach, which has emerged as one of two major trajectories within the decision-making tradition of foreign policy analysis, will be reviewed. In order to place

Hilsman's model in proper perspective, its relationship to this broader body of literature will be explained. The essential elements of Hilsman's model and the reasons why it was selected and adapted for this study will then be presented. Finally, some key limitations of the model will be discussed and the general architecture of the political process explanation to be used in the following chapters will be outlined.

Chapter 3 will examine the substantive political context, both domestic and international, in which the rescue decision took place. It will be the initial foundation upon which the subsequent analysis is built, setting the background to the decision-making process as accurately as possible at the intersection of the evolving international and domestic political settings. This chapter will highlight the major political difficulties and constraints that the Carter administration faced as it considered its options during the hostage crisis in Iran. It will also identify some key factors, related to the president's philosophy about his role, personal style of leadership and approach to political process, that had already shaped the political context and would continue to do so during the hostage crisis.

In order to complete the task of setting the stage for the analysis in subsequent chapters, Chapter 4 will examine the US-Iran policy context. It will discuss the three distinct phases in the Carter administration's relationship with Iran in terms of the dynamics of the US-Iran relationship, the administration's basic approach to the regimes in power and the degree of focus of senior decision makers, including the president. This chapter will also describe the seizure of the embassy and the administration's initial reaction to it.

Chapters 5 and 6 will take an in-depth look at decision making that took place at both the political and military-operational levels throughout the period between the seizure of the embassy and the rescue attempt. Chapter 5 will examine events from the seizure of the embassy on 4 November 1979 until the final decision-making process began with a key briefing to the National Security Council at Camp David on 22 March 1980. It will show how the diplomatic strategy and military planning proceeded simultaneously throughout this period, with the president intimately involved in the negotiating efforts and Brzezinski riding shotgun on the military planning efforts which, by mid-March, had produced a rescue option which he and other senior advisers believed had a reasonable chance of success. Chapter 6 will examine events from the 22 March meeting, at which the rescue option was placed firmly on the president's agenda, to

the failure of the mission on the night of 24-25 April. It will highlight the way in which the rescue decision crystallized in the president's mind, the final decision-making process unfolded and the operation was executed. Taken together, these chapters will highlight the way in which political and military-operational decision making moved both separately and together during this period, eventually culminating in the decision and the outcome.

Drawing on the analysis presented in previous chapters, Chapter 7 will directly address the two key questions posed at the beginning of the study: why the decision was taken to launch the rescue attempt and why the rescue operation failed. This chapter will identify and assess the key factors which influenced both the decision and the outcome and, by doing this, it will develop comprehensive political process explanations for both the decision and the outcome. This chapter will highlight the way in which decision making at the political and military-operational levels interacted and combined to produce the decision to launch the rescue mission and, equally importantly, the final shape of the operation and its prospects for success. The analysis will be pushed to the limits of both the model and the available information in order to provide the fullest possible explanations. The chapter will conclude with some critical comments on the limitations of these political process explanations as well as on the contribution they make to our understanding of the rescue attempt.

The concluding chapter of the study, Chapter 8, will use the evidence presented in earlier chapters to address some key issues which have emerged in the recent debates about the Carter administration's rightful place in history. To set the stage for this discussion, the chapter will begin by taking a brief look at the last nine months of the administration, including the immediate effects of the failed rescue attempt, the electoral defeat of the administration and the subsequent return of the hostages. It will then draw upon and extend some major themes that emerge from this study of the rescue decision and operation to argue that the Carter administration was divided and weak during what proved to be a crucial moment in its history, perhaps even a defining one, and to challenge the more sympathetic, revisionist approach that scholars and other analysts have recently tended to take when looking at the Carter years. It will argue, in other words, that an in-depth analysis of Operation Eagle Claw does not lend support to the case for a revisionist assessment of the Carter administration.

ENDNOTES - CHAPTER ONE

1. A precise delineation between the political and military-operational levels of decision making will be provided in the next chapter when the political process model is presented.
2. There are many discrepancies and omissions in these accounts. For example, the accounts of Jordan and Powell about the timing of the final decision conflict with that of Brzezinski and none of them explains how the decision to stage through Oman was taken in early April (Jordan, 1982: 249-277; Powell, 1984: 223-232; Brzezinski, 1983: 489-496).
3. Beckwith was the original Commander of Delta Force. Delta achieved operational readiness on 3 November 1979, the day before the embassy was seized in Tehran. From that point on, Beckwith was a key figure in the development of the assault plan, but he was based in Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and only occasionally invited to Washington for consultations. His account therefore has little to say about the dynamics in Washington which were so important in shaping the development of the broader rescue plan and, ultimately, in determining its chances of success (Beckwith, 1983).
4. As Principal White House Aide for Iranian Affairs, Gary Sick was the member of the NSC staff responsible for Iran throughout the hostage ordeal. As a Professor of Middle East studies at Columbia University, he has subsequently researched and written extensively on US-Iran relations during this period (Sick, 1983, 1985, 1985a, 1988, and 1991). His account of the hostage crisis, including his account of the way the administration considered the military options, is well known and widely cited (1985). He was not, however, directly involved in the planning or execution of the rescue operation.
5. A typical example is Gabriel's widely-cited account of the rescue mission which relies almost exclusively on newsmagazine coverage for its source material. Indeed, for virtually all of his information in his most recent account (1985), Gabriel draws upon two articles in *Time* that were written in the immediate aftermath of the failed operation and three editions of *Aviation Week and Space Technology* which published the unclassified version of the Department of Defense's official inquiry into the rescue mission which was made public in late 1980.
6. At the political level, Turner's recent book provides important new information about the decision-making process (Turner, 1991). At the operational level, Kyle's recent book goes far beyond all other attempts to explain the development of the rescue option and allows scholars to start to seriously investigate, for the first time from published sources, the ways in which the military and political decision-making processes interacted with each other (Kyle, 1990).
7. This documentation on the planning and conduct of the rescue mission, which was obtained by the National Security Archive in Washington, D.C., can now be used to corroborate and supplement Kyle's account. Following court proceedings that took place over the previous several years, the last of this information was released to the National Security Archive in November 1992. During research done at the Archive for this paper, in 1991, the author brought Kyle's book to the attention of Sheryl Walter, General Counsel to the Archive, shortly after it was published. She used it as evidence shortly thereafter in proceedings in the United States District Court for the District of Columbia to obtain more complete documentation from the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the rescue planning and operation under the Freedom of Information Act.
8. In terms of foreign policy practice, as Schneider points out in his introduction to Deece's recent book entitled The New Politics of American Foreign Policy (Deece, 1994: ix-xvii), US military interventions now tend to be considered through two alternative prisms: the "Vietnam syndrome" in which they are seen as potential quagmires ("don't go in - it will be another Vietnam") and the "Persian Gulf syndrome" in which they are seen in terms of the use of overwhelming

force ("win quickly and get out"). Given the diversity of situations in which decisions about the use of military force have to be made, these sorts of prisms are an obstacle to clear and full analysis.

9. The contribution of this study will therefore be to the data base on decisions to use force. It is, of course, important to improve the data base on decisions taken not to use force as well, such as the decision of the Clinton administration not to use force in Bosnia. As Haass has recently pointed out, referring to the situations in Somalia and Bosnia, "it matters not whether Americans choose to intervene or stay aloof; the debate can be equally heated" (1994: 21). Development of both data bases is important to developing an understanding of both types of decisions through comparative analysis. One might use comparative analysis, for example, to ask why President Johnson opted for a negotiating strategy when the Pueblo was seized, while Ford opted for a military one when the Mayaguez was seized. While the results of this study might make a useful contribution to future comparative studies of this nature, this study is not itself comparative. Rather, it seeks an in-depth understanding of a single decision and outcome. Another related area of inquiry, which Meernik has recently addressed, is the employment of US military forces to achieve political objectives in cases which do not involve hostilities (Meernik, 1993).

10. It has sometimes been observed that Carter was the first president since Hoover not to lose the lives of American soldiers in combat and, in the final comment in his memoirs, Carter makes it clear that not losing lives in combat is an aspect of his presidency that he will always cherish (Carter, 1982: 596). However, this outcome was clearly more the result of circumstances than it was a break in historical continuity. Carter did commit US soldiers to combat when he decided to launch the rescue mission. Had this mission continued to the point where these soldiers had reached Tehran, combat operations would have been conducted that, even by the most optimistic estimates, would have involved some American as well as many Iranian casualties. The rescue decision was therefore very clearly one to engage US military forces in combat to achieve an outcome, freedom of the hostages, that the Carter administration had failed to achieve through diplomacy and economic pressure. Also, like other post-World War II presidents, Carter engaged in "gunboat diplomacy" on several occasions and was the author of the Carter Doctrine which, in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, committed the US to the use of military power in the Persian Gulf region to maintain the free flow of petroleum, if that flow were threatened by an outside power (Kegley and Wittkopf, 1987: 114-118 and 586).

11. Several serious attempts have been made to assess the various implications of the outcome of the raid (for example, Iran: Consequences of the Abortive Attempt to Rescue the American Hostages). In the final analysis, about the only positive thing that could be said about the outcome is that it did facilitate an eventual reorganization of the various special forces capabilities of the US military into a single operational command structure, Special Forces Command. Other arguments have been made over the years, such as Kissinger's argument that even the failed rescue attempt helped to demonstrate the resolve of the US (Sidey, 1980: 25) and the argument advanced by several analysts that the whole effort helped to relieve pressures for military action (Moses, 1989: 432-434), but these were really just attempts to put a positive face on the failure. The consequences, in other words, were overwhelmingly negative.

12. A dramatic recent example is, of course, the confrontation with Iraq that began with the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. An interesting parallel between that crisis and the Iranian hostage crisis of a decade earlier is that Bush, in about the same length of time as Carter, became frustrated enough with the efforts to achieve the desired result by non-military means to opt for a quicker solution through direct military action.

13. Sick characterizes this dilemma as one between the protection of innocent lives and the preservation of national honour (Sick, 1985: 302), Brzezinski as one between lives and national interest (Brzezinski, 1983: 470-509) and Carter as one between the safety of the hostages and national honour (Carter, 1983: 459-522). The dilemmas posed for Carter were, of course, not new. Indeed, the "hostage-taking habit" goes all the way back to George Washington and has continued since Carter left office. Some of the better known incidents over the years where American hostages have been held abroad include the capture of the Philadelphia crew in Tripoli in 1803 (President Jefferson eventually sent an expeditionary force to rescue them after two years of captivity), the seizure of the Pueblo crew by the North Koreans in 1968 (President Johnson bargained for their release), and the seizure of the Mayaguez in 1975 by the Cambodians (the crew was released shortly after a costly rescue attempt ordered by President Ford failed to locate the hostages). Although the Reagan and Bush administrations had to deal with the hostage problems in Lebanon, the more dramatic examples of having to face the lives versus national interest dilemma during the Reagan-Bush years were the hijacking of TWA Flight 847 to Beirut in 1985 and the holding of American (and other Western) hostages in Iraq as a "human shield" in late 1990. Turner gives an excellent summary of the US experience with hostage taking through the Reagan administration (Turner, 1991).

14. In his letter of resignation, which is now on display at the Carter Library in Atlanta, Vance cites the rescue decision as the sole grounds for his resignation and he continues to argue that it was based exclusively on this single substantive issue. For example, during an interview conducted for this study, when the author suggested that several analysts have argued that his resignation resulted from a combination of things, he was emphatic in stating once again for the record that the rescue issue "stood on its own" (Vance interview). Others who were close to Vance at the time see it differently. David Newsom, for example, who as Undersecretary of State was the third ranking individual in the Department of State at the time, argues that Vance's resignation resulted from a number of frustrations which the rescue decision simply brought to a crisis (Newsom interview). Given the well-established personal integrity of Vance, there is little reason to doubt that he felt strongly about this particular decision and that, at the very least, it was the focus of his frustrations and provided a substantive as well as timely reason for his resignation. That said, it is important to understand the broader context in which the decision took place, one in which Vance had become more and more alienated from the direction that policy was taking and less and less effectively engaged in the process. This context will be fully explored in the following chapters.

15. Many analysts have emphasized Carter's handling of the hostage crisis as a key element in his downfall (Reichard, 1990: 614). Brzezinski's analysis of the 1980 election, which he proudly claims Richard Nixon endorsed, is probably a more accurate and balanced one. In Brzezinski's view, Carter's defeat can be attributed to a combination of three factors: the sense of national frustration over the hostage crisis and the perception that Carter was indecisive in his handling of it; the damage done to the unity and finances of the Democratic Party by the challenge of Senator Kennedy; and the extremely high rate of inflation that undermined confidence in administration's economic policies (Brzezinski, 1983: 506). Powell, who was one of Carter's key political advisers during this whole period, believes that economic factors were far more important than the hostage situation and that there would not have been a serious Kennedy challenge were it not for the poor state of the economy (Powell interview).

16. Reichard gives an excellent overview of this literature to date and of the major themes and issues that are now being debated (Reichard, 1990). Kaufman's recent bibliographic essay is an excellent starting point for those who wish to review the prodigious volume of literature on the Carter administration that now exists (Kaufman, 1993: 229-238).

17. Turner also believes that had it not been for "the failure at the top" of the Joint Task Force responsible for the rescue operation on the night of 24-25 April, the operation still could have succeeded (Turner, 1991: 132-145; Turner interview).

18. As Cogan points out, the term "la nebulouse" comes from Raufer's work on terrorism in the Middle East. As used here, the term applies, to the deliberate attempt on the part of some Iranians to set up "une nebulouse," or screen, between those who occupied the embassy in Tehran and Ayatollah Khomeini. Cogan argues that this tactic was consistent with a timeless Iranian tradition to use "an extraordinary battery of techniques of mental restriction, of dissimulation, of oblique maneuvers" when confronted with a powerful enemy. These techniques are intended as both "an instruction for prudence in the face of dangers and a method for not revealing esoteric secrets" (interpreted and translated from Raufer, 1987: 136-137 by Cogan, 1990: 417-418 and 429-430).

19. Carter himself asserted that "the political connotations of the holding of our hostages is not a factor for me" (Cogan, 1990: 427). Brzezinski observes that "neither the president nor his political advisers ever discussed with me the question of whether one or another of our Iranian options would have a better or a worse domestic political effect" (Brzezinski, 1983: 490) and Sick argues that "it was not political reasons but the long wait [before the hostages could be brought home by any other means] which was intolerable - due to U.S. national interests" (Cogan, 1990: 427). Although the clear thrust of Vance's published account of the rescue decision is critical of the president and others involved in the decision-making process, he does this by laying out the substantive reasons for his opposition to the rescue decision and avoids direct criticism of the motivations of others (Vance, 1983: 398-413). This was also the approach he took during the interview conducted for this study, despite an attempt by the author to get him to comment on the impact of the election campaign on the thinking of others involved in the process (Vance interview). During a similar interview, Powell reacted very strongly to questions about this, stating forcefully: "I don't think that the fact that it was an election year had any role at all in either the decision to attempt the rescue mission or the timing of it" (Powell interview).

20. Gartner's proposes a model which he claims "accurately predicts the timing of Carter's decision to launch the hostage rescue." The key trigger for the decision, he argues, was that Carter's key political advisers, Vice President Mondale, Chief of Staff Jordan and White House Press Secretary Powell, who were motivated purely by the need to improve the president's political standing, became proponents of the rescue mission (1993: 365-386). This study will challenge Gartner's simple conclusion; indeed, it will show that such facile, monocausal explanations do little to advance our understanding of the rescue attempt.

21. In looking at the hostage rescue attempt, Smith conveniently collapses consideration of Janis's eight symptoms of groupthink into two essential questions (1984: 118): "to what extent did the decision-making group fail fully to evaluate the risks of the operation?" and "did the group tend towards unanimity and the exclusion of any deviants?" While it is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a detailed critique of the various arguments advanced in the theoretically-oriented work mentioned here (Janis, 1980; Smith, 1984; Glad, 1989; Waugh, 1990), these two questions and thus the extent to which groupthink played a role in the decision-making process will be addressed in Chapter 7.

22. Obviously, one of the main reasons why these arguments have not been pushed to the limits of the available data is that much of the evidence that will be used in this study was not available at the time that these theoretically-oriented examinations of the rescue decision took place. Also, since they are all short studies (journal article length) and their main focus is theoretical, they do not critically assess even the limited amount of empirical evidence they use.

23. In the narrow military discussion about what went wrong with the operation, Kyle's recent contribution is an extremely important one. His book is balanced and credible and much of it can now be corroborated with documentation held by the National Security Archive in Washington. During an interview with Kyle for this study, he was highly objective and, at least on the surface, motivated by a simple desire to set the record straight (Kyle interview). Significantly, he has managed to maintain the respect of those who have taken sides in some of the narrow and rather bitter military debates over specific issues. Turner and Beckwith, for example, while highly critical of each other's views on whether more consideration should have been given to going on from Desert One with less than six helicopters, are both unqualified in their respect for Kyle and the role he played at Desert One (Turner and Beckwith interviews).

24. The Holloway Group, officially called the Special Operations Review Group, released its report, entitled Rescue Mission Report, in August 1980. The group was chaired by James L. Holloway III who was Chief of Naval Operations when he retired in 1978. In addition to Holloway, the review group consisted of five other senior officers with relevant experience, three retired and two in active service (Ryan, 1985: 109-110). An unclassified version of the "Holloway Report" was released in 1980. A version that releases most of the information previously withheld was obtained by the National Security Archive in 1992.

25. For ease of reference in both the text and the endnotes, original documents from the Jimmy Carter Library in Atlanta and the National Security Archive in Washington have been numbered sequentially in the bibliography as Jimmy Carter Library Documents (JCLDs) and National Security Archive Documents (NSADs).

26. Some of these sources are, of course, better than others. Although their account is extremely limited in the analytical sense, Martin and Walcott (1988), for example, put together a far more accurate account of the rescue operation than Gabriel (1980-81 and 1985). Unfortunately, scholars like Smith, who draw on these kinds of sources for information about the hostage rescue mission to make their theoretical points, are not very discriminating in their use of sources. In his work on foreign policy implementation (1985), for example, Smith draws heavily on early accounts by Gabriel (1981), McFadden et al. (1981), and Martin (1982) for a great deal of his information, all of which contain serious factual errors and misjudgments.

27. The reason that Vandenbroucke's analysis is so short is that it looks at four different operations in his book: the Bay of Pigs invasion of 1961, the raid on the Sontay prisoner of war camp near Hanoi in 1970, the Mayaguez incident in 1975, and the hostage rescue attempt of 1980. He draws on his analysis these four "perilous operations" to attribute the poor performance of the US in special operations to "faulty intelligence, poor interagency and interservice cooperation and coordination, provision of inadequate advice to decision makers, wishful thinking, and overcontrol of mission execution by officials far removed from the theatre of operations" (1993: 152-169).

28. The one obvious exception is the case of accounts, such as Waugh's, which suggest that there was political interference during the actual operation (Waugh, 1990: 34 and 38). However, as will be pointed out in Chapter 7, there is simply no basis for this line of argumentation in light of the evidence now available, including tapes of most of the interaction between the White House and the Department of Defense on the night of 24-25 April.

CHAPTER TWO: THE POLITICAL PROCESS MODEL

If it is important to study the hostage rescue decision and operation for the reasons outlined in Chapter 1, it is equally important to choose an effective way to do so. It is essential, in other words, to select an analytical framework which will facilitate an appropriate and consistent focus on the available data and help us answer the two key questions posed at the outset of this study: why the Carter administration took the decision to launch the rescue attempt and why the operation itself failed. Given the present state of theoretical diversity in the study of American foreign policy, there is certainly no shortage of frameworks to choose from. At the same time, at least since Allison's pathbreaking volume on conceptual models and the Cuban Missile Crisis (Allison, 1971), it has been clear to students of American foreign policy that their choice of theoretical framework is important since, to use Allison's graphic metaphor, these "both fix the mesh of the nets which the analyst drags through the material in order to explain a particular action or decision, and direct him to cast his nets in select ponds, at certain depths, in order to catch the fish he is after" (1971: 4).

In choosing an analytical framework to apply to the case of the hostage rescue attempt, it is essential to take into account the type of information that can be obtained as well as the type of puzzles that must be solved. One of the fundamental realities confronting scholars who wish to study presidential decisions to use military force, particularly fairly recent ones, is that much of the information that can be obtained about the decision-making process is incomplete, inaccurate or even, at least on occasion, totally misleading.¹ This data availability problem acts as a constraint on the early application of certain types of frameworks to the study of events such as Carter's decision to launch the rescue attempt and the failure of the subsequent military operation. In terms of Allison's metaphor, there is not much point in selecting a pond, a mesh and a depth for a type of fish that will not be swimming at the time that one is going to do the fishing. The task for scholars interested in studying fairly recent decisions and outcomes is to get these fish swimming as early as possible and to select appropriate ponds, meshes and depths as soon as they do. The challenge here, in other words, will be to select an appropriate analytical framework to apply to the hostage rescue attempt and then to push to the limits of the available evidence in order to fill

in the gaps and remove as many puzzles, inconsistencies and contradictions as possible.

A fundamental point of departure for this study is the assumption that our understanding of American foreign policy decisions and outcomes can be improved over time. As the accumulated body of information about a particular event grows, analysis with frameworks previously used can be refined and additional frameworks applied.² The quality of the explanations is not automatically improved by this process, since this will always depend on the accuracy and completeness of the data used, the strength of the particular framework being applied, and the skill with which the analyst is able to bring the two together. The quality can be improved, however, when the use of new data and an appropriate framework are brought together in a way that directly addresses the major puzzles that still exist. The objective of this study is to do precisely this: to bring new data and a specific analytical framework to bear in order to develop comprehensive explanations that are better than those which currently exist for both the decision to attempt the rescue and the subsequent failure of the military operation.

This chapter will examine the conceptual approach that will be taken in this study, one based on the recent work of Roger Hilsman (1987; 1990; 1992; 1993). In order to put the model in its proper perspective, the chapter will begin by reviewing theoretical developments within the broader "political process approach" which has emerged as one of two major trajectories of theoretical development, research and analysis within the decision-making approach to foreign policy analysis. In doing so, it will focus sharply on one particular theoretical development within this trajectory, the bureaucratic politics model, since Hilsman's latest work is essentially a reaction to it. It will then lay out the main elements of Hilsman's "political process model" and its limitations. Finally, it will present the reasons why this particular model was selected and explain how it will be adapted and applied in subsequent chapters.

The Political Process Approach in Perspective

Hilsman's "political process model" is one of a number of conceptual models that take what is now commonly referred to as the "decision-making approach" to foreign policy analysis. This decision-making approach, which continues to have a significant impact on foreign policy analysis (Hill and Light, 1985; Smith, 1986; Welch, 1992; Zelikow, 1994), focuses on the concrete, practical, day-to-day foreign policy decisions and

outcomes that follow from them. It attempts to explain these by opening up the "black box" of the state's decision-making process and rigorously examining patterns and dynamics involved during both the decision-making and implementation phases. The starting point and main justification for decision-making analysis is the belief that better explanations for decisions and outcomes can be developed by studying what goes on inside this black box. The decision-making approach thus disaggregates the state and explicitly rejects the traditional notion that states can be conceptualized as unified, rational actors, analogous to rational individuals.

The literature on decision making has developed steadily over the years since Snyder, Bruck and Sapin argued the case for a decision-making approach over four decades ago (Snyder, Bruck and Sapin, 1954). Their seminal work, which was launched in the spirit of the behavioral movement (Snyder, Bruck and Sapin, 1962), was an important catalyst for those who found monocausal explanations and the notion of a reified, abstract state unacceptable (Rosenau, 1967: 202). Indeed, surveys of the decision-making approach usually begin by acknowledging the contribution of Snyder, Bruck and Sapin and characterize their work as a watershed that has inspired much of what has been done to develop the approach since that time (Hermann and Peacock, 1987; Nossal, 1990).

The central elements of the Snyder, Bruck and Sapin scheme are that decision making is an observable activity that requires explanation; that the subjective perceptions of individual decision makers are important; that both external and domestic factors are important only to the extent that they are perceived as important by decision makers; and that the decision-making process itself needs to be examined because it can have a significant impact on the content of a decision (Snyder, Bruck and Sapin, 1954 and 1962). The clear implication of their scheme was that the key to explaining foreign policy decisions and the outcomes that follow from them is to reconstruct the subjective world of decision makers in order to understand the psychological, social and political factors which shape their goals, values, beliefs and perceptions and therefore shape their decisions. In order to accomplish the task, in other words, the analyst had "to examine the impact of international politics, domestic politics, and the governmental process on the decision maker, and understand the individual's own psychology and perception of his or her environment" (Nossal, 1990: 538). Although individual scholars have characterized this world in different ways, all decision-making approaches, including the one

to be used in this study, essentially focus on assessing the impact of at least some parts of this total psychosocial-political environment to address the fundamental question posed by the Snyder, Bruck and Sapin framework: "why do foreign policy officials (not nations) make the choices they do?" (Hermann and Peacock, 1987: 23).

Over the course of the past four decades since Snyder, Bruck and Sapin laid the foundation for the decision-making approach to foreign policy analysis, two major trajectories of theoretical development, research and analysis have emerged. The first trajectory focuses on various dimensions of the political process; the second emphasizes the cognitive dimensions of decision making. Since Hilsman's "political process model" is a contribution to the first of these trajectories, it will be useful to review the major developments within this broader "political process approach" to decision-making analysis in order to place Hilsman's model in its proper perspective before presenting it in detail. The second of these trajectories, the "cognitive approach" to decision-making analysis, and the relationship of Hilsman's model to it will be examined briefly later in this chapter.

The roots of the political process approach can be traced to the early work of the "first wave theorists", Almond (1950), Neustadt (1960), Huntington (1961 and 1962), Lindblom (1959, 1965 and 1968), Schilling (1962) and Hilsman (1967), all of whom, in one way or another, emphasized the importance of the political process in explaining decisions and outcomes.³ Collectively they offered rich insights into the way that process impacts on the substance of US foreign policy. They portrayed a governmental structure that includes a diversity of individual and institutional actors, in the legislative as well as the executive branches of government, involved in the decision-making process, with power widely dispersed between them. At the heart of this analysis is Neustadt's notion that foreign policy takes place in the context of "a government of separated institutions sharing powers" (Neustadt, 1960: 33). These institutions and the individual actors within them most often have different views on issues, both about what particular outcomes should be sought and about what means might be the most effective in achieving them. Even when it takes place, as it most often does in the case of foreign policy, in a way that is hidden from those not directly involved, the whole process is a highly political one. Divergences of views are given expression during the decision-making process and either reconciled through specific processes such as consensus-building and compromise or

impact decisions and outcomes through less accommodative processes such as competitive struggle and bargaining.

The concepts that underpinned the efforts of these "first wave" scholars were, however, for the most part implicit; they did not explicitly formulate conceptual models which would allow other scholars to comprehensively and consistently reproduce the logic of their analysis and therefore, over time, permit exploration of the full limits of their approaches. Relevant here is Kaplan's highly useful distinction between "logic-in-use" and "reconstructed logic." "Logic-in-use" is the implicit logic used by an analyst who works without a conceptual model and therefore is highly dependent on the individual cognitive style of the analyst; "reconstructed logic" on the other hand, is explicit logic used by an analyst who works with a specific conceptual model and is therefore more readily accessible to other analysts (Yanarella, 1975: 159-161; Kaplan 1964: 3-33). Since the "first wave" scholars, including Hilsman (1967 and 1971), took only a "logic-in-use" approach in their analysis, they did not formulate the kind of specific concepts and relationships between them that might have allowed other scholars to rigorously examine their analysis and conclusions by drawing on a broader spectrum of evidence. Simply put, their writings were rich in historical detail and powerful in the sense of highlighting the reality of an intense "political game" in Washington and the importance of process to it; at the same time, beyond simple formulations like Neustadt's convincing assertion that "presidential power is the power to persuade" (1960: 4) or Hilsman's that "the making of foreign policy is a political process" (1967: 543), they did not advance the kind of theoretical constructs and specific propositions that could be challenged or developed by other scholars applying the same logic to other cases. The result was that not much was done to advance their work beyond their initial formulations.

Some refinements were, of course, made. Neustadt, for example, revised his major work twice (1980 and 1990), but these revisions have simply brought his analysis up to date (the 1990 edition includes analysis of the Reagan years). They have not advanced or made more explicit the theoretical concepts upon which this analysis is based. Similarly, Lindblom updated his most definitive work with little substantive change (1980) and, until very recently, Hilsman's subsequent work (1971 and 1985) reorganized, refined and updated his earlier work without giving it further theoretical focus. Meanwhile, Schilling, Almond, Huntington and, more recently, Lindblom turned their attention elsewhere. Thus, until

Hilsman's explicit formulation of the political process model in 1987, this "first wave" literature remained theoretically static, albeit increasingly rich with historical detail, analysis and insights.

In the early 1970s, Allison launched a "second wave" of political process theorizing. Drawing on the concept of paradigm developed for sociological analysis by Robert Merton ("a systematic statement of the basic assumptions, concepts and propositions employed"), Allison proposed three specific paradigms to explain foreign policy decisions and outcomes. After presenting the prevailing mode of explanation for foreign policy decisions as the "rational actor paradigm," he proposed two alternatives: an "organizational process paradigm" and a "governmental politics paradigm," each with a carefully articulated unit of analysis, organizing concept, dominant inference pattern and illustrative propositions. His governmental politics paradigm was an apparent attempt to synthesize the work of the "first wave" scholars, most notably that of Neustadt, Schilling, Huntington and Hilsman, into a single conceptual model which would both expose the implicit assumptions and logic of the "first wave" approach and allow it to be more rigorously applied and examined by other scholars. His project, in other words, was to articulate the "reconstructed logic" for the political process approach which the "first wave" scholars had not provided (Allison, 1971: 1-9, 32 and 144-184; Welch, 1992: 113-116).⁴

The "first wave" had clearly established that bargaining and consensus-building among individuals and organizations form an inextricable part of the political decision-making process and that bureaucratic actors in the executive branch have a significant impact on foreign policy decisions and, perhaps even more directly, on the implementation of them. However, whether intentionally or not, Allison went much further than this; he proposed that these dynamics alone might be used to explain decisions and outcomes. The basic starting point for his "reconstructed logic" was that decisions and outcomes were the "political resultant" of "bargaining games among players in national government." Such bargaining, according to the model, takes place through regularized "action-channels" (the established, highly structured decision-making channels within government) and involves both conflict and compromise by players with different interests and unequal influence. The central focus of the model is thus on the way the decision process is structured and on the priorities, perceptions, interests, goals, bargaining advantages, skill and will of the various individuals and

organizations participating in the foreign policy decision or outcome of interest. The central dynamic is thus "bargaining games" which, in Allison's words, drive "the pulling and hauling that is politics." Using the "reconstructed logic" of the model, an analyst explains a foreign policy event by discovering "who did what to whom that yielded the action" and can even, according to Allison, make predictions of future events by "identifying the game in which an issue will arise, the relevant players, and their relative power and skill" (1971: 6-7 and 144-181).

Allison's aim, like that of many other scholars of the behavioral period, was to attempt to establish convincing forms of nomological-deductive explanation that could be used for both explanation and prediction. Indeed, he explicitly accepted an Hempelian understanding of the logic of explanation, one in which particular decisions or outcomes are logically deduced from initial circumstances and covering laws (Hempel, 1968; Allison, 1971: 278-79). This understanding led him to advance a number of general and specific propositions which he believed were suggested by the paradigm. The ones most commonly associated with the model over the years include the notions that a player's preferences, perceptions and influence are all dependent on their bureaucratic positions and that decisions are the unintended result of bargaining and thus do not reflect the intentions of the individual players (Allison, 1971: 173-181; Welch, 1992: 128).

The following year, Allison and Halperin jointly proposed an amalgam model which should be considered the definitive "second wave" formulation (1972: 378-408). This new conceptual model, which drew on Halperin's previous work in this area as well as Allison's, essentially collapsed Allison's "organizational process paradigm" and "governmental process" paradigms into a single "bureaucratic politics model."⁵ This new model gave a place to organizational process and shared values as "constraints" which could "bias the outcome of the bureaucratic politics game" (1972: 390), but there was no doubt that they both considered "bureaucratic politics" to be the critical and dominant feature of the policy process and therefore the one which could most readily be used to explain decisions and outcomes. Shortly thereafter, Halperin published his own study which was another forceful statement that bureaucratic politics dominate national security decision making (1974). Although, like the "first wave" scholars, Allison and Halperin have done little in the last twenty years to develop their theoretical contribution further, their "reconstructed logic" left other scholars with something solid to focus on

and immediately precipitated a debate. Given that this debate is still being conducted with considerable passion, there is no doubt that this "second wave" of theoretical development of the political process approach has had an enormous impact on the study of foreign policy decision making (Bendor and Hammond, 1992; Welch, 1992).

At the same time, over the past two decades, serious problems with the bureaucratic politics model have become evident. Indeed, the critiques of the whole approach have become so trenchant and well-developed that few scholars now seriously embrace the bureaucratic politics model as the basis for comprehensive explanations of foreign policy decisions or outcomes. In the first place, these critiques have shown that there are serious problems with both the content and the internal logic of the model. As Bendor and Hammond have recently pointed out (1992: 313-318), the model misrepresents executive decision making by claiming that bargaining always takes place; it overlooks the impact of hierarchy on bargaining where it does take place; many of its suggested propositions are ad hoc, not logically derived from the explicit assumptions; and its lack of parsimony in terms of variables and relationships makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to isolate them for analysis. The critiques have also made it clear that model does not perform well when its specific theoretical propositions are compared with the facts. Welch, for example, (1992: 128-137), drawing on the collective analysis of scholars over the past twenty years, convincingly argues that the propositions most commonly associated with the model, such as "player preferences correlate highly with bureaucratic position" and "governmental decisions do not reflect the intentions of any player in particular," can no longer be sustained in light of the scrutiny they have received. More recently, in an examination of outcomes related to the US Navy's budget, procurement choices and force structure, Rhodes argues that "outcomes cannot be predicted on the basis of parochial interests and the distribution of bureaucratic power" (1994: 3).⁶

Many other valid criticisms of the model can and have been made. In terms of relevance to this study, four specific ones deserve to be mentioned briefly. First, the model is based on a far too narrow definition of politics. It focuses attention on moments of decision where there is observable bargaining; without this, there is no basis for an explanation. This leaves out some crucial aspects of the broader context, such as the basic power structure that underpins the entire decision-making process and the way in which it is being shaped at any given

moment. Moreover, the fact that shared interests, values and ideas frequently overarch the whole decision-making process, ruling out tactical competitive bargaining on a day-to-day basis, is given far too little play (Ball, 1974 and Freeman, 1976; Rhodes, 1994).

Second, the model underestimates the influence of both the president and other actors outside the executive branch. It does not recognize, for example, the enormous impact that the president has on establishing the parameters of the decision-making context, including the selection of key players and their access to him; on defining, in other words, what it is that is being decided and by whom. Indeed, on many of the most important decisions, such as those about whether to use military force, the goals, values, beliefs and perceptions of the president play such a central role that they clearly deserve a far more central place in explanations than the bureaucratic politics model allows. Also, because it focuses so exclusively on the executive, the model underplays the potential significance of other actors and forces such as Congress, political parties, interest groups and public opinion (Krasner, 1972; Art, 1973; Ball, 1974; Perlmutter, 1974; Kohl, 1976; Brenner, 1976; Freedman, 1976; Caldwell, 1977; Rosati, 1981).

Third, the concept of rationality embodied in the model is problematic. While it is clear that the model, like all decision-making formulations, rejects the notion of the state as rational actor, it still sees individuals and organizations as acting in an essentially rational way. Indeed, there is a strong presumption throughout the model that individuals are capable of utility and value maximization through logical means-ends calculations. In Allison's original formulation, given their bureaucratically-defined self-interest, actors reason in an objectively rational means-ends mode (Allison, 1971; Steinbrunner, 1974; Lamb, 1989; Nossal, 1990; Rhodes, 1994). In the Allison-Halperin amalgam bureaucratic politics model, with the introduction of "organizational constraints" as a factor that could "bias the outcome of the bureaucratic-politics game," there is significant move towards a concept of what Simon refers to as "bounded rationality" (1972: 390-391; Simon, 1985).⁷ The capacity of individuals to process information in this amalgam formulation is, in other words, limited by organizational factors such as established programs and standard operating procedures.

However, none of the Allison-Halperin formulations addresses, in anything more than a cursory fashion, the other fundamental way in which the rationality of individual decision makers might be severely

circumscribed: through limits to their individual cognitive capacities to process the relevant information. It has now been demonstrated quite convincingly that there are limits to the capacity and will of individuals to make decisions based on completely rational considerations. Indeed, scholars like Steinbrunner, George, Janis and Jervis have shown that senior decision makers are frequently forced to use various non-rational forms of cognitive processing in the decision-making process for a number of reasons, including the pressure of deadlines, the volume and complexity of the problems they have to deal with, the value and interest tradeoffs they are forced to make and the uncertainty they are forced to accept with respect to the goals that should be pursued, the information they receive and the relevant cause-effect relationships. Thus, for example, an individual decision maker might avoid value conflict by ignoring information that highlights the conflict or deal with uncertainty by adopting decision criteria that permit him to "satisfice" rather than "optimize," to settle, in other words, for a decision that is simply "good enough" (Steinbrunner, 1974; George, 1980; Janis, 1989; Jervis, 1976, Nossal, 1990; David, 1993). The form of rationality embedded in the bureaucratic politics model completely rules out such possibilities and is, therefore, one of the most serious weaknesses of the model.

To be fair, it is possible to interpret Allison in a somewhat looser fashion. The basic spirit of his original work was to expose hidden assumptions and to encourage more theoretical work, including the development of "additional paradigms focusing, for example, on individual cognitive processes, or the psychology of central players, or the role of external groups" (1971: 277). Also, at one point he argued that the three paradigms he had outlined could be seen as complementing each other and pointed out that "the best analysts of foreign policy manage to weave strands of each of the three conceptual models into their explanation" (1971: 258); and in the amalgam model he proposed with Halperin, he recognized two major constraints to the bargaining process: organizational processes and shared values. Moreover, conspicuously absent from the "suggestive propositions" in the amalgam model are some of the more strident ones from his earlier work such as "where you stand depends on where you sit" and important decisions "typically reflect a coincidence of Chiefs in search of a solution and Indians in search of a problem" (1971:173-181); and besides, "suggestive propositions" are hardly dogma.

That said, there is no doubt that the Allison's work with Halperin is an attempt to create a single, parsimonious and elegant model that can be used to explain decisions and outcomes; the bureaucratic politics model is, in other words, "the product he is trying to sell" (Bell, 1974: 76). As Art pointed out near the beginning of the debate about bureaucratic politics, a loose interpretation simply makes the bureaucratic politics model, in his words, "old (but extremely) fine wine in new bottles." Such an interpretation ignores the central thrust of the whole effort (Art, 1974: 438-439). While Allison and Halperin acknowledge that foreign policy analysts have not yet developed "any satisfactory empirically tested theory" (1972: 408), their project is to help move us along the path towards this kind of nomological-deductive theory and not simply to put an old wine in new bottles. The result of the effort to do this, however, is a model which focuses so exclusively on the dynamics of bargaining that it can only explain events as "the result of bargaining among players positioned hierarchically in the government" (Allison and Halperin, 1972: 481-492). Although these "second wave" scholars deserve much credit for their attempt to advance the political process tradition by explicitly formulating a "reconstructed logic" that could be analyzed and debated, in the end the bureaucratic politics model deserves the harsh verdict that has been reached after over twenty years of theoretical and empirical investigation (Welch, 1992; Bendor and Hammond, 1992).

In short, the most fundamental problem with the bureaucratic politics formulation is that it focuses too narrowly on the dynamics of bargaining processes, at the expense of other factors and dynamics that have a vitally important impact on the decision-making process. The essential problem, in other words, is that it is focused on such a limited part of the psychosocial-political context defined by Snyder, Bruck and Sapin, at the expense of others. Clearly, serious bargaining does take place in Washington in some areas, such as the budget process, and ignoring this dynamic, as Kozak points out, "can only lead to ignorance and naivete" (Kozak, 1988: 13; Halperin, 1983-84). On the other hand, overemphasizing bureaucratic politics, which the "second wave" scholars have done, certainly leads one in the same direction. No conceptual model, of course, can offer more than what James Q. Wilson calls "partial, place- and time-bound insights" (Wilson, 1989: xi). The point here is that the bureaucratic politics model is especially partial, place- and time-bound. In terms of Allison's metaphor, it contains a net that is designed to catch only one species of fish in a very limited area of the

pond. It is not designed to catch many other types of fish, including the kind of decision and outcome related to use of military force that will be the focus of this study. Most scholars involved in the study of US foreign policy now recognize that, on some occasions, "bureaucratic politics" do take place and affect both decisions and outcomes (Nossal, 1990: 543; Bendor and Hammond, 1992: 318; Welch, 1992: 112); however, this essentially amounts to nothing more than acceptance of one of the major insights that emerges from consideration of the "first wave" formulations: what happens during the decision-making process is extremely important.

It is precisely these weaknesses of the bureaucratic politics model that has drawn one of the "first wave" scholars, Roger Hilsman back into the debate. In 1987, having listened to the debate on the "second wave" formulations for over fifteen years and having concluded that the time was right "to hear once more from the first wave" (Hilsman, 1987: viii), he set out to rearticulate some of the central themes that he and his contemporaries had developed in their "first wave" formulations of the 1960s. This time, however, he appears to have taken an important lesson from the "second wave" scholars: the need for "reconstructed logic." He therefore attempts not only to rearticulate the central themes developed in the work of the "first wave" scholars, including his own, but to do so in a way that is much more explicit and theoretically self-conscious. Indeed, in terms of its conceptual approach, Hilsman's political process model is formulated in much the same way that the bureaucratic model is, but without nomological-deductive formulations or pretensions.

In his recent work (1987, 1990 and 1993), Hilsman has progressively refined his model in terms of its assumptions, concepts and logic. The result has been a "political process model" which can be rigorously examined or applied by others to explain decisions and outcomes (Hilsman, 1987, 1990 and 1993).⁸ Indeed, his recent work is so much better focused and theoretically expressed than any of the "first wave" formulations that it essentially constitutes a new departure in the political process approach to decision-making analysis. If other scholars give it the attention it deserves, it might even justifiably be considered as launching a "third wave" of formulations within this important trajectory of theoretical development, research and analysis. Since this study will apply Hilsman's model to the case of the rescue decision and operation in a way which will demonstrate its considerable explanatory power, it will, hopefully, contribute to the launching of this "third wave" as well as to our understanding of this specific decision and outcome.

Hilsman's Model and Its Limitations

Hilsman's latest work integrates into an explicitly formulated political process model the essential elements of the first-wave formulations about the way in which the foreign policy decision-making process results in decisions and outcomes that "move a nation."⁹ After examining the epistemological and methodological basis for the classical "black-box" (rational actor) model which still dominates a great deal of the discourse in political science, he lays out his own model and applies both the black-box model and his own to specific cases to demonstrate the nature of political process explanations and how they are useful in helping to solve some of the dilemmas, inconsistencies and puzzles that arise from black-box explanations. His argument, in other words, is for the usefulness of his particular form of decision-making analysis.

The epistemological understanding that informs and underpins the political process model is essentially scientific realism, in which explanation consists of showing how political decisions and outcomes are the products of the fundamental entities and concepts posited by the model, in other words, products of the conceptual building blocks that are the foundation for political process discourse.¹⁰ Therefore, having established the case that the black-box model is unable to provide satisfactory answers to many serious questions that arise when one reflects on US foreign policy decisions and outcomes, Hilsman moves on to develop the concepts that will be used in his political process model to overcome these limitations. While many of these concepts were implicit in his rich and voluminous early work, it is only in his latest work that we see them explicitly articulated into a cogent and coherent conceptual model.

Hilsman's model, like all political process formulations, characterizes the essential nature of the decision-making process as political, but it does so in a broader and more flexible way than the "second-wave" formulations. The actors in this model are "power centres," the individual decision makers and organizations involved in the decision-making process. Individual power centres are given identities with respect to particular decisions or outcomes in terms of their relevant goals, values, beliefs and perceptions; organizational power centres are given identities in terms of relevant organizationally-defined goals and the current policies and values they represent. These actors are also defined in terms of the "power" they are able to bring to bear on a

particular issue or problem. Power in this context is the capacity to influence decisions and outcomes.¹¹

The foreign policy decision-making process is conceptualized as a group activity, played out in an interorganizational way at the highest levels of government, in which specific individuals, representing both themselves and their organizations, make decisions and affect outcomes. In this group setting, there is competition in the form of disagreement, conflict and struggle due to the diverse goals, values, beliefs and perceptions of the individual decision makers involved in it. At the same time, however, there are also efforts to build consensus and to reach some sort of accommodation, compromise or agreement on policy issues. In other words, just as conflict is a fundamental dynamic in the decision-making process, so is the separate, simultaneous and seemingly paradoxical dynamic of "strain towards agreement." This effort to reach consensus or accommodation is rooted in a common desire to preserve the system in the longer term and on other shared values and beliefs.¹² In the highly political process that takes place, individual actors develop complex strategies and coping skills to deal with other actors, value conflicts and uncertainty. Similarly, organizations are involved in both competition and strain towards agreement and, most notably, in their standard operating procedures and the way they develop policies, embody their own strategies and ways of coping with other actors, both individual and organizational, and with situations where value conflicts have to be resolved and uncertainties dealt with.

The result of all of this is a highly dynamic process in which the power centres respond to a wide variety of pressures both from within government, including pressures from each other and from Congress, and from outside government, including pressures from the media, interest groups and the public. In this environment, relative power is as important in determining governmental decisions and outcomes as the relative merits of the goals and values sought or the relative logic and wisdom of the arguments that are made. The model thus highlights the wide variety of goals, values, beliefs and perceptions held by senior decision makers, the differential power they have in the decision-making process and the broad spectrum of political dynamics which impact both decisions and outcomes. The key actors, some basic concepts and typical process dynamics are summarized in Table 1 on the next page.¹³

In order to develop a political process explanation for a specific decision or outcome, one has to identify the "power centres,"

organizational and individual, that were involved. With respect to foreign policy issues which, like the hostage rescue attempt, are dealt with by the president and a small number of close advisers, this means identifying the key individuals involved and assessing the extent to which

TABLE 1: THE POLITICAL PROCESS MODEL

<u>ACTORS</u>	<u>SOME BASIC CONCEPTS</u>	<u>TYPICAL PROCESS DYNAMICS</u>
Power Centres:	Goals	Conflict/Accommodation
Individuals	Values	Struggle/Compromise
Organizations	Beliefs	Manipulation/Persuasion
Interorganizational	Perceptions	Bargaining/Consensus Building
Groups	Power	Strategies/Coping Skills
	Current	Standard Operating Procedures
	Policies	Policy Development
		Value Conflict
		Uncertainty
		Response to Pressures

each of them represented organizational interests and their own parochial interests in the decision-making process. One then has to examine the activities of each of these key decision makers in terms of the basic concepts of the model, such as in terms of their goals, values, beliefs and perceptions and in terms of the current policies and interests of the organizations they head, exposing any tensions or contractions. One also has to examine the beliefs and perceptions of these individuals about the effectiveness, benefits and costs of alternative means because, as Hilsman points out, disagreements about means take place more often than over goals, although this does not lessen the intensity of the disputes. One must also assess the power of each of these individuals, relative to the others involved, to influence the president; one must assess their ability, in other words, to persuade or influence him on the specific issue.

Finally, and this is the essence of the political process explanation, one must examine the specific way in which the decision was taken or the outcome achieved, the strategies employed by the decision makers involved, the pressures on each of them and the details of the process dynamics such as conflict and accommodation, struggle and compromise, manipulation and persuasion, bargaining and consensus building that took place among them. At the same time, one must be sensitive to both choice and constraint, to value conflicts and efforts to resolve them

and to uncertainty and attempts to reduce it. The explanation thus depends on finding empirical answers to questions about the impact of the various key decision makers, the positions they took and why, and the precise dynamics of the decision-making process at both the organizational and individual level. In short, one must uncover enough about what happened inside the "black box" to make these decisions and outcomes intelligible in the sense that, given the circumstances and the players, one understands why they occurred in terms of the basic concepts and process dynamics defined in the political process model.

There are some important differences between the political process model and the bureaucratic politics one which are worth highlighting as a way of better understanding the precise nature of the former. The first difference concerns the basic nature of the kind of explanations that can be developed by applying the model. The political process model, like the less theoretically self-conscious formulations in the first-wave literature on political process, is based on a different understanding of what an explanation should accomplish. The bureaucratic politics model seeks to develop a tight, nomological-deductive, Hempelian type of explanation, in which decisions and outcomes are derived from the combination of circumstances that existed at the time and certain specific laws. The model is thus inspired by a vision of decisions and outcomes as "clocks" that can be better understood through the progressive development of nomological-deductive statements in the same way that the physical universe has been better understood through the development of the laws of physics. It is this vision that leads Allison to suggest that predictions as well as explanations could be derived from his model (1971: 7 and 278-279; Almond and Genko, 1977). The political process model, on the other hand, seeks to develop a less ambitious, looser type of explanation in which decisions and outcomes are simply made intelligible by showing how they arise out of the combination of circumstances that exist at the time, the goals, values, beliefs, perceptions, power and current policies of the individuals and organizations involved, and the dynamics that take place during the decision-making process. It does not seek to establish the kind of nomological-deductive formulations that might be used for prediction and therefore does not advance the kind of tight propositions that are contained in the bureaucratic politics model. The model is thus inspired by a vision of decisions and outcomes as "clouds" to be understood only through historically specific analysis, not through the discovery of physics-like laws. It thus seeks to promote analysis rather

than description by providing a logical and parsimonious arrangement of key concepts and an understanding of the way they are interrelated. It is, in other words, simply an intellectual tool which, like a Weberian "ideal type," is designed to help us find comprehensible and satisfying answers to the typical kinds of questions we ask by highlighting important dimensions of reality we might not otherwise see (Dray, 1969; Young, 1972; Yanarella, 1975; Almond and Genko, 1977).¹⁴

Another essential difference between the two models is that, whereas the bureaucratic politics model gives only very limited recognition to the possibility of bounded rationality by considering organizational factors as a "constraint" in the bargaining process, the political process model embodies a concept of bounded rationality which fully recognizes that both organizational and cognitive factors can severely limit the abilities of individual decision makers to act in an objectively rational fashion. As mentioned earlier, the inability of the bureaucratic politics model to embrace cognitive factors is a major weakness. Indeed, this lacuna in the formulation leaves it completely divorced from the entire growing body of literature on cognitive constraints. While Hilsman's main focus is very clearly on the process aspects of decision making and he does not explicitly deal with the subject of rationality, his model considers both the process, which takes into account organizational constraints, and the values, beliefs and perceptions of individual decision makers, which take into account many cognitive constraints, as important determinants of decisions. The model allows the full examination of other forces that might circumscribe the rationality of the decision-making process as well, such as time constraints, without a presumption that, individually or collectively, any of these factors are determinant. The extent to which rationality is bounded in a specific case is an empirical question. This openness on the question of rationality allows the analyst using the political process model, unlike one using the bureaucratic politics model, to be open to concepts and insights that have emerged from the second trajectory of research and analysis within the decision-making approach.

This second trajectory, which draws very heavily on the discipline of psychology, is defined by its sharp focus on the cognitive processes of individual decision makers and includes a wide variety of formulations that highlight different aspects of these processes. One major area of development has been the attempts by many scholars to link foreign policy behaviour to the "belief systems" of the decision makers; to link this

behaviour, in other words, to the relatively constant and entrenched thoughts and ideas they have about the foreign policy environment (Axelrod, 1976; George, 1979; Cottam, 1986; Rosati, 1987; Lamb, 1988; Rhodes, 1994).¹⁵ Another major area has been the attempts to define ways in which decision makers respond, including non-rational ways, in specific decision-making circumstances such as group settings (Janis, 1972), crisis situations (Holsti, 1972; Oneal, 1988; Janis 1989; McCalla, 1992) or, more generally, conditions of time pressure, value complexity and uncertainty (Steinbrunner, 1974 and 1975; George, 1985; David, 1993).¹⁶ Other areas include attempts to examine the role that misperception (Jervis, 1976 and 1983; McCalla, 1992), risk-taking propensities (Quattrone and Tversky, 1988; Huth, Bennett and Gelpi, 1992), and styles of reasoning (Sylvan and Ostrom, 1994) play in the decision making process.¹⁷ Recent attempts have even been made to apply cognitive theory directly to the presidency (Fiske, 1993). Much of the energy for these cognitively-oriented approaches is rooted in the compelling truism that individuals make decisions and so the ways in which they process information must be an important factor in determining the content of these decisions (Lamb, 1989: 48).¹⁸

Although the focus of Hilsman's model is on political process, it allows the analyst to consider the impact that specific cognitive factors may have on the decision-making process through the basic concepts embedded in it. Since the beliefs of individual decision makers is one of the basic explanatory concepts in the model, for example, the attention of the analyst is quickly directed to this area. In contrasting his model with the bureaucratic politics one which gives such a predominant place to the process, Hilsman makes it clear that, while the focus of his model is on process, "the single most important determinant of what the participants espouse is their fundamental perspective on international affairs" (Hilsman, 1993: 88-89).¹⁹ Similarly, other cognitive factors can also be considered through examination of the perceptions of individual decision makers. The model thus allows cognitive processes to be important, even at times decisive, but it does not assume a priori that this is the case. It rejects tight cognitive assumptions, just as it rejects tight bureaucratic ones. It leaves the impact of cognitive processes as an empirical question to be examined in each specific decision-making situation.

The political process model also gives far more weight than the bureaucratic politics model to domestic political factors, including

congress, the media and public opinion. This is not to say that domestic political factors will play a central role in any given foreign policy decision or outcome; it is to say that the basic concepts and process dynamics inherent in the model force the analyst to consider the impact of these factors in developing a comprehensive explanation for such events. At the same time, in sharp contrast to the bureaucratic politics model which sees the institutional positions of decision makers and the bureaucracies in Washington as the most important determining factor in decisions and outcomes, the concepts and dynamics in the political process model force the analyst to consider, in Hilsman's words, "the organization as only one determinant of the policy the participants espouse and the great bureaucracies as important but not nearly the most important determinant of the policy outcome." Finally, whereas the bureaucratic politics model sees bargaining as the central dynamic and decisions and outcomes as the unintended result of this bargaining process, the political process model sees a far broader range of process dynamics. Indeed, since the model credits decision makers with the ability to develop both realistic expectations about the outcome that can be achieved and effective long-term strategies to pursue these outcomes, the analyst is forced to look for instances of accommodation as well as conflict, of compromise as well as struggle, of persuasion as well as manipulation and of consensus building as well as bargaining (Hilsman, 1993: 88-89; Art, 1974: 434-439).

The political process model thus provides the analyst with a "reconstructed logic" in the form of basic concepts and a way of looking at the dynamics of the US foreign policy decision-making process. The fundamental effect of this "reconstructed logic" is to focus the search for explanations on the political process itself. What the model suggests, in essence, is that the decision-making process is the best place to focus if one wants to develop an explanation for a specific decision or outcome. This focus is sharp enough to allow one to apply Hilsman's logic and methodology in a broad variety of circumstances and situations; it is broad enough to allow one to consider the full range of possible factors that might impact specific decisions and outcomes. It is clearly a model that can be used to examine the hostage rescue decision and operation. However, before outlining the reasons why this particular model was selected for this study and how it will be adapted and applied in the following chapters, it is important to recognize some inherent limitations.

First of all, as is evident from the above discussion, the political process model embodies a very modest view of what conceptual models can accomplish. It does not contain the kind of if-then hypotheses that might advance our theoretical knowledge in the study of international relations. In his discussion of "the role of theory," Hilsman explicitly recognizes that good theory should contain "if-then" relationships, pointing out that in the "hard" sciences a theory or conceptual model "tells the analyst what facts to look for and then what will happen if certain facts are found" (1993: 37-47). However, he also recognizes that the social world is both "more difficult" and "less predictable" than hard sciences like physics. He thus argues that the real value of the kind of conceptual model he has developed is its usefulness in analyzing international politics (1993: 47-49).²⁰ When he outlines his model, there is a conspicuous absence of if-then hypotheses. Indeed, his presentation of the model is essentially a discussion of the nature of politics, the nature of political power and the characteristics of the political system. It is explicit on what kind of facts to look for, which helps to focus the attention of the analyst on a manageable amount of material, but he suggests no nomological-deductive way to use these facts to explain what happened or to predict what will happen in the future. In the case of past events like the hostage rescue attempt, the model thus leaves it in the hands of the individual analyst to weigh the evidence and to determine, using the facts that the model suggests are important, why a particular decision was taken or outcome achieved. This is not very ambitious science, but it may be appropriate and useful guidance for those who wish to understand decisions and outcomes at this point in the development of political science as a discipline.

Closely related to this, the political process model does not give the analyst any formula with which to weigh the evidence. The question posed by Snyder, Bruck and Sapin in their seminal work on decision making was "why do foreign-policy decision makers take the decisions they do?" Over the years since then, scholars have tried to address the natural follow-on question to this: "which kinds of explanatory variables are most potent in accounting for decision makers' choices?" (Hermann and Peacock, 1987: 24) In his "pretheoretical" work (1966 and 1980), for example, Rosenau made an impressive effort to reduce the number of variables suggested by Snyder, Bruck and Sapin to five "determinants" of foreign policy behaviour and to suggest what their relative importance might be for specific issue areas.²¹ However, while several adaptations of

Rosenau's pretheory are now widely used in textbooks on both US foreign policy and international relations (Kegley and Whitkopf, 1991; Russett and Starr 1989), the reality is that generalizations about what factors might be the most important in any given situation are still at the speculative stage (Nossal, 1990: 539-541).²² Beyond pointing out that, for example, "persuasion, compromise, and consensus building are as characteristic of the policy-making process as conflict," the political process model does not provide any guidance to help the analyst weigh the relative effects of various factors. Hilsman stops, in other words, once he has defined the various basic concepts and process dynamics that he believes are the key things to look at in developing explanations; he leaves it to the analyst to decide what their relative importance might be in the case of specific decisions or outcomes. The strength of the explanation is therefore dependent on the individual skill of the analyst in applying the model, not on the validity of statements in the model about the relative importance of such factors.

Another limitation which needs to be acknowledged at the outset is that, like most decision-making approaches, the political process model focuses the attention of the analyst so sharply on the process in the US government that it leaves relatively unaddressed some fundamentally important questions related to the broader context in which the executive exists and operates. For example, the model does not directly address issues such as the nature of the international system in which the US government has to operate or of the relationship of US government to civil society (Nossal, 1990: 544-548). In terms of the model, these are important only to the extent that they are perceived as important to the relevant decision makers; system-level or societal-level factors which might shape the entire decision-making context but are not given expression in the process leading to a specific decision or outcome will be left out of the analysis and thus out of the explanation. The underlying social and economic structures, processes and trends at both the international and domestic levels which constrain the menu of options for consideration, for example, are certain to be left out of the analysis in most cases because these are not the kinds of considerations that dominate the beliefs and perceptions of decision makers in US government. Moreover, because of its focus on the immediate decision or outcome, the model considers normative aspects of decisions only to the extent that they are given expression in the process as well (Maoz, 1990: 43-44). In addition, the purely pluralist notion of the nature of power embodied in

the model accepts all of the limitations of that approach, including its focus on the existing decision-making agenda which sometimes leaves out important issues about how that agenda is actually set (Lukes, 1974; Shapiro and Reeher, 1988).²³ While these aspects of the model are characteristic of the whole decision-making approach to foreign policy analysis, they also constitute important limitations to Hilsman's model which should be understood before the model is applied.

The way in which the political process model takes the values and beliefs of individual decision makers as the starting point for analysis imposes another limitation. The model is, as Hilsman points out, silent on the issue of where these values and beliefs come from. For example, in developing his political process explanation for President Johnson's 1965 decision to escalate US involvement in Vietnam similar to the ones he has developed for the decisions by the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations not to fight a war in Southeast Asia, Hilsman argues that Johnson was not under pressure to escalate. Indeed, according to Hilsman, the strategic factors that supported arguments for and against escalation tended to cancel each other out and Johnson had to overcome considerable political opposition within his administration before he was free to pursue a policy of escalation. His political process model thus explains how, once Johnson decided to escalate US involvement, he accomplished his wish through "skilful maneuvering." The model does not deal with the issue of where Johnson's goal of escalation came from or where the values and beliefs that supported his quest of this goal came from. "On this essentially psychological point," says Hilsman, "the political process model ... is silent" (1993: 97-102). In his recent book on the 1990-91 crisis and war in the Persian Gulf, which highlights the way in which the conflict developed into a personal struggle between Saddam Hussein and George Bush, Hilsman describes their background in considerable detail, but he does this to flesh out fully their personal goals, beliefs, values and perceptions in enough depth to provide comprehensive explanations for their choices; he does not try to provide a deeper account of where their fundamental values and beliefs came from (1992: 219-255). It is, of course, the silence of the model in this area that permits the analyst to keep sharply focused on the process and to develop a relatively parsimonious explanation rather than, for example, getting wrapped up in complex psychological and sociological issues. At the same time, it means that certain kinds of questions are not addressed. It is, in other words, both a strength and a limitation of the model.

Similarly, the model is relatively silent on options or choices that are not considered in the decision-making process. In applying the model, the analyst deals primarily with options and choices that are evoked and introduced into the process; indeed, the focus of analysis is on why certain choices were made rather than others. Thus, for example, one of the key questions that Hilsman sets out to answer at the beginning of his recent study on the Gulf War is why, after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the Bush administration gave "such short shift" to some alternatives which might have avoided the use of predominantly US military forces (1992: xi-xiv). At the same time, the model does not direct the analyst's attention towards fundamental issues about why other possible options were never evoked, even those that might have been considered reasonable options by the decision makers involved. This again keeps the analyst sharply focused on the actual decision-making process rather than sidetracked into an area where complex psychological and sociological issues about the process of discovery would have to be addressed (Simon, 1985: 302-305);²⁴ however, this focus also means that certain fundamental questions about the limits to choice in the US government are likely to be ignored.

Another limitation that should be understood is that the political process model is focused so sharply on the executive branch of the US government that it is not readily applicable to other countries and situations. While the basic concepts and some of the process dynamics defined in the theory might be applied to other political systems, particularly democratic ones, it is the rich detail that Hilsman provides on the US political system which validates the concepts and dynamics and brings the model to life. The meat on the bones, in other words, is highly specific to the modern executive in the US (1993: 119-349). In introducing his model with case studies, Hilsman does make an effort to show how the political process approach can help improve our understanding of foreign policy decisions and outcomes in other countries. He argues, for example, that by focusing the analyst on the internal power struggles taking place in China and Iran at the time, his model does better than the black-box model in explaining the Chinese decision to invite Nixon to visit China in 1972 and the continued holding of the US hostages in Iran in 1979-80 (1993: 102-111).²⁵ His examination of these cases, however, is very brief and does little more than demonstrate the general applicability of a political process approach to other situations. The detailed way in which he develops the concepts and dynamics of the actual model with

exclusive reference to the US promotes an understanding of them that is specific to the case of the US political system and therefore cannot be readily applied in a more comprehensive way to the case of China or Iran (1993: 119-349). Moreover, application of the model depends on having access to the kind of information that is essential to make it work. Recognizing this limitation, Hilsman uses the case of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan to illustrate the point. In this particular case, he concludes, the political process model is "useless" in trying to improve our understanding or helping us to assess rival black-box explanations of Soviet behaviour because it simply does not have "the facts needed to make it work" (1993:105-107). Before the model could be used to develop the kind of in-depth explanations that will be attempted here in a different political system, two obstacles would thus have to be overcome. First, considerable analysis and adaptation would be required to ensure that the model adequately captured the process dynamics of that particular system and, second, enough information to make the model work would have to be found which, in most political systems, would inevitably be much more difficult than in the US. As it is, the political process model is essentially a single-country theory.²⁶

Although these inherent limitations are serious ones, the political process model has been chosen as the conceptual approach to be used in this study; indeed, this particular model has been selected because, despite these limitations, it is well suited to addressing many of the issues that arise from a serious examination of the rescue decision and outcome. Most significantly, it is particularly well suited to addressing the issue of the links between decision making at the political and military-operational levels during the five and a half months of the hostage crisis leading up to the rescue operation which, as was pointed out in Chapter 1, is the major lacuna in the literature on the rescue attempt to date. What remains to be done, before turning to the empirical evidence, is to explain more fully why the political process model is an appropriate choice and how it will be adapted and applied to the specific case of the hostage rescue attempt.

Adopting, Adapting and Applying the Model

To this point, in order to place the political process model in its proper perspective, the discussion of the model has been at a fairly high level of abstraction. Since this study will examine very specific historical evidence concerning the hostage rescue attempt, it is important

at the outset to state explicitly why the use of this particular model makes sense and to outline the ways in which it will be adapted and applied, so that the way in which the data is handled and interpreted in subsequent chapters will be completely transparent to the reader. In terms of Allison's metaphor, it is important to understand why the political process net has been selected as the one to be dragged through the empirical evidence, what precise species of fish it is intended to catch and how it will be cast in certain ponds and at certain depths in order to accomplish the task. Therefore, before moving on to a detailed historical examination of the Carter administration and its performance related to Operation Eagle Claw, the remainder of this chapter will explain the relevance and value of the political process model in addressing the major issues that emerge from an initial reading of the literature on the rescue attempt and outline the successive steps that will be taken in subsequent chapters as the model is applied and comprehensive explanations for the rescue decision and outcome are slowly developed. Since Hilsman's model will be extended into the military-operational level of decision making in this study, the rationale for this specific adaptation of Hilsman's work will also be explained.

First of all, it is clear that many of the issues raised in the literature on the rescue attempt as described in Chapter 1 can only be addressed by opening up the black box of the decision-making process. For example, if one is to examine seriously questions such as whether the failure of the mission was virtually inevitable, the president's decision was influenced by domestic political considerations, the military planners accurately assessed the risks, there was proper command and control during the operation and the like, it is essential that the black box be opened up as far as possible in order to expose, to the maximum extent possible, the kinds of dynamics embodied in the political process model. It would appear, in other words, that the overall focus of the model is one which will facilitate a thorough exploration of the key questions and issues surrounding the rescue decision and operation. The basic concepts and process dynamics embodied in the model are such that the attention of the analyst is guided very quickly into the heart of the decision-making processes at both the political and military-operational levels and, even more importantly for purposes of this study, into areas where these two processes touched and influenced each other.

With respect to the decision, like most decisions to use military force, the hostage rescue decision was very clearly a presidential one and

the political process model facilitates a sharp focus on the unique role of the president as the key "power centre" in the process. Indeed, one of the inherent strengths of the model is that it conceptualizes the president as chief decision maker on foreign and defence issues, as well as chief legislator, chief administrator and chief of state. It recognizes, in other words, that the realities of global politics and the provisions of the Constitution give presidents "extraordinary power in defense and foreign affairs." At the same time, it recognizes that the power of any president to affect outcomes depends, among other things, on how well he understands the political process and on the skill with which he uses it; how well, in other words, he leads (Hilsman, 1987: 104-126).²⁷ It also recognizes the importance of the inner circle of advisers close to the president. Thus, in terms of the rescue decision, the model will ensure that the focus of the explanation is where it should be: on the president himself, his innermost circle of advisers and the process at the highest levels of the administration where the rescue option was discussed and debated before it was eventually chosen by the president.²⁸ The model will thus help us assess the extent to which the "conventional wisdom" that the president was poorly informed when he took the decision holds up to the latest evidence; it will also help us assess the extent to which other factors such as wishful thinking, groupthink, electoral politics, bureaucratic momentum and the decision-making process itself had a significant impact on president's decision to launch the rescue operation.²⁹

With respect to the outcome, the model can also facilitate an appropriate focus by drawing our attention to the decision-making process that took place at lower levels as the rescue plan was developed and eventually implemented. This, however, requires an adaptation of the political process model since Hilsman's personal focus has been primarily on decisions rather than outcomes. That said, there are a few cases where Hilsman has demonstrated how the model can be equally useful in developing explanations for outcomes. In his most recent work, for example, he attempts to explain why Iran held the hostages for 444 days, an outcome, rather than any specific decision within Iran during this period (1993: 107-111) and he also attempts to explain why the Gulf War evolved the way it did, the actual outcome of the war, rather than any specific decision by Iraq or the United States (1992: 219-255). The notion of using the model to develop explanations for outcomes is thus compatible with

Hilsman's focus and intent, although he does not apply it in the kind of top to bottom manner in which it will be applied in this study.

What is required before the model can be used to develop an explanation for the failure of the rescue operation is to open up the black box of the decision-making process further than Hilsman opens it to include the activities related to the rescue mission that took place in the Department of Defense. This will allow us to focus sharply on the decision-making process at what will be referred to in this study as the military-operational level: the other end of the chain of decision makers involved in the rescue experience, the planners and implementers within the Department of Defense and Central Intelligence Agency.³⁰ Clearly, a full understanding of the process at this level is vital to assessing the extent to which the "conventional wisdom" that the operation was poorly planned and virtually predestined to fail holds up to the latest evidence. It is also vital to pinpointing the key operational factors that contributed to the failure and to assessing the extent to which poor judgment and incompetence at the military-operational level contributed to the failure of the operation. Applied to this level of decision making, the political process model will thus facilitate the kind of rigorous examination of the rescue planning and operation which will permit the development of a comprehensive explanation for the total failure of the operation.

Even more importantly, adapting the political process model in this fashion will allow us to examine the ways in which decision making at the political and military-operational levels touched and influenced each other at various points in the process. It will, in other words, facilitate a critical examination of decision making at both of these levels in the broader context of the entire decision-making process from top to bottom. As outlined in the previous chapter, to date there have been broad political accounts of the decision and narrow military accounts of the failure of the operation, but there have been no comprehensive attempts to bring the two of these together in a way that shows how the political and military-operational decision-making processes touched and influenced each other at key points in the hostage crisis. By allowing us to focus on the entire decision-making process, the political process model will thus allow us to examine not only how the decision-making processes took place concurrently at both levels, but also how they interacted and combined over time, eventually resulting in a specific plan, the decision to implement it and the total failure of the operation

on the night of 24-25 April. In short, adapted to this case, Hilsman's model appears to be extremely well suited to helping us overcome the major lacuna in studies to date by taking full account of the two-way relationship between political and military-operational decision making.

Given this adaptation, this study will result in a unique application of the political process model. Succinctly put, it will look at events surrounding the rescue attempt, from the various interactions and discussions with the president to the development of the rescue plan in the Special Operations Division of DoD, as part of a single, symbiotic decision-making process which led to both the rescue decision and the failure of the operation. This view of the context in which the rescue decision and operation took place, which is the point of departure for the analysis that will follow in subsequent chapters, was inspired by Hilsman's work on political process and is entirely compatible with the basic structures of his model; at the same time, it is an adaptation of this work which extends the political process conceptual net into a significant new area of inquiry.

Put another way, this study will not only examine the rescue attempt, it will also explore the potential of the political process model to help us develop an in-depth explanation for this type of decision and outcome. On both counts, of course, the recent additions to the data base on both the political decision-making process and the military planning for and execution of the operation that were described in Chapter 1 are highly significant. With this information, there is now enough information available to permit the development of far more comprehensive political process explanations than would have previously been possible.¹¹ Most importantly, it is now possible to examine, in far greater detail than before, the key points at which the development of the rescue option by the military planners influenced the political decision-making process and was, in turn, influenced by that process. We now have, in other words, the facts needed to make the political process model work.¹² At the same time, the model provides us with the kind of "reconstructed logic" which will allow us to focus our attention sharply on the facts most relevant to the major lacuna that still exists in the literature. The match of the model and the available evidence, in other words, appears to be one that has potential to further our understanding of both the model and the case.¹³

Admittedly, given the state of development of the whole field of foreign policy analysis and of the decision-making approach within it,

selection of a specific model such as the one used in this study involves making a personal epistemological choice.³⁴ In the final analysis, the choice of Hilsman's model for this study is based on an assumption that the decision-making process is a useful and important place to focus; on a particular understanding of what we can hope to achieve with our efforts to explain; on a view that more factors impact decisions and outcomes than are captured in tidy, parsimonious models; and on an initial assessment that, least in this particular case, the way in which decision making at the political and military-operational levels interacted and combined needs to be fully examined. Moreover, it is a choice that has its roots in an expectation, based on historical research, that the political process model will be useful in helping us to find the best possible answers to the key questions that arise from consideration of the literature to date on the hostage rescue decision and operation. In the end, of course, "the proof will be in the pudding": the wisdom of this choice will have to be reassessed after the conceptual rubber has travelled the empirical road. This will be done in Chapter 7, once the political process explanations have been developed.

The application of the political process model to this case results in a sharp focus on the process which immediately raises a number of related questions about decision-making at both the political and military-operational levels. What, for example, were the goals, values, beliefs and perceptions of those, including the president, who participated in the decision? To what extent did the decision-making process give expression to them? What power did those involved have to influence or determine the decision? What initial policies were put in place at the beginning of the crisis and how did these change over time? What was the effect of organizational procedures? What were the dynamics involved in the process: to what extent were there conflict and accommodation, struggle and compromise, manipulation and persuasion, bargaining and consensus building? What pressures were there on decision makers at the time of the decision, especially the president? How did those involved deal with value conflict and uncertainty? What strategies and coping skills did they employ? What factors account for the decision? To what extent, for example, was it driven by purely political calculations, by dysfunctional process or by other considerations? And what were the goals, values, beliefs and perceptions of those involved in the development and implementation of the rescue operation? What organizational factors came into play? What process dynamics were

involved in this military side of the story? Were the planning process and the elaborate plan both fatally flawed? Were the planners so obsessed with secrecy, as some have alleged, that they doomed the operation to failure from the outset? Was the rescue force ready for the mission? Was its performance on the night of 24-25 April the primary cause of the failure? What specific operational factors account for the abort of the mission and the subsequent disaster at Desert One? To what extent, for example, was the failure caused by technical, leadership or other problems? Where, in short, should we point our fingers in assigning blame for the ignominious failure in the Iranian desert?

At the same time, application of the political process model also focuses our attention quickly on a number of other questions related to the ways in which decision making at the political and military-operational levels interacted and combined during the November-April period. For example, at what points did decision making at each of these two levels touch and influence decision making at the other? What effect did this have, at the political level, on the president's decision and, at the military-operational level, on the shape of the rescue mission and its chances for success? Was the president properly informed about the risks or did the planners put forward overly optimistic assessments of the probability of success? To what extent did bureaucratic momentum build up for the rescue option? Did the president receive poor advice and, if so, from whom and why? Was the president pressured into the decision by National Security Adviser Brzezinski and others who favoured the rescue option? What pressures from political-level decision makers were placed on the planners? Were restrictions placed on the planners or did they receive all of the support they needed from the political level? Was there interference from the political level during the actual operation? What was the precise role of Brzezinski in all of this? Did the small planning group which he led and which was responsible for developing the military options play an improper role by leaving others out of the process? To what extent did he take advantage of his position to manipulate others and orchestrate a decision in favour of the rescue option he favoured?

To the maximum extent possible, these are the kinds of questions that will be addressed in the following chapters. Indeed, the essential thrust of the remainder of this study will be to focus sharply on these kinds of issues raised by the political process model and to examine the available evidence carefully in light of them. Simply put, the model as

it has been adapted for this study will be applied in a systematic and rigorous way to slowly piece together the story of Operation Eagle Claw.

In order to begin to set the stage, this study will begin in Chapters 3 by defining the basic political context, both international and domestic, at the time the hostage crisis began. It will do this by taking a brief look, in turn, at the issues and tensions in the administration's domestic and foreign policy. Consistent with the political process model, it will, in each case, highlight the way in which problems within the decision-making process contributed to the administrations troubles and the ways in which the administration attempted to deal with them. It will examine, for example, the well-documented and fundamental differences that existed between Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, differences that would later be complicated by the hostage situation and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and eventually reach their breaking point over the rescue decision. In short, to set the stage, this chapter will situate the decision-making context as accurately as possible at the intersection of the evolving foreign and domestic political realities at the time.³⁵

To complete the task of setting the stage, Chapter 4 will examine the context in which the US embassy in Tehran was seized in terms of US-Iran relations. It will look at the various stages the administration went through in its relationship with Iran during the three year-period leading up to the hostage crisis, each of which can be distinguished by the dynamics of the US-Iran relationship, the administration's basic approach to the regimes in power, and the degree of focus of key decision makers, including the president. It will show that, when the crisis began, the administration's Iran policy was essentially in disarray. Again, consistent with the political process model, the analysis will highlight problems within the decision-making process and the impact they had on the course of events. The chapter will also describe the seizure of the embassy on 4 November 1979, examine the administration's initial reaction to it and identify the "power centres" involved from the outset in the decision-making process.

Taken together, Chapters 3 and 4 will set the essential background for the direct, in-depth examination of the rescue attempt that will follow. Drawing mainly on published sources, these two chapters will place the beginning of the hostage crisis in its proper political context so that the discussion about the hostage crisis and the rescue option can immediately and sharply focus on the dynamics of the decision-making

process. Consistent with the overall conceptual approach taken to this study, the focus of these two chapters will be on the decision-making process. The simple objective will be to highlight themes relevant to the discussion in subsequent chapters.

The detailed examination of decision making during the hostage crisis will begin in Chapter 5 which will look at the process from the seizure of the embassy until the first full briefing of the rescue option to the president at a key meeting of the National Security Council at Camp David on 22 March.³⁶ The chapter will focus on the way in which the diplomatic strategy and military planning proceeded simultaneously but, for the most part, separately from the beginning of the crisis on 4 November to the point where both the negotiations had bogged down and a rescue plan was ready in late March. It will examine the effect of the president's personal involvement in all aspects of the efforts to negotiate with and bring pressure to bear on Iran and the effect of Brzezinski's personal supervision of the military planning effort with the help of a small and highly secretive military planning group which he set up for this purpose. It will also examine the administration's pursuit of its strategy of negotiations and pressure as it suffered a continual series of setbacks throughout this period and political pressures on the president to do something more decisive to free the hostages steadily mounted. It will highlight the way in which the debate about military options was conducted throughout this period, showing that it was one that was framed by Vance and Brzezinski right from the outset, with Carter generally taking Vance's advice. The focus of this chapter will thus be on the evolving dynamics within the administration during this period, as support for Vance's negotiating strategy slowly eroded and other decision makers, including the president, became much more receptive to the possibility of using the rescue option as a way to end the crisis. In short, it will provide an account of how the process evolved during the first four and a half months of the crisis and where the key decision makers were at in their thinking about the rescue issue when the final decision-making process began the meeting of the NSC on 22 March.

Chapter 5 will also look at the decision-making process at the military-operational level. Two days after the seizure of the embassy, planning for the rescue mission began, inexorably pushing forward over the next few months with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff personally guiding the efforts of the Joint Task Force that was set up to develop a rescue option and the Director of Central Intelligence personally guiding

the intelligence effort that was so crucial to success. This chapter will examine how the defence and intelligence power centres slowly but steadily developed the rescue option from initial conceptual planning in early November to the 22 March presentation to the president, by which time the members of Brzezinski's military planning group, which included the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Director of Central Intelligence, had concluded that a rescue operation had a good chance of success.³⁷

Chapter 6 will provide an in-depth analysis of the actual decision to attempt the rescue operation and the execution of the operation by the US military. To do this, it will take a close look at the decision-making process from the time of the 22 March meeting to the point where the operation failed deep inside Iran on the night of 24-25 April. With respect to the decision, it will explore the pressures on the administration to act during this period, the inputs of decision makers at both the political and military-operational levels, the way in which the rescue option was considered, and the way in which the president embraced it so quickly following the collapse of the negotiations in early April. The focus here will be on the innermost ring of the decision-making process, on the way in which the process played out around the only individual who could make the decision to launch the rescue operation, the president himself. The chapter will also provide an account of the implementation of the president's decision, the rescue operation itself. It will examine the final adjustments which were made to the plan prior to implementation as a result of decisions at both the political and military-operational levels and the actual decision-making process during the night of 24-25 April to determine what went wrong during the operation.

Chapters 5 and 6 will thus prepare the way for the development of comprehensive political process explanations for the rescue decision and outcome by highlighting the evolving dynamics within the entire decision-making process so that the kinds of questions outlined above can be addressed. In these two key chapters, the political process model will be applied directly to ensure that, as the empirical evidence is examined and evaluated, the focus is kept as sharp as possible. It is here that the nexus between military and political decision-making processes will be rigorously explored in order to uncover the ways in which decision making at the political and military-operational levels interacted and combined, eventually culminating in both the decision and the failure. The general

thrust of this account will thus be on who did what and, sometimes, to whom, as the rescue option was developed, debated, chosen and implemented. In short, using the political process model as a conceptual net to pull through the evidence from the first days of the crisis until the rescue force had withdrawn from its aborted attempt to insert an assault force into Iran, the black box of decision making will be opened up as far as possible to produce the most complete understanding possible of the sequence of events.

Drawing on the evidence presented in Chapters 3 to 6, Chapter 7 will directly address the two fundamental questions posed at the beginning of the study: why the president decided to launch a rescue operation and why the operation failed. It will carefully examine the issues that emerge from the analysis in earlier chapters, identify and assess the key factors which contributed to the decision and the failure and develop political process explanations for both. These explanations will attempt to expose the two-way interaction between political and military-operational decision making that occurred during the entire period between the seizure of the embassy and the failure of the operation. They will highlight not only the ways in which decision making at the military-operational level influenced decision making at the political level, culminating in the president's decision to launch the mission, but also the ways in which decision making at the military-operational level was, in turn, influenced by decision making at the political level, culminating in the failure at Desert One. The most important product of this chapter will be two succinct political process explanations, one for the decision and one for the outcome, which will, in essence, provide a specific interpretation of the rescue attempt.

In short, using the "reconstructed logic" of the model, these five chapters will highlight the key factors that influenced the decision-making process from the first days of the hostage crisis to the point when the rescue mission failed. Taken together, they will explain when and why various options were considered, how and why the rescue option steadily matured and rose on the agenda of key decision makers, why the decision was taken to implement it and why the military operation failed. These chapters will, in other words, tell the political process story of Operation Eagle Claw.

ENDNOTES - CHAPTER TWO

1. Decision makers are particularly likely to make evasive or misleading public statements if they believe that these are justified on grounds of national security. For example, Carter's White House Press Secretary, Jody Powell, gives an excellent account of why and how he used this type of reasoning with respect to the hostage rescue mission (Powell, 1984: 223-240).
2. A good example of this is the way in which our understanding of one of the most thoroughly studied of all foreign policy decisions, the naval blockade of Cuba in 1962, continues to grow. It does so as a result of both additions to our data base about this crisis, most recently the ones made with the help of scholars and officials from the former Soviet Union (Garthoff, 1988), and efforts to re-examine the accumulated data through new conceptual lenses (for example, Herek, Janis and Huth, 1987 and 1989; Welch, 1989; Sylvan and Thorson, 1992).
3. Allison (1971: 147-162) and Art (1974: 434-438) provide good summaries of this early political process-oriented literature. Art, who used the term "first wave" to distinguish this literature from the "second wave" bureaucratic politics approach, includes only Neustadt, Huntington, Schilling and Hilsman in the first wave, but the early work of both Almond and Lindblom clearly fits in this category as well. The brief comments that follow on this "first wave" literature draw on both Art and Allison. Another scholar who is sometimes cited as one of the early writers on political process is Destler (Brenner, 1976; Destler, 1972).
4. Welch's succinct overview of the concept of paradigm that Allison borrows from Merton is excellent. This concept includes "five closely related functions" for paradigms: it provides an explicit and parsimonious arrangement of concepts and the relations between them for use in description and analysis; it helps the analyst to avoid ad hoc or logically inconsistent propositions; it acts as a foundation upon which new theoretical developments can take place; it encourages analysis rather than description by making analysts aware of certain empirical or theoretical problems they might otherwise overlook; and it codifies the logic of qualitative analysis "in a manner approximating the logical, if not the empirical, rigor of quantitative analysis" (Welch, 1992: 114-116).
5. Although Halperin's work was not published until 1974, its influence on the amalgam model was acknowledged by the authors (Allison and Halperin, 1972: 378). At the time that they proposed their joint model, Allison and Halperin, along with other well-known scholars like Richard Neustadt, James Q. Wilson, Earnest May and Stanley Hoffmann, were involved in Harvard University's Research Seminar on Bureaucracy, Politics and Policy (Welch, 1992: 112). In their joint article, Allison and Halperin called their proposed "reconstructed logic" both the "bureaucratic politics paradigm" and the "bureaucratic politics model." As Allison did in his first formulation, they explain their use of "paradigm" by referring to Robert Merton's definition and they state that their use of "model" is interchangeable with "conceptual scheme" or "framework" (1972: 380-382 and 408).
6. Rhodes also finds that outcomes related to the US Navy's budget, procurement choices and force structure can be better explained on the basis of knowledge about the dominant images and ideas of the key decision makers. This leads him to propose an alternative "idea-driven" model of state behaviour. "Contrary to Allison's speculation," he concludes, "perhaps 'the name of the game' is not politics, but the competition of ideas for intellectual hegemony" (Rhodes, 1994: 39-41). Of course, one of the difficulties with this type of "idea-driven" explanation, as Jacobsen points out, is that it fails to recognize that, while perhaps separable for analytic purposes, ideas and interests are inextricably intertwined in the real world (Jacobsen, 1995: 309).

7. In Simon's formulation, to embody actors with "objective rationality" is to consider them capable of responding in a way that optimally adapts their behaviour to the environment in terms of maximizing their utilities and values. Explaining the choices of decision makers in terms of objective rationality requires that we know both their goals and the objective characteristics of the situation. To embody actors with "bounded rationality", on the other hand, is to consider them far more constrained in their ability to achieve optimal behaviour. Actors are still considered goal-oriented and purposive, but their ability to maximize utilities and values is limited by a number of real-world constraints such as organizational and cognitive factors. Explaining the choices of decision makers in terms of "bounded rationality" requires that we know their goals, their subjective understanding of the situation, and their capacity to process information (Simon, 1985).

8. The first signs of a more theoretical dimension to Hilsman's work can be seen as early as 1985, when an expanded version of his earlier work on "politics and the making of public policy" set the stage for his subsequent work on "the policy-making process" (Hilsman, 1971: 1-15 and 1985: 25-49). However, it is only in his most recent work that the self-conscious, theoretical dimension which will be applied in this study has been fully developed (Hilsman, 1987, 1990 and 1993).

9. Hilsman's main contribution to the first-wave literature was entitled To Move a Nation: The Politics of Foreign Policy in the Administration of John F. Kennedy. This brief summary of the political process model is based on the last three editions of his widely-used text, Policy-Making in Defence and Foreign Affairs (1987, 1990 and 1993). Hilsman's focus is primarily, although not exclusively, on decisions but, as this study will show, the political process model is equally useful in explaining outcomes such as the failure of the hostage rescue operation.

10. Dessler highlights the ontological aspects of scientific realism in a way that is relevant to understanding this point. For him, ontology refers to "the concrete referents of an explanatory discourse." It consists, in other words, of "the real-world structures (things, entities) and processes posited by the theory and invoked in its explanation." From this perspective, conceptual models like the political process one "explain by showing how phenomena are the products or aspects of an underlying ontology." Thus, in much the same way that a physicist explains how physical phenomena are products of basic ontological elements like time, distance, mass and velocity, a political scientist explains how political phenomena are products of the basic elements of the conceptual model he uses (Dessler, 1989: 445-448).

11. Although Hilsman does not fully define what he means by power, it is clear that he accepts the pluralist notion of power as influence (Hilsman, 1990: 74-78). Pluralists, who draw on Dahl's well-known definition of power as the ability to get another actor to do something they would otherwise not do, focus on decision-making behaviour to highlight the policy preference of individual decision makers and how these decision makers influence each other to promote their policy preferences (Dahl, 1963: 39-54; Shapiro and Reeher, 1988).

12. The phrase "strain towards agreement", as Hilsman correctly points out, was first used by Schilling (1962: 23). For Allison and Halperin, the shared beliefs of decision makers act as a "constraint" in an essentially bureaucratic process, while for Hilsman they are an equally important characteristic of the decision-making process (Allison and Halperin, 1972: 391-392; Hilsman, 1987: 69-70).

13. This interpretation is based on Hilsman's most recent work (Hilsman: 1987, 1990 and 1993). The political process model he lays out is still quite vague in terms of explicit terminological specification. He uses, for example, "objectives," "goals," "motives" and "interests" almost interchangeably. He also does this with "values," "beliefs," "ideological convictions" and "mind sets", and with "perceptions" and "views." He does not provide definitions for any of these terms. An effort has been made here to tighten up this terminology in order to

add some consistency and precision to the political process model. In this study, "goals" will be used to refer to intentions that decision makers have which are end-directed with respect to the environment. Freeing the hostages, for example, was a primary goal of the Carter administration throughout the hostage crisis. "Beliefs" will be used to refer to relatively constant sets of ideas and thoughts that individuals have concerning the environment, with "values" being used to refer to the more abstract kinds of beliefs that focus on desirable end-states and modes of conduct (Rosati, 1987: 15-17 and 36). Using this distinction, the desire to maintain a peaceful world, for example, is considered a value, while the idea this end was threatened by the hostage crisis is considered a belief. Finally, "perceptions" will be used to refer to the assessments of individuals about the alternative courses of action open in specific circumstances and their possible consequences. These definitions will result in a tighter use of terminology than Hilsman's, but they are entirely compatible with the spirit of his political process model (1993: 76-89).

14. Another way to consider this issue is in terms of the important Hollis-Smith debate. As they frame this debate, the emphasis of Hilsman's model is more on "understanding" than on "explaining." The Weberian or "clouds" type of explanation that his model is designed to facilitate is more consistent with the position of Hollis who favours an approach "which gives most of the bureaucratic game to its players" than it is with the position of Smith "which subordinates the players to the demands of the bureaucratic structure" (Hollis and Smith, 1990: 213). The issue of logic of explanation also raises the epistemological problem of structure versus agency in foreign policy analysis (Wendt, 1987; Dessler, 1989; Carlsnaes, 1992). It is therefore not surprising that the Hollis and Smith debate precipitated another lively Wendt versus Hollis-Smith one (Hollis and Smith, 1991 and 1992; Wendt, 1991 and 1992).

15. There are great differences in the comprehensiveness of the belief systems defined in the various formulations and in the degree of causal importance ascribed to them in determining decisions and outcomes. The most widely cited and researched of the belief systems approaches are the "cognitive map" and "operational code" ones. Development of the cognitive map approach was inspired by the same desire to find nomological-deductive explanations that underpins the bureaucratic politics model. It focuses on a fairly narrow set of beliefs and attempts to provide a full account of decisions (Shapiro and Bonham, 1973; Axelrod, 1976; Cottam 1986). The operational code approach focuses on a broader set of beliefs and ascribes much less causal significance to them (George, 1979; Cottam, 1986). In almost all of these belief systems formulations, some limits to the cognitive capacity of individuals to process information are inherent in the notion of relatively constant beliefs, but organizational limits are given very little, if any, emphasis. Once the beliefs of individual decision makers are taken into account, the decision-making process is assumed to follow rational means-ends logic. It is the beliefs of individuals, in other words, that place the bounds on the degree of rationality involved. Thus, for example, George concludes that "a person's operational code beliefs structure and channel the way in which he copes and deals with the cognitive limits on rationality; they serve to define his particular type of 'bounded rationality'" (George, 1979: 103). One study of beliefs with obvious relevance here is Rosati's study of beliefs and their impact on behaviour during the Carter administration (Rosati, 1987).

16. Taken together, these formulations challenge the notion that a relatively stable system of beliefs can be defined which can serve as a foundation for a consistent, parsimonious explanatory model. Indeed, one of the central thrusts of the work by scholars such as Janis, Jervis and Holsti is to challenge the notion that even the kind of bounded rationality contained in the beliefs system formulations exists in the real world. They attempt to establish, in other words, the real world limits to cognitive performance by foreign policy decision makers. As

such, they pose fundamental problems for those who would wish to pursue a nomological-deductive form of belief systems explanation. At the same time, since their focus is on the individual, they tend to leave the organizational limits to means-ends rationality unexplored. The important exception is Steinbrunner. His early work contains one of the clearest articulations of both organizational and cognitive limitations (Steinbrunner, 1974). Unfortunately, Steinbrunner has not advanced his theoretical work in this area since his initial formulation. David has recently attempted to synthesize the previous literature on cognitive and organizational constraints on rational decision making into a single framework. In his theoretical introduction to his recent work on the fall of the shah and the Iran-Contra affair (1993: 7-47), he proposes four categories of coping mechanisms commonly manifested in individual and group situations: "avoidance" (including procrastination and wishful thinking), "minimalizing" (including satisficing, incrementalism and resort to standard operating procedures and repertoires), "biased search" (including representing parochial interests, bolstering specific alternatives and using historical schema and analogies) and "imposed consistency" (including groupthink and consensus politics).

17. The issue of the risk-taking propensity of decision makers is one which obviously affects decisions and outcomes. Two decision makers could, for example, agree on the degree of risk involved in a particular decision, but disagree on the appropriateness of accepting this level of risk. Thus, for example, some of the behaviour of Napoleon can only be explained if one recognizes that, while his actions were carefully calculated ones, he preferred to take great risks rather than to accept compromise (Rothenberg, 1988: 750; Bueno de Mesquita, 1988: 639).

18. There are two major problems in applying this truism in any practical way. First, reconstruction of the subtle details of a decision maker's cognitive processes involves enormous research and hermeneutic tasks. Attempts to collect and interpret appropriate data have, at least to this point, tended to be epistemologically naive, ignoring the ongoing difficulties in cognitive psychology upon which this work draws (Cottam, 1986: 5-31). Also, in collecting their data, political scientists have tended to base their analysis on highly simplistic data such as public statements (Rosati, 1987; Lamb, 1989). The second problem is that, despite impressive efforts to do so, no causal relationship between cognitive processes and behaviour has been established to date. While some have claimed, in the true spirit of Hempel, that tight cognitive formulations such as cognitive mapping might be used for prediction as well as explanation (Axelrod, 1976: 13-14), these formulations do no better than the tight, "second-wave" political process ones. Most scholars, however, are more cautious in their claims about the explanatory potential of cognitive processes. Thus, for example, George warns that a belief system should not be seen "as a set of rules and recipes to be applied mechanically to the choice of action" because it "influences, but does not unilaterally determine decision making behaviour" (Lamb, 1989: 46). Similarly, in his review of research on the beliefs-behaviour relationship, Rosati concludes that it is a complex and varied one and that its exact nature and strength is still a very open question. His "causal-nexus model" is based on beliefs but, while it recognizes the causal importance of beliefs, it also recognizes the causal importance of many political process factors as well. His explicit objective is to develop a belief systems approach that acts as a corrective to the earlier work on cognitive processes that had nomological-deductive expectations. In essence, his causal-nexus model is intended to move us towards a type of explanation that simply gives more focus to beliefs and less to political process than Hilsman's political process model does (Rosati, 1987).

19. As Allison points out in his review of Hilsman's model, the bureaucratic politics model does recognize "values, personal ties and skills" (Allison, 1987: 524). The key difference is with respect to the weight that the two models allow cognitive factors to have. Clearly, Hilsman's political process model is far more open to cognitive factors having an extremely important impact, perhaps even a determining one in

some cases, on decisions and outcomes, while for Allison their place is in the background.

20. It is interesting to note that in this discussion of conceptual models, although the entire thrust of his work has been to develop a model which performs better than the "black box" geopolitical (rational actor) one, Hilsman is not willing to throw it out. Despite its flaws, he argues, the "geopolitical model is a better tool for analyzing international politics than flipping a coin" (1993: 49). The reason for this, according to Hilsman, is that "the people who act in the name of the state share at least some commitment to state goals and at least some of the time agree on what those goals are and the best means for achieving them" (1993: 107).

21. Rosenau reduced the number of "determinants" to which foreign policy behaviour could be attributed to five: the individual traits of the decision maker, the role which the decision maker played, the decision-making process itself, societal pressures on the decision maker, and the forces which came to bear on the decision maker from the international system. He then advanced a proposal about what the relative weight of these "determinants" might be based on several attributes of the state (fixed in the case of the US) and several different issue areas. The result was a matrix of 48 different categories and therefore 48 different proposals about the relative potency of the five "determinants" (Rosenau, 1966 and 1980; Nossal, 1990: 539-541).

22. Although other scholars using adaptations of Rosenau's pretheory have also advanced proposals about the relative weight of the variables in their particular frameworks (see, for example, Kegley and Wittkopf, 1987: 539-572), the whole area of the potency of variables remains largely untested and speculative (Nossal, 1990: 539-541). The thrust of the work inspired by Rosenau's pretheory is thus similar to the thrust of Hilsman's: it helps the analyst to order facts and concepts into useful and meaningful patterns in order to facilitate the development of explanations, but does not attempt to establish tight nomological-deductive generalizations (Kegley and Wittkopf, 1987: 12).

23. Lukes' account of the dimensions of power highlighted in various definitions and Baldwin's critique of the use of the concept of power in the study of world politics are forceful reminders of the assumptions and limitations inherent in this pluralist view (Lukes, 1974; Baldwin, 1979). Bachrach and Baratz (1962 and 1963), Lukes (1974 and 1986), Jenkins (1982) and others make convincing arguments that "non-decisions" can have the same impact as decisions and that it is therefore important to understand the kinds of things that are left off the agenda as well. However, by embracing a pluralist notion of power, the entire decision-making approach leaves this aspect unaddressed.

24. This limitation is not, of course, unique to the political process model. This aspect of decision making, as Simon points out, has been largely ignored in most of the decision making literature (Simon, 1985: 302-302).

25. In a more in-depth attempt to apply the model to another political system, Hilsman develops explanations for the choices of Saddam Hussein as well as George Bush in his recent study of the Gulf War (1992). However, the study is unique because of the importance it places on the way in which these two men personalized the conflict. "More than any other war in modern history," Hilsman argues, "the Gulf War was a personal struggle between two men" (1992: 225). It is also unique because of the importance it places on the ability of these two men to influence the course of events. In the case of Saddam, given the way in which he had personalized the struggle and the nature of his regime, Hilsman is able to develop explanations for Saddam's actions which are based on his personal goals, beliefs, values and perceptions, leaving other elements in the model, such as organizational inputs and process dynamics, in the background. To support the explanation, he therefore needs only a limited kind of information. This is a highly unique situation which does allow a credible extension of the model to another

political system; on the other hand, without full information about the political process in Iraq, Hilsman's arguments about the reasons for Saddam's choices must be treated with an element of caution.

26. It is interesting to note that Rosenau, whose hope when he proposed his pretheory had been to develop a single framework which would apply across space and time, has more recently called for single-country theoretical efforts. While still insistent that there is a nomothetical context and that use of the comparative method is also vital, he now argues that looking at single countries and developing "single country theories" can make a more immediate contribution and "may even facilitate the construction of more general models" (Rosenau, 1987: 53-55).

27. Like Neustadt, Hilsman sees the main source of the president's power as "the power to persuade." He sees a president sitting at the centre of the process, but having to "persuade, cajole, and prod," to "wheel and deal," and to "broker" by "mediating, trying to work out compromises, bargaining, negotiating, pressuring, threatening, dangling tempting baits and prizes, using both sticks and carrots." In other words, the president must "politik" (1987: 122-126). Two recent studies which together provide an overview of approaches to the issue of presidential leadership are those by Hargrove and Sinclair that appear in the recent volume on researching the presidency edited by Edwards, Kessel and Rochman (1993).

28. Hilsman's earlier work characterizes the political process in terms of concentric rings. At the centre of the various layers of the decision-making process is, of course, the president. The hostage rescue decision is clearly an example of what, in his earlier work, Hilsman called the "closed politics" of the "innermost circle" (Hilsman, 1967: 541-543).

29. The issue of "bureaucratic momentum" is one that has not been dealt with very thoroughly in previous accounts, but is one that must be addressed in developing a political process explanation (Hilsman, 1990: 66-68). In terms of this case, the issue is whether senior military decision makers believed that, in Beckwith's words, "America needed a win" (Jordan, 1982: 262) and were so determined to deliver one that it became inevitable that the rescue option would be used once the decision was made to develop it.

30. In this study, the "political level" will refer to the decision makers who were responsible to the president for offering advice which was broader than military-operational issues. National Security Adviser Brzezinski and Secretary of Defence Brown were the two political-level decision makers on the small "military planning group" (which Brzezinski chaired and which oversaw the rescue planning effort), while Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Jones and Director of Central Intelligence Turner generally operated at the "military-operational level" because their major role was to provide military and intelligence advice. On occasion, they did operate at the political level when they advocated positions at meetings of the military planning group or of the NSC, such as when they recommended that the rescue mission go forward at the key meeting of the NSC on 11 April. Most of the time, however, they operated at the military-operational level in making military or operational decisions and giving direction and support to the Joint Task Force. The members of the Joint Task Force which was assembled to develop the rescue option and its immediate supporting cast, of course, operated exclusively at the military-operational level. Clearly, both the political and military-operational levels are part of the overall process captured by the political process model as it has been adapted for this study. However, for purposes of this study, a distinction is made between the two levels in order to show how they interacted and combined at various points.

31. As mentioned in Chapter 1, in addition to published accounts, this study will draw upon original documentation obtained from the Carter Library and the National Security Archive and on interviews with a

majority of the key decision makers involved in both the decision and the rescue planning and operation (see bibliography). While additional sources of information, such as the National Security Council papers from this period, once they are released, will no doubt add to our understanding over time, this study will push to the limits of the information that can be obtained at this time. This information is sufficient to put together a comprehensive political process explanation, but aspects of it will no doubt have to be refined over the years as more information becomes available.

32. It should be noted that rather than applying his model in the in-depth way that will be attempted here, Hilsman himself has concentrated his effort on the development of succinct explanations for a wide variety of foreign policy events. Thus, by pushing to the limits of the model's potential to develop comprehensive explanations for the rescue decision and outcome, this study will also contribute to our understanding of the strengths and limitations of more in-depth political process explanations. Another useful contribution to the development of the model would be to take a more comprehensive look at the succinct political process explanations Hilsman puts forward to demonstrate how the model works in his various editions of The Politics of Policy Making in Defense and Foreign Affairs (1987, 1990 and 1993). Indeed, examining these cases in greater depth to see if these explanations hold up to more rigorous examination of the evidence might be an effective way to test the validity and reliability of succinct political process explanations. The objective in this study, however, is to examine the explanatory power of the political process model as it is applied in-depth to a case that Hilsman does not address: the hostage rescue decision and operation.

33. At this point the reader may wonder whether the author chose the case or the conceptual approach first, in other words, where the impulse to study Operation Eagle Claw by using Hilsman's political process model first came from. While the author's interest in the decision-making approach to foreign policy analysis clearly preceded his interest in the hostage rescue attempt, the choice of this particular case as the topic for this in-depth study was made prior to any more specific interest in the political process model. After considerable research and reflection about events surrounding the rescue mission, however, the author slowly came to the conclusion that Hilsman's approach was the most suitable one for this case since it would facilitate the kind of examination of the data which the author had already concluded was essential to better explanation. The idea of adapting the model by opening up the black box to include decision-making at the military-operational level as well as decision making at the political level was as much a result of the personal experiences of the author (as a senior officer in the Canadian Forces who has been very close to decision making at the highest levels of the Department of National Defence) as it was a result of academic insight. In any case, the die was cast during the development of the initial proposal for this project. From the perspective of the author, the match of the model and the case has seemed like the right one ever since that initial proposal.

34. There are clearly a number of other approaches that could be taken, completely outside of the decision-making area, that might also advance our understanding of the hostage rescue attempt and of those specific approaches. As the earlier analysis in this chapter has pointed out, there are still many ongoing efforts within the decision-making tradition to establish both tight nomological-deductive models and a variety of looser models and formulations. Clearly, even within this relatively narrow spectrum of specific approaches to foreign policy analysis, one could legitimately choose to make a contribution to the development of a number of different approaches and, at the same time, make a useful contribution to an understanding of the rescue decision and operation as, for example, Lamb has done in the case of the Mayaguez crisis with his excellent study of both the crisis and the "beliefs system" approach (1989). Lamb actually applies four different models in his study of the decisions and outcomes during the Ford Administration's

handling of the Mayaguez crisis: rational actor, bureaucratic politics, crisis resolution (based on an earlier study of the same crisis by Head, Short and McFarlane) and beliefs system. However, after considering all of the models, he concludes that the belief system one produces "the most refined and compelling explanation of the crisis." Unfortunately, since Hilsman had not developed his "reconstructed logic" by the time that Lamb launched his study in the early 1980s, he did not have the option of applying the political process model to the Mayaguez crisis (Lamb, 1989: xi-xv and 172-240).

35. In this regard, it is important to realize that Carter stood at the intersection of his foreign and domestic policy situations at the time and it is therefore important to sketch out, at least in a general way, the major difficulties confronting him on the domestic front. While Wildavski's "two presidencies" thesis (1975) is a useful way to separate different aspects of the presidency for analytical purposes in some cases, the president is, in reality, a single decision maker who stands at the centre of a single political system. In order to assess the pressures on the president in the manner that will be done in this study, it is therefore essential to set the stage in a way that takes this reality into account.

36. Glad correctly points out that the hostage episode was not a crisis in the way that it is usually defined to include "a major threat to central values" and "a need to act in a short period of time." The hostage experience "was not a true crisis", she argues, "in that US national security was never seriously threatened, nor were there ever clear indications that the United States must act within a few hours or days to save the values that were being threatened - i.e., the lives of the hostages." She nevertheless refers to the issue as the "hostage crisis" because it was "the way it was experienced at the time" and it did result in "a major national loss - i.e., of honour - even after the hostages were returned safely several months later" (Glad, 1989: 36). It is in this looser sense that the word crisis will be used in this study. Carter himself uses the word to describe the whole ordeal in his memoirs (Carter, 1983: 457-522) and is quite emphatic that it was a crisis in a narrated video presentation at the Carter Library. Perhaps even more revealing about the mood of the Carter administration at the time, Jordan's account of this period is entitled Crisis: The Last Year of the Carter Presidency.

37. The military planning group also included Jones' Assistant, Lieutenant General John Pustay, and Brzezinski's Military Assistant, Colonel William Odom. It was responsible for reviewing all of the military options on a regular basis but, particularly as the hostage crisis went into 1980, increasingly focused on the rescue option (Brzezinski, 1983; Sick, 1985; Turner, 1991; Brzezinski, Turner, Jones, Pustay and Odom interviews).

CHAPTER THREE - THE BASIC POLITICAL CONTEXT

The hostage crisis began with the seizure of the American Embassy in Tehran on 4 November 1979 and was resolved with the return of all remaining hostages 444 days later, minutes after Ronald Reagan was sworn in as the fortieth president on 21 January 1981. Throughout this period, which covered the final year before the 1980 election and the transition period following Carter's decisive electoral defeat, the Carter administration's efforts to resolve the hostage crisis were relentless; and the rescue attempt launched on 24 April 1980 was one of the specific ways in which it tried to do so. Indeed, obtaining the release of the hostages became one of the central preoccupations of this administration and, for well over a year, the issue absorbed an enormous amount of the time and energy of key decision makers, including the president.

Seen in historical perspective, the hostage crisis began during a period in which the administration confronted serious difficulties with both its domestic and foreign policies and in which tensions and divisions within the administration were mounting. This chapter will situate the basic political context at the intersection of the evolving international and domestic political realities at the time of the seizure of the embassy. It will begin by briefly tracing the rise and fall of Carter's political fortunes, from the electoral campaign in 1976 to the point where the hostage crisis began in late 1979. It will then outline, in turn, the central domestic and foreign policy issues faced by the president and his inner circle of advisers at the time, highlighting the most serious problems that developed within the decision-making process and the ways in which the administration reacted to them.

As an overview of a period of more than a thousand days after the Carter administration took office, this chapter will necessarily cover vast territory. The breadth of the subject matter and the volume of the issues raised will therefore not permit a detailed application of the political process model. Rather, the approach will be to provide a brief overview of the decline of the administrations's political fortunes and the major problems it had encountered with its domestic and foreign policy programs by the fall of 1979, and then to highlight some key themes which stand out as factors which contributed to the administration's problems at this point and which will be relevant when the political process explanations are developed in later chapters. The purpose of the chapter

is to lay out the essential background and examine the basic political context, with a particular emphasis on process issues, in order to facilitate an immediate and sharp focus in later chapters on the dynamics of the decision-making process between the seizure of the embassy and the failure of the rescue operation. Together with the next chapter, which will focus on more specific issues of substance and process related to US-Iran relations prior to the hostage crisis, this chapter will set the stage for the direct and detailed application of the political process model to Operation Eagle Claw.

The Decline of Carter's Political Fortunes

Jimmy Carter was elected on 2 November 1976 as the thirty-ninth president, edging out incumbent Gerald Ford in an electoral college vote that was the closest in over sixty years. The campaign that brought him to the White House took place at a time when the Watergate scandal, which forced the resignation of Richard Nixon in 1974, and the US failure in Vietnam, symbolized by the fall of Saigon in 1975, were casting extremely heavy shadows over the political system in the US. Many Americans felt betrayed by the executive branch which had led them to such a tragic, expensive and unnecessary foreign policy failure; and an increasing number believed that dishonesty and illegal activity had become the standard tools of operation for an increasingly "imperial presidency." Above all else, Carter's appeal in the 1976 campaign was based on his ability to articulate and represent the pervasive dissatisfaction with the Washington establishment that had swept the country. To many Americans he stood as a symbol of fresh leadership and personal integrity (Spencer, 1988 19-33; Gillon, 1992: 163-165; Kaufman, 1993: 5-36).¹

Since Carter saw the main problem facing the nation as one of immoral leadership and spiritual disintegration, his drive for the presidency took on many of the characteristics of a spiritual crusade. His project, he declared, was nothing less than to sweep aside the old order, whose self-serving excesses and moral bankruptcy had led to Vietnam and Watergate, and replace it with an entirely new one. As a nationally unknown, one-term former Governor of Georgia, his drive to capture the presidency was one of the most unexpected and dramatic political events in US history. Although, particularly as it began to build momentum following the early primaries, his campaign was increasingly backed and counselled by influential opinion leaders and establishment figures, it was essentially a grass roots one that almost completely bypassed the

traditional power brokers within the Democratic Party; and his appeal rested not only on his novelty and claims to personal integrity, but also on his ability to project an image of someone capable of making the kind of simple choices that many Americans felt were needed: between yes and no; between good and bad; and between right and wrong. The key ingredient in his success throughout 1976 was thus Carter's ability to sustain a "symbolic crusade" rather than an issue-oriented campaign (Spencer, 1988: 19-33; Glad, 1980: 305-322; Gillon, 1992: 163-179; Kaufman, 1993: 5-18).²

Carter did, of course, take some specific positions during the 1976 campaign. On the domestic front, he called for an ambitious program that included, among other things, a new energy policy, welfare reform, a balanced budget, tax simplification and executive branch reorganization. However, most of these promises were purposely kept vague and the main thrust of his campaign strategy was simply to project the image of an honest and capable decision maker who, as an outsider unencumbered by the sins of the past, was capable of imposing new standards of conduct in Washington and bringing in new people with new ideas. Indeed, he promised during the campaign, "I'll never lie to you ... never make a misleading statement ... never betray your trust." Moreover, promised Carter's campaign chairman, Hamilton Jordan, "You're going to see new faces, new ideas. The government is going to be run by people you never heard of" (Gillon, 1992: 164; Spencer, 1988: 25-27).³

In the area of foreign policy, Carter called for a broad agenda for action which de-emphasized East-West relations and placed more emphasis on relations with the third world. He also pledged to negotiate a treaty with Panama on the future of the Panama Canal, a new arms control agreement with the Soviet Union and solutions to regional conflicts, especially in the Middle East. Although the positions he took on foreign policy issues tended to be more specific than the positions he took on domestic policy ones, the most effective thrust of his strategy was again simply to project an image of honesty and high moral standards of conduct. One campaign promise that stood out in this regard was the one to commit the US to the cause of human rights around the globe. Consistent with his vision of a post-Vietnam, post-Watergate domestic order, Carter argued that the US deserved a foreign policy "as good and honest and decent and truthful and fair and compassionate - and filled with love - as the American people are" (Spencer, 1988: 31).

Many of his more specific campaign pledges, such as his commitments to balance the budget without sacrificing either social programs or

defence, to bring inflation and unemployment under control simultaneously, and to arrest the growth of the defence budget while improving the capabilities of the armed forces embodied obvious tensions within them (Gillon, 1992: 164). What explains his success, however, was that his basic appeal transcended the immediate issues. In essence, he asked voters to take his ability to lead the US as an act of faith, and this strategy proved to be a successful one as a winning coalition was built around the profound and broadly-based dissatisfaction with the status quo.

By election day, Carter's symbolic crusade had lost some of its lustre, with the wide lead that he had held for most of the campaign having all but disappeared. Nevertheless, despite his narrow victory over Ford, a high level of public support and great expectations accompanied Carter when he arrived in the White House in January 1977. Polls during his first two months in office showed an approval rating in the 70-75% range and growing optimism in the public's attitudes about government. However, both Carter's standing and this optimism eroded very quickly, and his administration would never again have the level of public support that it started with (Glad, 1980: 409; Reichart, 1990: 616; Edwards: 1990: 75-90; Hill and Williams, 1984: 1).⁴

One of the immediate problems created for Carter by his symbolic campaign, the tensions in the substance of his specific proposals and his narrow margin of victory, was that there was no broad consensus on the specific mandate that had been given to his administration. Nevertheless, the new administration moved steadily forward in pursuit of what proved to be extremely ambitious agendas in the areas of domestic and foreign policy. As it did this, serious problems appeared in both the substance of the administration's policies and in the political process put in place to pursue them (Glad, 1980: 413; Yarbrough, 1984: 174-178; Spencer, 1988: 29).⁵

As the administration moved forward with its substantive policy agenda, Carter's popularity steadily declined. As early as mid-1978, a strong majority of Americans felt that Carter was uncertain, indecisive and unsure of himself, had no clear-cut program for moving the country ahead, and lacked strong leadership qualities. His approval rating at that point had already fallen to around 40%. By mid-1979, polls indicated widespread disapproval of the administration's handling of the economy (Edwards, 1990: 133-134 and 168; Gillon, 1992: 254). After a brief rise following the announcement of the Camp David Accords in September 1978, Carter's approval rating fell to around the 30% level in the six-month

period immediately preceding the seizure of the embassy in Tehran. With the exception of Nixon's last few months before his resignation, this was the lowest approval rating of any president in over twenty-five years (Edwards, 1990: 165-169; Brace and Hinckly, 1992: 21).⁶

Carter's relationship with the media deteriorated rapidly after his first few months in office, especially after a public inquiry into Bert Lance's record as a private banker forced him to resign from his position as Director of the Office of Management and Budget. Lance was a close friend of Carter's and his resignation dealt a significant blow to the president's reputation and prestige (Neustadt, 1990: 249-257).⁷ By late 1977, a negative attitude was already evident in the media, one which steadily hardened over the next few years. By late 1979, Carter was widely criticized for his lack of vision and leadership qualities, as well as for his lack of clear and consistent policy objectives and coherent decision-making process (Rozell, 1989: 113-155). Political cartoonists reinforced these perceptions by depicting him as "a diminutive, continually perplexed, and foolishly grinning figure" (Reichart, 1990: 616).

Meanwhile, Carter's legislative program ran into extremely tough opposition in Congress. During the election, Democratic candidates in both the House and the Senate had run ahead of Carter in virtually every region of the country, creating a sense that they owed nothing to the president and were free to pursue their own agenda (Yarbrough, 1984: 175). From the outset, the administration was constantly criticized by influential members of Congress, political commentators and the media for its hasty preparation of complex and controversial proposals without adequate consultations, for its failure to develop public support for these proposals and for its unwillingness to compromise with legislators (Rozell, 1989: 9). The early consensus on Capital Hill was that the entire administration, especially the president, was inept in its dealings with Congress (Gillon, 1992: 191). By late 1979, the administration's support on Capitol Hill had eroded to a new low with key members of Congress from both parties taking a completely confrontational approach to the administration's legislative agenda (Neustadt, 1990: 238; Reichart, 1990: 610; Rozell, 1989: 140; Gillon, 1992: 269).

Relations within the Democratic Party also became severely strained. If there was one point of consensus within the party, it was that Carter had failed in his role as party leader (McClesky and McClesky, 1984). Particularly in the aftermath of the 1978 mid-term elections, in which the

Republicans made significant gains, increasing numbers of Democrats openly complained about the performance of the White House. By late 1979, the unity of the party was under severe stress, especially from the liberal wing, and there were growing expectations that Senator Edward Kennedy would oppose the president for the nomination of the party in 1980. Indeed, many Democrats openly called for Carter to withdraw from the race (Glad, 1980: 450-458; Gillon, 1992: 207 and 269).

Although the next election was still a full year away at the time of the seizure of the embassy, the political fortunes of Jimmy Carter had clearly taken a decisive turn for the worse. Charges that he was inept and incapable of providing the leadership necessary to formulate and implement effective policies and programs were being heard with increasing regularity and strength. Polls among Democrats showed him trailing Senator Kennedy and national polls showed him behind likely Republican challengers. Confidence in his ability to lead the country had eroded so dramatically that it was widely believed he would not be able to recover and be reelected (Glad, 1980: 450-458; Lankevich, 1981: 49 and 125; Rozell, 1989: 140).⁸

The reasons for this dramatic decline in Carter's political fortunes are complex and beyond the scope of this study. Clearly they went beyond the performance of the administration to include, among other things, the increasingly assertive mood of Congress, the critical approach of the media, infighting within the Democratic Party and, perhaps most significantly, a major shift to the right in public attitudes. Whatever the reasons, the important point here is that by late 1979 this decline in Carter's popularity had become a central issue for the president and his inner circle of political advisers (Carter, 1982: 114-120).⁹

The administration was embattled at this point, but it had not given up; indeed, it was fighting back forcefully and trying to turn things around in a number of ways. Carter intended to seek reelection and therefore recognized the need to improve his standing with the American public.¹⁰ The period immediately preceding the hostage crisis was therefore one of considerable regrouping for the administration as several substantive changes in personnel, policy and process were made. The main adjustments were in the area of domestic policy, but the first signs of a major reorientation of the administration's foreign policy were also beginning to emerge.

The Domestic Policy Program Runs Into Trouble

By the time that the hostages were seized on 4 November 1979, the administration's effort to push forward with domestic policy initiatives had lost almost all of its early momentum.¹¹ Despite the Democratic majority in both the Senate and the House, the administration soon experienced enormous difficulties in getting its legislative initiatives through Congress and by late 1979 was regrouping from a major reorganization of the Cabinet and White House and a major reorientation of its policy in a number of areas. At the outset, despite his campaign promise to bring "new faces, new ideas" into the administration, Carter's appointments to the various departments and agencies were mostly well-known, establishment figures (Shroup, 1980: 103-111).¹² In the area of domestic policy, the key Cabinet-level ones were James Schlesinger (Energy), Michael Blumenthal (Treasury) and Joseph Califano (HEW). Within the Executive Office, especially in the White House, Carter appointed many fellow Georgians, most of them young and with no experience in Washington (Ayres, 1984: 144-147).¹³ The key ones with responsibility for domestic policy issues were Stuart Eizenstat as Assistant for Domestic Affairs and Policy, Frank Moore as Assistant for Congressional Liaison and Bert Lance as Director of the Office of Management and Budget. As vice president, Walter Mondale also played an important advisory role on domestic policy issues (Gillon, 1992: 163-181).¹⁴ At the same time, Carter did not appoint a Chief of Staff. While Hamilton Jordan was always the most influential White House aide or "first among equals," Carter made a deliberate effort to move away from the centralized way in which his predecessors, especially Nixon, had organized their decision-making process. He therefore consciously tried to adopt a "spokes-in-the-wheel" model of decision making, in which his key domestic policy advisers, including the members of his Cabinet, had direct, unfiltered access to him. He chose this highly decentralized decision making process not only because he wanted to create a post-Vietnam, post-Watergate climate of openness, but also because it was consistent with his general style of leadership (Ayres, 1984: 146-151; Mondale, 1990: 140).¹⁵ The result was that, in the area of domestic policy, Carter essentially acted as his own Chief of Staff.

Carter immediately placed the energy issue at the centre of his domestic policy agenda. The objectives of the administration's program were to reduce US dependence on foreign oil, decrease demand through conservation and establish a federal Department of Energy. For Carter,

the energy issue became "the moral equivalent of war" and he was fully engaged in the development of policy options and in efforts to implement his preferred ones, but with only limited success. After a protracted battle with Congress in which the president's initial proposals were significantly altered, the National Energy Act was passed in late 1978. Given the personal investment of the president and the confrontational approach that his administration had taken with Congress, the final product was widely seen more in terms of what had been rejected than in terms of what had passed. Moreover, throughout 1979, energy problems continued to dictate the full engagement of the president, with long lineups for gasoline in many parts of the US due to shortages caused by the Iranian revolution and the OPEC decision to increase world oil prices. In a July 1979 address to the nation, now known as his "crisis of confidence" speech, Carter emphasized the need to overcome what he believed was a crisis of confidence in order to address the continuing energy crisis. Meanwhile, his battle with Congress, which he would later characterize as an "exhausting fight" continued throughout 1979, particularly over oil import fees which Congress eventually rejected (Carter, 1982: 91-124; Hill, 1984: 17-18).¹⁶

By November 1979, another centrepiece of the domestic policy agenda, welfare reform, had essentially been abandoned. After a year-long effort to put together a comprehensive reform package and steer it through Congress, it became clear that comprehensive legislation would not be passed and the administration therefore decided to seek a more limited, compromise solution. However, even this limited effort quickly ran into trouble and, in the end, only a few pieces of highly specific and limited legislation were passed. By late 1979, it was obvious that the administration's entire attempt to overhaul the welfare system had been an unambiguous and complete failure (Hill, 1984: 19-22).

Meanwhile, the administration's proposals for a national health insurance plan and new urban policy never really got off the ground. In light of the difficulties it was facing, the administration switched its focus in 1978 from health insurance to getting a hospital-cost containment bill passed. Despite the personal involvement of the president in putting this limited proposal forward as a key element of his anti-inflationary program, this initiative was defeated in Congress for the second time in November 1979. Similarly, although the administration essentially abandoned its efforts to pursue a comprehensive approach to urban policy, its attempts at even limited reform in this area had to be abandoned when

it shifted its priority to domestic expenditure cuts in 1979 (Hill, 1984: 22-23).

Throughout this period, the state of the economy acted as a major constraint in the domestic policy program. The initial economic objectives of the administration were to reduce unemployment, move towards a balanced budget and reduce the federal government's share of expenditure in Gross National Product (GNP).¹⁷ There were some initial reasons for optimism. Unemployment, the budget deficit and the federal government proportion of GNP and unemployment all began to decline during the first year. By 1978, however, things were clearly beginning to go wrong, with inflation and interest rates both edging into double digits. Despite efforts by the administration to address this problem, inflation accelerated, interest rates continued to rise and the dollar declined to a point where there were serious concerns about the possibility of a currency crisis. By mid-1979, double-digit inflation had become the number one domestic political issue (Woolcock, 1984: 36-44; Gillon, 1992: 205). The administration responded by shifting its economic focus almost entirely to the inflation problem, but there was widespread scepticism about its ability to manage the problem. To many Americans, the administration appeared to be always one step behind the harsh economic realities.

In mid-1979, in a major monetary policy reversal, the administration attempted to reduce inflation and avert a currency crisis through far tighter control of the money supply, deliberately precipitating a brief recession.¹⁸ Despite this sharp policy shift, interest rates continued to climb, high rates of inflation persisted, and the size of the deficit began to increase. The administration was thus caught up in a reactive cycle of events in which the performance of the economy had become the overwhelming priority of its domestic policy agenda. Meanwhile, proposals for tax reform that the administration finally put forward as part of the 1979 budget, which were strikingly modest in comparison to the major tax reforms that been promised during the campaign, were simply swept aside by Congress (Woolcock, 1984: 43-48).

In short, by late 1979, the administration had abandoned its preferred, comprehensive approach to the domestic policy agenda and was experiencing severe difficulties in bringing price stability and sustaining growth in the US economy. With an election year not far away, the domestic policy program was clearly in trouble. To a growing number of Americans, it appeared that this administration was simply not capable

of the kinds of consultations, coalition-building and leadership that were required to pursue effectively its own domestic policy agenda. This image of ineffectiveness in dealing with the major domestic problems confronting the nation clearly overshadowed the limited achievements of the administration to this point, such as its partial successes in the area of energy policy and reducing the federal deficit (Hill, 1984: 29-31). Confronted with this reality, the president launched a number of initiatives to try to turn things around in the months immediately prior to the hostage crisis. Before examining these initiatives, however, it is important to take a look at some of the factors which contributed to the problems the administration had to deal with at this point.

Some Contributing Factors: Philosophy, Style and Process

The reasons why Carter's domestic policy program ran into such serious trouble are complex and likely to be debated for many years to come (Reichard, 1990). Some of the factors involved, such as the energy crisis brought on by the Iranian Revolution and OPEC price hikes, structural problems with the US economy, the assertive mood of Congress, the suspicious attitude of the media and the public about the authority and activities of the executive branch, and the increasingly conservative mood taking hold across the nation, were all largely beyond the immediate control of the administration. Other factors, such as the substance of the administration's specific policy proposals and the way in which it tried to advance them, were the complete responsibility of the administration. For purposes of this study, there are three factors which contributed to Carter's difficulties and over which he did exercise some control that are especially noteworthy and relevant to the application of the political process model in later chapters: his philosophy of the role of the presidency, his personal style of leadership and his whole approach to political process.

The philosophy that underpinned Carter's whole approach to the role of the presidency can be seen most clearly in his troubled relationship with Congress. The substance of his initial agenda of domestic policy proposals tended to alienate both liberals and conservatives. Conservatives tended to oppose these proposals because of their ambitious and comprehensive nature and liberals believed that they were far too fiscally conservative. It was therefore virtually certain that these proposals would run into difficulties in Congress. Nevertheless, Carter consistently considered his role to be one of a "trustee" who is

responsible for representing the public and national interest, not for brokering deals with Congress and outside interest groups (Jones, 1988).¹⁹

In light of the difficulties that the administration experienced with Congress, many analysts have concluded that Carter simply did not understand that presidential success depends on using the power to persuade to the fullest (Hill and Williams, 1984: 1-10). This impression is reinforced by the public statements of key legislators such as House Speaker Tip O'Neill, who has written that Carter never really understood "the politics of Washington" or "how the system worked" (O'Neill, 1987: 297) and Senate Majority Leader Robert Byrd, who has complained about Carter's "ineffective lobbying" and his "insensitivity to the legislative process" (Glad, 1980: 426). Nevertheless, a characterization that is more consistent with the overall evidence is that Carter believed his proper role was to remain essentially above the system of bargaining, to take a comprehensive, national approach to the toughest issues while downplaying, as much as possible, short-term political considerations. He considered Congress far too oriented toward short-term considerations and far too dominated by special interests. In his memoirs he describes the attitude of even his fellow Democrats in Congress as one of "competition rather than cooperation with the White House." He did meet frequently and extensively with congressional leaders on many issues, but more to explain his proposals than it was to bargain (Carter, 1982: 66-73). Indeed, throughout his entire four years in office, his consistent objective in his meetings with legislators was to lobby them to vote for his preferred policy option, not to exchange views and work with them to develop politically-expedient compromises (Jones, 1988; Hargrove, 1988; Gillon, 1992). The fundamental assumption underlying this whole trustee approach was, of course, that the executive could produce better policy options than an executive-legislative bargaining process (Hargrove, 1988: 1-32).²⁰ It was thus inevitable that Carter's trustee philosophy would lead him into an intense struggle with Congress.

Another important dimension to Carter's handling of domestic policy issues was his issue-oriented, problem-solving style of leadership. Carter took personal responsibility for the toughest issues, such as the development of an energy policy and the fight against inflation. In essence, he became engaged in "issue politics" in these selected areas. His objective was to set good policy directions by exercising issue rather than institutional leadership, and to do so he educated himself thoroughly at the level of detail on these issues (Young, 1988). Perhaps at least in

part because of his background as an engineer, his view of leadership frequently consisted of hard work and careful analysis and management of the technical aspects of the problem (Richard, 1990: 605; Mondale, 1990: 224).²¹ It also consisted of a willingness to take tough decisions when this hard work and careful analysis produced a policy prescription that had political risks or costs (Gillon, 1992: 202-256).²²

One of the results of this issue-oriented, problem-solving style of leadership, however, was that the president did not stand back and set overall priorities. When he became fully engaged in one of "his issues," as he did, for example, in the formulation of energy policy, it placed extremely heavy demands on his time. This left him with little time to devote to other aspects of the domestic policy program or to look at the entire program at a more macro-level with a view to setting priorities and maximizing his overall effectiveness. The result was that the priorities of the administration were set in the ad hoc sense of following Carter's personal involvements, rather than through balanced analysis of what initiatives could and should be attempted and of what the scope and timing of them should be. The impact of this was particularly negative with respect to Congress, since the administration literally overwhelmed legislators with a complex array of domestic policy proposals without establishing any clear priorities to guide them in their work (Hill and Williams, 1985: 7).

Another important aspect of his personal leadership style was that Carter eschewed the traditional backroom wheeling-and-dealing scene in Washington, one in which pork-barrel politics and logrolling were established parts of the culture (Yarbrough, 1984: 178-184). In some ways he was not even a politician. In a perceptive comment just prior to the 1976 election, Carter's close friend and mentor, Charles Kirbo, predicted that "as president he will do what he thinks is right, whether it is popular or not, and, if elected, he may be a one-term president" (Hargrove, 1988: 1). Indeed, as Mondale observed years later, Carter thought that wheeling-and-dealing politics was "sinful." According to Mondale, "The worst thing you could say to Carter if you wanted to do something was that it was politically the best thing to do" (Gillon, 1992: 201; Mondale, 1990: 243).²³

In another way, Carter was highly political. Seeing himself as trustee of the public good and national interest, he considered his audience the American public, not their narrowly-focused Congressional representatives or the special-interest groups in Washington. While

rejecting the politics of Washington, he was more than willing to play politics directly with the US public. Thus, for example, he made several appeals directly to the public to support his energy program, such as his July 1979 "crisis of confidence." This speech was a highly political act intended to create an aura of crisis and renewal with a national audience. Thus, at this level, Carter was intimately involved in high-risk efforts to lead and to gain the support of the US public (Glad, 1980: 444-447). Moreover, in late 1979, with Kennedy's candidacy looming on the horizon, Carter "was engaged in an extraordinary public show of the insider's muscle" to collect the endorsements of the local Democratic leadership across the country (Glad: 1980: 457). In short, while Carter's leadership style was a pragmatic, problem-solving one in Washington, he was clearly willing to play politics with the American people. The problem for the administration's domestic program was that this approach was not working. With the president's popularity so low, it was simply not possible to bypass the politics of Washington and impose this kind of issue-oriented, problem-solving approach on Congress.

The domestic policy program revealed some serious flaws in the way that the White House was organized and staffed. The decentralized spokes-in-the-wheel model was clearly the central problem,²⁴ but the poor match between some individuals and their jobs, especially Jordan and Moore, and the inexperience of the entire staff in the politics of Washington also contributed to the coordination problems, communications breakdowns and general appearance of dysfunction that emerged. To a lesser extent, cultural clashes between the establishment in Washington and the "Georgia mafia" and the highly critical attitude of the press also played a role, especially with respect to the appearance of disarray that plagued the White House from the outset (Ayres, 1984: 144-160; Pfiffner, 1988: 23-30).²⁵

Finally, the domestic policy program resulted in significant tensions between the White House and the executive departments and agencies. Early in the administration, Carter made a sincere attempt to "restore the Cabinet to its proper role as the president's first circle of advisers" (Califano, 1981: 26-27). He initially gave the members of his Cabinet considerable authority to choose their subordinates, to administer their bureaucracies and to make policy except in those areas in which his own level of involvement ruled this out (Marchand 1984: 193-195). This gave the Cabinet members considerable independence, but at the price of immediate friction with the White House. Before long, key members of the

White House staff objected to the decentralized way in which senior appointments in the bureaucracies were made and to the control that these bureaucracies had over their agenda (Pfiffner, 1988: 83; Friedman, 1992).²⁶ Tensions increased as substantive policy differences emerged, such as Califano's opposition to the creation of a Department of Education and Blumenthal's opposition to comprehensive tax reform (Pfiffner, 1988: 66), creating not only an image of indecisiveness and disorganization, but also mounting pressures for change (Rozell, 1989: 71-112). In mid-1978, Carter took the first concrete steps to move towards a major realignment of responsibilities, giving Jordan additional responsibilities for coordinating appointments and the policy-planning process and moving to improve the image of the White House by bringing in Anne Wexler as Assistant for Public Liaison and creating new positions for Gerald Rafshoon (Assistant for Communications) and Tim Kraft (Assistant for Political Affairs and Personnel). Nevertheless, the frictions within the executive and the image problem persisted, contributing to the growing difficulties that the administration was experiencing in the area of domestic policy (Ayres, 1984: 148; Marchand, 1984: 194-195; Pfiffner, 1988: 55-57).

The 1979 Attempt to Turn Things Around

By mid-1979, the president was ready for a major shakeup. In early July, with his popularity at a new low and gasoline shortages resulting in long lineups at service stations in many parts of the country, he cancelled a scheduled speech to the nation on energy policy and began a serious reassessment of his administration (Carter, 1982: 114-121). Although the immediate issue was energy, he recognized that his whole domestic policy program was in trouble and, indeed, the credibility and effectiveness of his administration needed to be improved. Over a period of ten days, he examined the issues with a steady flow of visitors at Camp David, including elected representatives and officials from all levels of government, business leaders, economists, academics, energy experts, religious leaders and his inner circle of political advisers. The cancellation of the speech and this highly visible retreat to consultations at Camp David were vintage Jimmy Carter. He essentially returned to the populist style that had brought him to the White House, turning away from the formal machinery of government to engage in a highly personal, problem-solving exercise. This unprecedented display of presidential self-examination created an atmosphere of crisis and was

"good politics" in that it effectively set the stage for his subsequent effort to reorganize his administration and refocus the nation. At the same time, however, it was a "high-risk venture," one which caused immediate instabilities in the global currency market and raised the expectations of the US public that something decisive would be done (Glad, 1980: 444-446).

At the end of this process, one hundred million Americans watched Carter deliver his "crisis of confidence" speech from the oval office (Rozell, 1989: 128-131).²⁷ In it, he spoke about the loss of confidence Americans were experiencing in their institutions and in their ability to solve the serious problems confronting them and about the "paralysis and stagnation and drift" in Washington. He called for a new spirit of "common purpose" and "all-out effort" to overcome these difficulties, including the energy problem. The speech was "quintessential Jimmy Carter" (Glad, 1980: 446), in which he returned to some of the themes that had been so successful for him during the 1976 campaign, casting himself as a victim of the isolation and inaction in Washington rather than as a central player. He concluded the speech by characterizing the energy issue as "the immediate test of our ability to unite this nation" and arguing that the nation could win back its confidence and regain control of its own destiny on "the battlefield of energy" (Lankevich, 1981: 125-128). The next day, in another speech in Kansas City, he outlined his new energy policy proposals which were focused primarily on reducing oil imports and creating alternative supplies. In retrospect, it was a sincere and focused effort by a beleaguered president to rally the nation to address an issue he was intimately involved in, as well as to improve the fortunes of his administration, and the immediate responses of both the media and the public were generally supportive (Carter, 1982: 181; Rozell, 1989: 131-135).²⁸

Another major thrust in Carter's efforts to turn things around for his administration following his meetings at Camp David was to make major changes to his Cabinet and the White House. Two days after his "crisis of confidence" speech, he asked all members of the Cabinet to offer their resignations, and over the following few days, he accepted five of them, including those of Califano, Blumenthal and Schlesinger.²⁹ The main reasons in the cases of Califano and Blumenthal were that the president had concluded that they were pursuing their own agendas with too much independence and were, conversely, not working closely enough with the White House. He also believed that they had been ineffective in getting

key parts of their programs through Congress. He considered Schlesinger, on the other hand, to have "exhausted his usefulness" in his previous struggles with Congress on energy issues (Carter, 1982: 116-117; Kaufman, 1993: 133-150).

Whatever the validity of Carter's assessment of the situation, the reaction to what became known as the "July Massacre" was immediate and critical, with the media generally portraying him as having dismissed some of the members of his team that were the most capable in an "ill-timed and desperate attempt to restore a beleaguered presidency" (Rozell, 1989: 136-140). Even some of the departing members of the Cabinet were critical of the president. Blumenthal, for example, criticized the administration for its lack of consistency in economic policy while Brock Adams, outgoing Secretary of Transportation, in direct reference to Carter's return to the populist anti-Washington rhetoric of 1976, pointed out that Carter was trying to run against the very establishment he was supposed to lead: "there's a difference between campaigning and governing," he said, "you can't govern being against government" (Glad, 1980: 448). In his memoirs Carter admits that he "handled the Cabinet changes very poorly" (Carter, 1982: 121). With the timing and methods chosen, it was inevitable that these changes would be seen as part of an ongoing crisis within the administration.

At the White House, the most significant change was to appoint Jordan as Chief of Staff. Carter still gave other senior staff and Cabinet members liberal access to his office, but this reorganization established, for the first time, a system below the level of the president to provide cohesion, filter detail, set priorities and settle disputes. At the same time, more than 85 other changes were made within the White House staff, although most of these were at the lower levels. At the senior level, the key ones included the appointment of Jack Watson as Deputy Chief of Staff and Lloyd Cutler as Counsel to the President. Hedley Donovan, Editor-in-Chief of Time, was also brought in as "Senior Presidential Advisor" (Ayres, 1984: 147-150; Donovan, 1985: 149-154). While these changes were in response to virtually unanimous and clear advice to "bring in some more mature and substantive people" that had been given by those Carter had consulted at Camp David, they did not go very far (Carter, 1982: 117). They did not, for example, result in changes at the top of either the congressional liaison or press offices, despite the grave difficulties in these areas."

These changes left even greater responsibility in the hands of the tight inner circle of Georgians, particularly in the hands of Jordan whose talents were far more suited to electoral campaigns than to playing a central administrative role in Washington (Ayres, 1984: 152-154). Moreover, the overall effect of the Cabinet changes and White House reorganization was to tighten the president's control over the executive departments and agencies by centralizing more decision-making authority in the White House (Hill, 1984: 29). It was therefore inevitable that the whole effort would be generally characterized in negative terms as a "tightening of the reins of the 'Georgia Mafia' in the administration" (Rozell, 1989: 136-140). To many critics, Carter was "promoting his problems and firing his solutions" (Glad, 1980: 448). The overall effect of this mid-1979 reorganization was thus to undermine the initial positive reaction to the "crisis of confidence" speech.

The next few months were a period of adjustment and consolidation as the announced changes took place. During this period the administration made an effort to reduce its domestic policy agenda and to focus the president's involvement in a few selected areas (Hill, 1984: 29). Elements of the domestic policy program that had been central in earlier plans, including welfare reform, urban policy initiatives and health care reform were deliberately placed on the back burner to allow him to do this. Despite this reduced agenda and sharper focus, by early November his new energy policy proposals had bogged down in Congress and a new round of inflation was causing the Federal Reserve Board to launch a harsh monetarist strategy to deal with it (Hargrove, 1988: 101-102). Throughout this July-November period, Carter's approval rating remained around the 30% mark (Edwards, 1990: 85-86). Moreover, the relationship of the administration with Congress showed no signs of improvement and its relationship with the media continued to deteriorate, with an increasing number of journalists beginning to focus on the "failing presidency" theme and starting to assess the president's actions very critically in the context of his political ambitions for a second term (Rozell, 1989: 140-144).³¹ All of this made it increasingly likely that there would be challenges to his renomination from within the Democratic Party (Glad, 1982: 451).

In short, by late 1979, the administration was embattled, but was fighting back to improve both its performance and its standing with the US public. The Camp David summit and its aftermath demonstrated the president's resolve to turn things around and his willingness to make

changes to his team and to the decision-making process in order to improve the ability of his administration to act more effectively in addressing the domestic policy problems he had now established as his top priorities: energy and inflation. Yet, as the administration's continuing struggle with Congress and the media over the next few months clearly demonstrated, his efforts to reorient and revitalize his administration would not include any alteration to his basic trustee approach or to his issue-oriented, problem-solving style of leadership. By the beginning of November, despite Carter's sincere efforts to improve the performance of his administration and its political standing, neither was showing signs of improvement. Worse, not only was his domestic policy program clearly on the ropes, similar problems with his foreign policy program were compounding his difficulties. He was beginning to look like an almost certain loser in 1980, with increasingly profound implications for the administration's ability to act effectively.

The Foreign Policy Program Also Runs Into Trouble

By the time that the hostages were seized on 4 November 1979 the administration's effort to push forward with a broad and ambitious foreign policy program had also run into trouble. There had been some notable achievements in some areas, but serious and persistent problems were evident elsewhere. The centrepiece of the initial foreign policy program, an increased emphasis on human rights, had lost virtually all of its credibility and developments on the international stage were forcing a significant change of focus, one that was about to take a quantum leap forward as a result of the hostage crisis and Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. Severe tensions, especially between the State Department and the White House, were also evident in the foreign policy decision-making process, reinforcing the growing perception that Carter's foreign policy, as well as his domestic policy, was not working. Nowhere were those problems of substance and process more evident than they were in the case of the administration's handling of the revolution in Iran.

As he had for domestic policy appointments, Carter turned to well-known and experienced establishment figures when he made his senior foreign policy appointments. The key ones were Cyrus Vance as Secretary of State, Harold Brown as Secretary of Defense and Zbigniew Brzezinski as National Security Adviser. All three had been members of both the prestigious Trilateral Commission, to which Carter had also belonged, and the Council on Foreign Relations (Shroup, 1980: 103-111). Vance and Brown

both had extensive experience in government, Vance as a former Secretary of the Army, Deputy Secretary of Defense and negotiator in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations and Brown as a former Secretary of the Air Force and Under Secretary of Defense. Brzezinski, who was one of the few non-Georgians appointed to a senior staff position in the White House during the entire four years, had no such experience but, as Executive Director of the Trilateral Commission and as an adviser to the 1976 campaign, had developed a close working relationship with Carter. Other important appointments to the foreign policy team included Andrew Young as Ambassador to the United Nations, Paul Warnke as Arms Control Director and Admiral Stansfield Turner, a former Naval Academy classmate of Carter's, as Director of Central Intelligence.³⁷

The spokes-in-the-wheel model of decision making was also applied to the foreign policy decision-making process. Carter wanted a simple and responsive system put in place in which his key advisers had direct, unfiltered access to his office. Having heavily criticized the decision-making process of the Nixon-Kissinger-Ford years, he made it clear at the outset that he did not want any "lone rangers" (Moore, 1984: 61; Hargrove, 1988: 164). Instead, he wanted to establish a highly decentralized, collegial approach which would encourage lively debate and allow him to hear different ideas (Jordan, 1982: 46-47).³⁸ Consistent with his desire to do this, he gave Brzezinski, whom he considered to be a creative thinker and conceptualizer (Carter, 1982: 46-47), Cabinet status and expected him to put forward his personal advice as well as to manage the process as National Security Adviser. Carter hosted weekly "foreign policy breakfasts" to encourage informal and frank exchanges on foreign policy issues with his key advisers. These were regularly attended by Vance, Brown, Brzezinski and Mondale, and others were invited from time to time (Vance, 1983: 39). In this spokes-in-the-wheel process, the president clearly saw himself as "the decider" standing at the hub and making decisions only after receiving "separate streams of advice" from several sources (Jordan, 1982: 46-47; Hargrove, 1988: 114-116). In his memoirs, referring to the "natural competition" that took place between Brzezinski and Vance, Carter succinctly states the philosophy that resulted in an active policy advocacy role for Brzezinski: "In making the final decisions on foreign policy, I needed to weigh as many points of view as possible" (Carter, 1982: 54).³⁹

At the White House, besides Brzezinski, only the vice president, Jordan and Powell were regularly involved in discussions of foreign policy

issues, and usually only in a limited way. Mondale attended meetings of the NSC's committees as well as full NSC meetings and the foreign policy breakfasts. He was also fully included in the paper flow on foreign policy issues and attended the president's intelligence briefings. While he did not exert much influence on the foreign policy agenda or on the development of policy proposals, he did play a significant role as an emissary of the president abroad and as a link with Congress. Thus, for example, he made an important contribution to the Middle East peace process with his trip to Israel and Egypt in early 1978 and to the process of normalizing relations with China with his historic trip to China in mid-1979. At home, his efforts to lobby Congress were a fundamentally important ingredient in the administration's success in getting the Panama Canal treaties ratified. As he did in the case of domestic policy, Mondale saw the need for a more political approach to foreign policy issues, one which recognized the need to sustain support for a policy over time. He thus frequently argued the case for such an approach with Carter and with other key members of the foreign policy team (Gillion, 1992: 215-295).³⁵

With no previous experience in foreign policy, White House aides Jordan and Powell had very little involvement at first. As the manager of Carter's successful 1970 gubernatorial campaign in Georgia as well as the 1976 presidential one, Jordan had an extremely close personal relationship with the president. Powell, who had been at Carter's side throughout these campaigns and had also been his press secretary while he was Governor of Georgia, had an even closer one (Carter, 1982: 41-44). Moreover, of the senior White House aides that he chose, Carter clearly valued the political advice of these two the most. As a result of this close personal chemistry, the key political roles that these two advisers played and their easy and open access to the president, it was virtually inevitable that, regardless of the organizational structures and formal processes he put in place, Carter would seek their political assessment on the complete spectrum of issues, including foreign policy ones. Within months, Jordan was tasked to serve as Carter's special emissary during the negotiations of the Panama Canal treaties and Powell was speaking for the president on key foreign policy issues such as human rights and the Middle East. By late 1979, they were also attending meetings of the NSC and its two committees as well as the foreign policy breakfasts on a fairly regular basis. By that time, a consistent pattern had emerged in which Carter listened to "separate streams of advice" from his three main

foreign policy advisers (Vance, Brown and Brzezinski) and his key political advisers (Mondale, Jordan and Powell) before making important foreign policy decisions.³⁶

The administration began to pursue its foreign policy program on a number of fronts almost immediately. Unlike its immediate predecessors, the administration did not have to face an immediate international crisis or war and therefore had considerable latitude to pursue the specific objectives it wished. At the outset, the priority objectives it formally established included negotiating a new strategic arms agreement with the Soviet Union; normalizing relations with China; strengthening political cooperation with Western Europe, Japan and other advanced democracies; working to resolve regional problems and conflicts, especially the problem of white rule in Africa and the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East; placing increased emphasis on building better relationships with third world countries; seeking a more comprehensive and reciprocal detente with the Soviet Union; restricting the level of global armaments and the proliferation of nuclear weapons; continuing to maintain a defence posture to deter Soviet aggression and counter Soviet intervention in the third world with greater "budgetary efficiency;" and promoting the cause of human rights wherever possible. These objectives, written under the guidance of Brzezinski to reflect the consensus developed during the transition period, were accepted by the president in the spring of 1977. According to Brzezinski, the general philosophical approach that underpinned these objectives was one of "constructive global engagement" (Brzezinski, 1983: 48-57).³⁷

These objectives were, of course, largely unassailable. However, the real difficulty with foreign policy, as Bell points out, is not to define laudable objectives, but to devise "the strategies and tactics which will move the real world of independent sovereign decision makers and unreasonable, intransigent constituencies in the desired directions" (Bell, 1978: 560). Judged by this more practical criterion, Carter's foreign policy program had very limited success, and most of that success came during the first two years. By late 1979, much of the program, like the domestic one, was in obvious trouble. In many regions of the world and in several issue-areas, events simply were not moving in the desired directions.

There were a number of notable successes, including the Panama Canal treaties, the Camp David Accords and the normalization of relations with China. The administration set these difficult issues as early priorities

and tackled them with energy and determination. All three of these achievements came to fruition in 1978, with the Panama Canal treaties ratified in March and April, the Camp David Accords signed in September and the normalization agreement with China finalized in December. They were significant achievements which were possible only after the president and his foreign policy team overcame formidable obstacles.

Negotiation of a treaty with Panama on the future of the Panama Canal was set as one of the first priorities of the administration (Brzezinski, 1982: 51). Carter saw the issue in terms of taking the morally correct action, avoiding an attack on or sabotage to the Canal, and promoting better relations in Latin America. The main obstacle to such an agreement was Congressional and public opinion in the US, which had prevented the Johnson, Nixon and Ford administrations, all of which had negotiated with Panama, to resolve the issue. A clear majority in the Senate, where any treaty would have to be ratified, and an overwhelming majority of Americans opposed any relinquishment of real control of the canal to Panama. Despite this, Carter was convinced that he could sway Congress and the public and he therefore pushed forward with negotiations with the Torrijos government in Panama. These were successfully concluded in August 1977, resulting in two treaties: one providing for the joint operation of the canal until 1999, at which time Panama would assume total control, and another guaranteeing the permanent neutrality of the canal and the right of the US to defend it from external threats. Having reached an agreement with Panama without any significant input from Congress, Carter was forced to launch one of the most intense and well-organized efforts of his administration to rally the support of key political and opinion leaders around the country behind the treaties. After a highly-focused, six-month lobbying effort with senators, both treaties were ratified by a narrow margin during March-April 1978. However, opponents of the treaties never gave up and a protracted and time-consuming struggle in the House over enabling legislation continued to place heavy demands on the president and his senior advisers until suitable legislation was finally passed in September 1979. The final result, a long-term framework that was acceptable to both Panama and the US, was thus achieved only through the expenditure of tremendous time and effort and an enormous political investment (Smith, 1986: 109-132; Kaufman, 1993: 37-50; Dumbrell, 1993: 199; Carter, 1982: 152-185; Vance, 140-158; Brzezinski, 1983: 134-145).

The administration also placed the Arab-Israeli conflict at the top of its initial agenda. Again Carter viewed the issue in terms of trying to do the right thing as well as in terms of US interests in the region. After its initial efforts to convene a UN conference of the main protagonists and following Sadat's historic visit to Israel, the administration began to deal directly with Begin and Sadat. When these negotiations stalled as well, against the wishes of many of his advisers and friends, Carter decided to invite Begin and Sadat to Camp David in September 1978 for direct negotiations. The result, the Camp David Accords, returned the Sinai to Egypt in exchange for guarantees about Israeli security in that area and outlined terms for future negotiations on the status of the West Bank. The agreement was widely acclaimed as a major step towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict in the Middle East and Carter was given much of the credit. Indeed, his display of determination and leadership during the negotiations resulted in a significant revival in support for his presidency over the following few months. Yet, as in the case of the Panama Canal treaties, the continued involvement of the president was required in order to keep the reconciliation process moving forward to the point where a full Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty could be signed. In early March 1979, the president flew to the Middle East to salvage once again the stalled peace process and, in another major breakthrough, convinced Sadat and Begin to agree to all points of a treaty, which was signed in Washington later that month. The final result was a treaty of lasting significance, but the expenditure of time and energy was again enormous (Smith, 1986: 157-179; Carter, 1982: 269-429; Vance, 1983: 196-255; Brzezinski, 1983: 234-288).

In mid-1977, the administration decided to pursue earnestly normalization of relations with the People's Republic of China. Carter perceived the need to come to terms with the reality of the post-1949 experience in China and to move beyond a simple East-West analysis of the China-Taiwan dilemma. The issue moved slowly at first, partly because the administration decided that asking the overloaded Senate to handle both the Panama Canal and normalization issues at the same time, both of which were highly controversial, would be counterproductive and partly because of the State Department's concerns that an adverse Soviet reaction to this initiative might have a negative impact on the SALT II negotiations.¹⁴ Following a trip by Brzezinski to China in Spring 1978, progress in direct negotiations with China was very rapid and in December, in a surprise television announcement, Carter outlined the terms of the agreement which

had been worked out whereby the US would extend full diplomatic recognition to China on 1 January 1979. The reaction to this announcement, both in the US and worldwide, was generally positive and, despite considerable vocal opposition in Congress, the legislation required to implement the agreement was signed into law in late 1979 (Carter, 1982: 186-211; Vance, 1983: 75-83 and 113-119; Brzezinski, 1983: 196-233).³⁹

Elsewhere the foreign policy program was far less successful. By late 1979, the whole effort to pursue an aggressive policy on human rights had lost much of its momentum and credibility; the SALT Treaty was in trouble in the Senate; serious new tensions had developed in US-Soviet relations; the administration had reversed course in its basic defence policy; there was little evidence of strengthened ties with Western Europe, Japan and other advanced democracies; efforts to restrict arms transfers and nuclear proliferation were going nowhere; and efforts to forge constructive relationships with several third world countries, most notably Nicaragua and Iran, were clearly failing. In short, much of the administration's foreign policy program was not working.

At the outset, the administration gave the issue of human rights a high profile. Believing that "moral principles were the best foundation for the exertion of American power and influence," Carter was clearly a driving force behind the administration's efforts in this area (Carter, 1982: 143), but Vance and Brzezinski also considered an increased emphasis on human rights to be appropriate (Vance, 1983: 29 and 33; Brzezinski, 1983: 124-129). Indeed, as the key foreign policy adviser during the 1976 campaign, Brzezinski was one of the main architects of the policy and, at the outset, believed that one of the new administration's top priorities should be "to increase America's ideological impact on the world" and that "by emphasizing human rights, American could again make itself the carrier of human hope, the wave of the future" (Brzezinski, 1983: 3).⁴⁰ In light of the anti-Vietnam, anti-Watergate mood that brought Carter to office, this new emphasis appeared to many to be consistent with the need to move the country away from its exclusive focus on the struggle with the Soviet Union and towards a more global one in harmony with the basic values and ideals of the nation.⁴¹ As Brzezinski points out, when Carter declared, in a part of his inaugural address that Brzezinski had drafted, that "our commitment to human rights must be absolute," to a large extent the new president was expressing "the will of Congress and the aspirations of the

American people, as well as his own deeply felt moral beliefs" (Brzezinski, 1983: 125).

Efforts to translate this commitment into effective foreign policy quickly ran into practical difficulties. There was, first of all, an almost immediate struggle within the State Department between the newly-appointed staff responsible for implementing the human rights policy and those in the various regional bureaus responsible for maintaining good relations with and influence over governments in power. The administration's early actions also sparked an intense public debate. Vance's April 1977 attempt to establish criteria helped define some of the tradeoffs involved and recognized the need to be pragmatic, flexible and sensitive to security interests, but provided little practical guidance that could be used to build a consensus in specific situations. The result was a policy that was inconsistent and was widely perceived as such.

Despite the importance it placed on a more comprehensive and reciprocal detente, the administration immediately launched a campaign against human rights abuses in the Soviet Union which Carter personally coordinated and which quickly strained the US-Soviet relationship quite visibly. At the same time, in light of its desire to normalize relations with China, the administration overlooked similar abuses there. An Interagency Group on Human Rights and Foreign Assistance was formed under the direction of Deputy Secretary of State Christopher, but its work was soon limited to consideration of loans by multilateral lending banks since the two most powerful levers, military aid and food aid, were exempted from consideration. The group's efforts did result in US actions against a significant number of countries but, more than anything else, this undermined the effectiveness of multilateral lending institutions. The administration imposed an embargo on trade with Uganda, but only after Congress passed legislation for it to do so. It did, on its own initiative, join the international efforts to isolate the regimes in Rhodesia and South Africa and suspended or reduced bilateral aid to several countries including Argentina, Chile and Nicaragua, but it did not apply sanctions to Iran or Zaire or suspend military aid to South Korea or the Philippines, despite blatant human rights violations in these countries. In light of these difficulties and contradictions, by late 1979, the administration's human rights policy had become so uneven and inconsistent in application that it had lost all credibility, both at home

and abroad (Smith, 1986: 49-55; Spencer, 1986: 35-100; Muravchik, 1986; Dumbrell, 1993: 111-174; Vavrina, 1994: 103-113).⁴²

Another priority over the first three years was to pursue strategic arms control negotiations with the Soviet Union. Despite an earlier commitment to Brezhnev to conclude the SALT II Treaty as soon as possible based on the Ford-Brezhnev Vladivostok agreement of 1974 and against the advice of Vance, Carter decided to attempt to engage the Soviets in a new set of negotiations leading to an agreement based on his preferred concept of "deep cuts." Vance thus took a proposal to Moscow in early 1977 that called for deep reductions to existing forces. The proposal was quickly and emphatically rejected by the Soviets who, among other things, resented both Carter's efforts to change the rules from Vladivostok and to raise human rights issues with them. The result was that the arms control process slowed down and it was only in June 1979 that a SALT II Treaty was concluded, one based largely on the original Vladivostok formula. By that time, however, there was widespread dissatisfaction with the administration's entire policy vis-a-vis the Soviet Union and, despite a lobbying campaign that, in Carter's words, "made the Panama Canal treaties effort pale into relative insignificance" (Carter, 1982: 262), the SALT II Treaty immediately ran into serious opposition in the Senate. By late 1979, the prospects for ratification were looking increasingly doubtful (Smith, 1986: 65-84; Hargrove, 1988: 132-137).⁴³

By late 1979, the seeds of the fundamental change in the administration's basic approach to East-West issues that would take place following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan at the end of the year were already being sown by Brzezinski. To that point, despite his criticism of the Soviet Union in the area of human rights, Carter clearly favoured a policy of cooperation and was generally optimistic that his approach would revitalize detente. Vance too believed that cooperation was essential and shared Carter's basic optimism, although he had concluded very early in the administration that public pressures in the area of human rights were counterproductive (Vance, 1983: 102). Brzezinski, on the other hand, was less optimistic at the outset and, over time, increasingly argued that the administration had to counter what he considered to be "Soviet adventurism" with more effective geopolitical strategies and military power. By the beginning of 1978, for example, he was already arguing that the Soviet support to Cuban and Ethiopian troops fighting Somali guerrillas in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia required a US military response (in the form of sending a naval task force to the region) and the

linkage of the SALT II negotiations to Soviet behaviour. As his list of examples of "Soviet adventurism" grew to include Soviet actions in Angola, Yemen and Cambodia, as well as the continued deployment of SS-20 missiles to Eastern Europe, Brzezinski became increasingly strident and public in his appeals for a firmer approach.

In light of this challenge, Vance simply appealed to Carter to avoid renewing Cold War tensions. With the exception of his continued efforts on behalf of Soviet dissidents, such as Sakharov, Sharansky and Ginzburg, Carter usually endorsed Vance's specific recommendations for a continued cooperative approach, particularly with respect to avoiding any explicit linkage between Soviet behaviour and SALT II.⁴⁴ At the same time, Carter was becoming increasingly frustrated with Vance's unwillingness to be an aggressive spokesperson for the administration, and fully endorsed Brzezinski's growing public profile. The media followed these developments closely, and the result was that the differences between Brzezinski and Vance were highly visible and created a growing image of an inconsistent and uncertain government (Smith, 1986: 208-240; Rozell, 1985: 113-156; Hargrove, 1988: 146-159; Thornton, 1991; Carter, 1990: 3-16).

The administration's reversal on the basic thrust of its defence policy added to this image. At the outset, Carter called for less preoccupation with the Soviet Union and for a generally less militaristic approach to foreign policy. Initial guidelines called for continued emphasis on Western Europe, the withdrawal of ground forces from South Korea, reduced defence spending and greater emphasis on arms control and non-proliferation efforts. In 1977, supported by Brown but against the advice of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Carter cancelled the production of the B-1 bomber, slowed the MX missile program, slowed down the shipbuilding program, cancelled production of an additional aircraft carrier and directed the military to continue to plan for the withdrawal of troops from Korea. In 1978, against the advice of Vance, Brzezinski, Brown and the Joint Chiefs, Carter decided to defer production of the enhanced radiation weapon (neutron bomb), a reversal of his own position which created doubts on both sides of the Atlantic about his ability to manage defence issues (Williams, 1984: 94-96).⁴⁵

By 1979, the administration was under increasing pressure to reverse course. Concern that the military balance was steadily shifting in favour of the Soviet Union was growing both within Congress and the public. Pressure groups were also becoming more strident in their attacks on the administration's defence policy. Carter's early actions, particularly his

"deep cuts" proposal, cancellation of the B-1 program and modifications to the shipbuilding program, had alienated the Joint Chiefs and had resulted in intense lobbying campaigns by the individual services on Capitol Hill. In late 1978, public opinion polls showed that a majority of Americans were in favour of increased defence spending (Williams, 1984: 95-96; Perry, 1989: 244-277).⁴⁶

For Carter, the decisive factor was SALT II. He realized that, in light of the changing mood in Congress and the nation, the support of the Joint Chiefs was essential to the successful ratification of SALT II. During summer 1979 he therefore reversed an earlier position by deciding to deploy the MX missile and suspended plans for the withdrawal of ground troops from South Korea. Also that summer, the administration committed the US to increased spending for NATO and began to lay the groundwork for the major increase in the overall defence budget, one which was announced in December. While these policy reversals were enough to ensure that the Joint Chiefs would throw their support behind SALT II, it was certainly not enough to assure ratification of the treaty as the heated controversy in September over the Soviet Combat brigade in Cuba demonstrated.⁴⁷ By that time, the central issue had become Carter's stewardship of defence policy, not SALT II, and the view that Carter was a president "who was fundamentally unsound on defence" was becoming conventional wisdom on Capitol Hill, as well as in the media and public opinion (Williams, 1984: 103).

The administration's desire to strengthen its ties with Western Europe, Japan and other advanced democracies brought, at best, mixed results. Carter, Mondale, Vance, Brzezinski, Brown and a host of other senior foreign policy advisers had served in the Trilateral Commission, and Mondale's January 1977 trip to Europe and the Far East was a visible sign of new determination to strengthen these ties. The administration did exercise some leadership within NATO, in getting the allies to agree in 1979, for example, to a 3% increase in defence expenditures through 1985 and to a "two-track" policy on the SS-20 issue which included plans for the deployment of Pershing IIs and Ground Launched Cruise Missiles as well as plans for arms control negotiations. However, strains in the alliance were also apparent as the atmosphere of detente began to fade and several European leaders, most notably Chancellor Schmidt, saw Carter's approach, particularly his human rights campaign, as the main problem. They were also critical of the administration's "unilateralism" in its handling of the neutron bomb issue and its attempts to convince the

British, French and Germans to adopt tighter restraints on reprocessing and on the export of nuclear material and technology. The administration's policy on reprocessing and its plans to withdraw ground forces from Korea also caused difficulties for the Japanese. Moreover, by 1979, the administration began to press Japan over its low level of military spending (Brzezinski, 1983: 289-315; Smith, 1986: 55- 61 and 106-108).

Economic tensions with both Europe and Japan also grew, exacerbated by the oil price increases. The administration's basic international economic plan was to promote a world-wide economic expansion based on greater coordination of policies among the countries with the largest economies. These countries were not, however, interested in economic expansion, and the kind of close collaboration that the administration sought was never achieved. The US economic expansion therefore took place in the context of a worsening trade deficit, caused by both the lack of expansion (and therefore marketing opportunities) in the economies of its major allies and the skyrocketing price of imported oil. Hoping to promote exports, the administration then allowed the dollar to depreciate, despite harsh criticism from the Europeans, especially the Germans and French. While the administration was a firm supporter of the GATT process and a constructive player in the negotiations that led to the successful conclusion of the Tokyo Round in 1979, these broad international economic difficulties also continued to cause tensions between the US and Japan. The June 1979 G-7 meeting, which followed another 60% price hike by OPEC was, in Carter's words, "an acrimonious meeting" (Carter, 1982: 112). The kind of improvement in the trilateral relationship that the administration had hoped for was simply not taking place (Brzezinski, 1983: 289-315; Smith, 1986: 56-59 and 106-108; Hill, 1984: 48-52).

The administration's efforts to restrict arms transfers and to promote nuclear nonproliferation achieved very little. Despite considerable effort to tighten its own guidelines and to generate an international consensus that would reduce the volume of sales of conventional armaments to the third world, US sales continued to increase, albeit at a rate far slower than that of the Soviet Union and of allies such as France, West Germany, Britain and Italy. Meanwhile, the administration's early commitment to the "demilitarization" of the Indian Ocean was challenged by the Soviet and Cuban intervention in Ethiopia and subsequent events elsewhere in Africa and in the Middle East and formal talks with the Soviet Union were suspended in early 1979. Also, despite

a strong personal commitment, Carter was not able to muster support for an effective nonproliferation regime. Moreover, the administration pursued its nonproliferation policy without adequate consideration of the interests of several important allies, notably Japan, France and West Germany, all of whom had made major economic commitments to specific technologies which Carter opposed. The policy also caused strains in relations with Pakistan and Brazil, without having any practical impact on their nuclear programs. In the case of India, Carter's decision to authorize the export of nuclear material was, in Brzezinski's words, "inconsistent with our nonproliferation policy" (Brzezinski, 1983: 134).⁴⁸

By late 1979, the administration also had very little to show for the early emphasis it had placed on improving relationships with and conditions in third world countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. In Asia, other than the normalization with China, very little had been accomplished. Carter's early attempt to normalize relations with Vietnam had been abandoned in light of the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia and efforts to improve on the human rights records of regimes in the Philippines, Indonesia and South Korea had fallen victim to strategic considerations. In Africa, the achievement of majority rule in Zimbabwe was a collective international effort and little progress was made on majority rule in South Africa or on the Namibia issue. Elsewhere in Africa, the presence of Cuban troops and Soviet support in Angola and Ethiopia were forcing the administration to allow strategic considerations to dominate its thinking. In Latin America, the administration's early attempts to move towards improved relations with Cuba were placed on hold as Cuban involvement deepened in Africa and Grenada. As Argentina, Brazil and Chile were singled out for human rights violations and Brazil for its nuclear program, relations with these three countries deteriorated, with no sign of improvement in their human rights record or impact on Brazil's nuclear program (Smith, 1986: 85-156).

The administration's general lack of success in the third world was vividly underlined by its obvious failures in Nicaragua and Iran, two countries that had been staunch allies of the US in their respective regions during the Nixon-Kissinger-Ford years. In both these countries, the administration failed in its efforts to encourage the existing regimes to move forward with liberal and democratic reforms. It then failed in its efforts both to influence the course of events as these regimes ran into broadly-based opposition and, once revolutionary regimes took power, to forge relationships with them which served US interests.

In the case of Nicaragua, the administration's early focus was on trying to moderate the repressive measures imposed by Somoza while continuing to support his regime in order to promote stability and limit the influence of Cuba and other communist countries in the region. As Nicaragua plunged deeper and deeper into civil war, the administration applied diplomatic pressure and, on several occasions, withheld economic aid in an attempt to pressure Somoza to curb the atrocities and to accept a mediated settlement. In early 1979, when Somoza refused to allow elections sponsored by the Organization of American States, the administration took stronger action, including the termination of military aid and most forms of economic aid. In mid-1979, when it became clear that Somoza would be forced to resign, the administration then tried to build support for an interim government of national reconciliation. When that plan failed and the Sandinistas took power in July, the administration moved quickly to establish diplomatic relations and to send emergency food and medical aid, hoping to establish the basis for a constructive relationship with the new regime. Despite this, the Sandinistas increasingly turned to Cuba and the Soviet Union for support. The administration always seemed to be one step behind events. By late 1979, it was clear not only that US interests and influence in Nicaragua were suffering as the Sandinistas consolidated their control, but that US values were being rejected as well (Smith, 1986: 118-122; Dumbrell, 1993: 150-161).

In the case of Iran, a similar pattern prevailed, with the administration reluctant to accept reality at each stage of the revolutionary process. Recognizing the strategic importance of Iran, the administration supported the shah while quietly encouraging him to improve his record on human rights. As the crisis in Iran reached the boiling point in late 1978, the administration continued to support the shah's regime although, as a result of divisions within the administration itself, some confusing signals were sent to the shah about the US position with respect to his efforts to broaden his base of political support and maintain stability. When it became obvious near the end of December that the shah's rule was about to end, the administration quickly threw its last-minute support behind the government the shah appointed, despite an obvious lack of popular support for it. When that government fell six weeks later, the administration immediately shifted its focus towards developing a positive relationship with the government appointed by Ayatollah Khomeini, but by that time even the moderates associated with

this new government were convinced that the US would not accept the Iranian revolution and were deeply suspicious of US motives in its dealings with Iran. Thus, despite the administration's efforts to normalize relations with the Khomeini-appointed government, by late 1979, even before the hostage crisis began, it was clear that US interests and influence in Iran had suffered enormous damage and that US values were being rejected in a most fundamental way.⁴⁹

In short, like the domestic policy program, the administration's foreign policy program was in trouble by the time the hostage crisis began. There had been some undeniable successes, most notably the Panama Canal treaties, the Camp David Accords and the normalization of relations with China, all of which came to fruition in 1978. As the administration moved into 1979, however, it was clear that all momentum had been lost. The problems that it was facing across the complete spectrum of its priority foreign policy objectives had grown to the point where the entire program had lost its sense of direction. The foreign policy performance of this administration, in other words, was contributing to the growing consensus that this was "a failing presidency" (Rozell, 1989: 142-150).

Contributing Factors: Back to Philosophy, Style and Process

As in the case of his domestic policy program, the reasons why Carter's foreign policy program ran into such serious difficulty are complex and likely to be debated for years to come (Reichard, 1990). Some of the factors involved, such as the behaviour of other states, including that of the Soviet Union, the changing position of the US in the global economy and the resurgence of demands for a more assertive foreign policy by Congress, the media and the public, were again largely beyond at least the immediate control of the administration.⁵⁰ At the same time, the substance of the administration's specific policy proposals and the way in which it attempted to implement these were the complete responsibility of the administration and had a profound impact. For purposes of this study, his philosophy of the role of the presidency, his personal style of leadership and his whole approach to political process are again the most significant factors which contributed to Carter's foreign policy difficulties and over which he had exercise some control. These three factors are therefore the most important ones to highlight in setting the proper context for the direct application of the political process model in later chapters.

The philosophy that underpinned Carter's general approach to foreign policy issues was again a trustee one. Indeed, given that he considered the proper role of the president to be one of representing the public and national interest rather than brokering deals, he was far more comfortable working on foreign policy issues where he felt less constrained in his ability to set his own agenda and make his own decisions about how to pursue specific objectives. While domestic politics absorbed far more of his time, it is clear from his memoirs that Carter's frustration with his ability to act as a trustee was rooted primarily in domestic politics. Thus, for Carter, "the most interesting and intriguing and gratifying elements of his administration were those dealing with foreign policy because he could act as he thought, subject only to reversal by Congress." He also believed that "most Americans underestimate the authority the president has in foreign policy while overestimating the authority he has in domestic affairs" (Moore, 1984: 68).⁵¹

Carter's trustee philosophy thus resulted in far less tension with Congress in the area of foreign policy. The administration was able to act decisively in areas like promoting the Egyptian-Israeli peace dialogue and conducting the secret negotiations with the Chinese on normalization without having to directly engage Congress. With respect to some of the major undertakings where the support of Congress was ultimately required, such as the Panama Canal treaties and the SALT II Treaty, the administration still had considerable freedom to act decisively to produce its final product and then appeal to both Congress and the electorate for support. In other areas, of course, ranging from defence spending to trade policy, the involvement of Congress was more along the lines of its involvement in domestic politics. Overall, however, Carter was far more willing to engage in specific lobbying efforts on foreign policy issues and far more effective in doing so, since his general "explaining" and "selling" approach, as opposed to a "bargaining" and "compromising" one, was far more consistent with the expectations of Congress, the media and the public in the area of foreign policy than it was in the area of domestic policy. Indeed, on some foreign policy issues such as the Panama Canal treaties, Carter was aggressive, persistent and quite effective in his lobbying efforts, relying on "homework, personal effort, will power and moral persuasion to carry the day" (Hargrove, 1988: 124).

Another important aspect of his trustee philosophy was that Carter considered it important to tackle some tough and controversial issues like the Panama Canal treaties and the Arab-Israeli conflict because he felt

that the longer-term interests of the US would be undermined if these were not resolved. As Vance observes in his memoirs, with respect to the complete range of foreign policy issues, "Carter was determined that we might do what was in our long-term national interest, and not what was politically expedient or good for his ratings in the public opinion polls" (Hargrove, 1988: 122-123; Carter, 1983: 155 and 279; Vance, 1983: 257). Indeed, it is clear from Carter's memoirs that he felt compelled to pursue comprehensive solutions to some of the most controversial and difficult issues. His sense of responsibility to represent what he perceived to be the public and national interest is apparent, for example, in his account of the administration's efforts to negotiate and ratify the Panama Canal treaties, despite intense opposition in Congress and by the public, and his account of the process leading to the normalization of relations with China, where he simply refused to allow Congressional and public sympathy for Taiwan to deter him from achieving his objective (Carter: 1982: 152-211).

Given his willingness to tackle the tough and controversial issues and his ambitious foreign policy agenda, it was virtually inevitable that there would be some political fallout. However, this fallout did not alter Carter's basic trustee philosophy. He realized at the outset that on several of the issues he tackled, such as the Panama Canal and China, the political damage might outweigh the political rewards, even if he achieved his objectives. Nevertheless, he pressed forward in the hope that, at least in the final analysis, his political reward in the form of reelection would come through his overall record of policy achievements (Hargrove, 1988: 122). A clear pattern emerged in which he listened to his closest political advisers before making key decisions, but on issues where he was convinced that a particular action would serve the long-term national interest of the entire country, he did not allow that advice to sway him. For example, when he went ahead with the direct Begin-Sadat-Carter negotiations at Camp David, against the virtually unanimous advice of his key political advisers, he clearly demonstrated his determination "to follow his own drummer rather than the advice that came to him from people concerned with the political fallout, with the implications for his own career if he did not succeed" (Moore, 1984: 76). Mondale, who struggled constantly to get the president to give greater weight to the advice of his political advisers, was thoroughly frustrated by Carter's trustee philosophy on many foreign policy issues. He believed, for

example, that the president should have been much more sensitive to the pro-Israel lobby in the US on Middle East issues (Gillon, 1992: 215-250)."

As he did in the area of domestic politics, Carter exercised an issue-oriented, problem-solving style of leadership in the area of foreign policy. Again, despite his lack of foreign policy experience, he became deeply engaged in selected areas, getting thoroughly educated and mastering the technical details of the issues at the outset. His memoirs, which focus disproportionately on his foreign policy agenda," make it clear that he approached foreign policy in terms of specific problems to be solved rather than in terms of overall geopolitical strategy." These memoirs also provide unambiguous evidence of the president's intense personal commitment to making progress on specific issues and his in-depth knowledge of the technical details of each of them. As he did in the case of domestic policy, he sought policy approaches that were comprehensive in scope and provided full solutions to problems rather than ones that were narrow in scope and aimed at only limited solutions (Hargrove, 1988: 111; Young, 1988). Even more than in the case of domestic policy, Carter saw himself as a "policy premier" standing at the focal point of the decision-making process and making the final policy decisions. Indeed, he saw himself as the sole "decider" or "maker" of foreign policy (Brzezinski, 1983: 63 and 515).

One of the direct consequences of this issue-oriented, problem-solving approach in which the president plunged into the fine details of the top priority issues is that they placed great demands on his time. His memoirs show not only that he was willing to focus his time and energy as necessary to act as "policy premier" on these issues but also that he frequently became so immersed in particular issues that he had little time for anything else. Thus, for example, during his efforts to lobby senators to support the Panama Canal treaties, he entered in his diary that "It's hard to concentrate on anything except Panama," and he opens his lengthy account of his efforts to promote peace in the Middle East by commenting that "Looking back, it is remarkable to see how constantly the work for peace in the Middle East was on my agenda, and on my mind" (Carter, 1982: 171 and 273). The obvious consequence of this leadership style was that the president had very little time left to consider important issues on the foreign policy agenda that were not the highest priority problems at the moment.

At the same time, it is clear that Carter was able to take tough decisions. As Moens points out, "most evidence shows that on individual

decisions he was quite decisive" (Moens 1990: 36). This, of course, was easier when there was a fairly solid consensus among his key advisers as there was, for example, on the terms of the Panama Canal treaties and the normalization with China (Carter, 1982: 152-211). It was more difficult when his advisers gave conflicting advice as they did on many important issues such as how to react to the growing Soviet and Cuban involvement in Africa and whether to engage the Chinese in a strategic dialogue (Brzezinski, 1983: 178-233; Vance 1983: 75-119), or when they offered advice that conflicted with Carter's own sense of what should be done as it did on issues such as whether to deploy the neutron bomb and whether to withdraw troops from South Korea (Brzezinski, 1983: 301-306; Vance, 1983: 67-69, 92-97, and 127-130). Nevertheless, when a decision was required, Carter consistently demonstrated his capacity to make them; and after he made his decision, he seldom changed his mind (Moens, 1990: 36).⁵⁵ He took an open approach with his inner circle of advisers during the decision-making process, but he took a hard line on any attempts to undercut his decisions. He expected the entire administration to support his decisions once they were made and reacted quite angrily when he suspected that attempts were being made to resist or circumvent them. Thus, for example, Carter's reaction to an apparent contradiction between his instructions and the actions of the embassy in Iran in the immediate aftermath of the departure of the shah was one of immediate anger and frustration. Referring to this incident in his memoirs, he expresses anger "at the apparent reluctance in the State Department to carry out my directives with enthusiasm" and he used the occasion to threaten to dismiss any official who did not give him the kind of support he felt he deserved. He goes on to say that the proper role of the State Department was to "advise me freely when a decision was being made, but then to carry it out and give me complete support once I had issued a directive" (Carter, 1982: 449-450).

Another important yet frequently overlooked dimension to Carter's style of leadership was that, in his attempts to find solutions, he was willing to take calculated political risks. For example, his decision to tackle the Panama issue was one that involved obvious political risks and his decision to invite Begin and Sadat to Camp David in 1978 was, in his own words, "an all-or-nothing gamble" (Carter, 1982: 318).⁵⁶ To a large extent this willingness was an inextricable consequence of his desire to search for bold, comprehensive solutions to foreign policy problems and to do so without delay.⁵⁷ Indeed, as he recognized, a certain degree of

political risk was inherent in his commitment to take on some of the issues he did and the more he became personally invested in particular issues, the more determined he seemed to be to take risks rather than give up. Thus, for example, his trip to the Middle East in March 1979 to revive the stalled peace process was, by his own account, "an act of desperation" performed in a context where "there were no alternatives that would work with any certainty" (Carter, 1982: 416). Fully committed to leaving no stone unturned to try to salvage what had been accomplished at Camp David, he went on the trip despite the serious political risks, which Mondale and others advised him to avoid because they felt an unsuccessful trip would simply dramatize the administration's failure in a way that would damage both its domestic standing and US interests in the Middle East. For Carter, despite the risks, nothing less than a "bold stroke" would do (Brzezinski, 1983: 279-283; Vance, 1983: 245-246; Hargrove, 1988: 129-130).⁵⁸

Finally, by late 1979, some serious flaws in the foreign policy decision-making process were beginning to appear. At the heart of this problem were the growing tensions between the White House and the State Department, which increasingly gave rise to serious clashes of will between Brzezinski and Vance. However, the key ingredient in this situation was the president himself, since he believed that the decision-making process was essentially serving him well, despite the serious and frequently irreconcilable differences of views between Brzezinski and Vance. Thus, unlike the case of the domestic program where he had replaced some of the key members of his team and had made a major effort to improve the process in mid-1979, Carter was standing firm with both his foreign policy team and his decision-making process.

From the beginning, Carter had insisted on a simple, responsive structure of committees within the NSC framework. While the full NSC, chaired by the president, would remain the forum where the most important decisions would be made, Carter wanted a structure at the next level which would facilitate effective policy formulation and implementation and would ensure there were no "lone rangers" in the area of foreign policy. After rejecting more complicated proposals, he settled on a two-committee structure. The Policy Review Committee (PRC) handled most foreign, defence and international economic issues and was chaired by the appropriate Cabinet member (usually Vance); the Special Coordination Committee (SCC) handled issues that cut across departmental lines, such as intelligence and arms control, and was chaired by Brzezinski. The SCC was

also the committee responsible for coordinating crisis management (Brzezinski, 1983: 57-63; Vance, 1983: 34-39; Moore, 1984: 62-63).

It was apparent from the outset that Carter expected Brzezinski to play a Cabinet-level role in managing the NSC decision-making process. Indeed, at the first meeting of his new Cabinet, Carter formally announced that Brzezinski would have Cabinet status. Moreover, in Brzezinski's own words, "certain key levers were reserved" for him. As chairman of the SCC, his influence over the policy-making process in some key areas was assured. Even more importantly, as the individual responsible for summarizing discussions and recording policy recommendations and decisions for both committees, he was given considerable latitude to interpret the results of meetings and his reports went directly to the president without first being circulated for review by other members of the committee. This procedure, which Vance later regretted he did not oppose forcefully, was clearly one that could lead to problems if major disagreements on policy or discrepancies in interpretation arose between Brzezinski and other members of the committees with a stake in the issue (Brzezinski, 1983: 62-63; Vance, 1983: 36-38; Andrianopoulous, 1991: 140-141).⁵⁹

Carter fully intended that Vance and Brzezinski would become his key advisers and had some clearly formulated ideas about the roles that all three of them should play. He saw Brzezinski as a "first-rate thinker" and wanted him to play the role of free wheeling conceptualizer, as well as that of process manager; he saw Vance as his leading diplomat and implementer, as well as manager of the State Department's huge bureaucracy; and he saw himself as the one who would, at least on the larger issues, make up his own mind after listening to the advice of both of them. As Jordan points out in his memoirs, "The President-elect was not worried about conflicts, and relished their different ideas and lively debate. The roles were clear to him: Zbig would be the thinker, Cy would be the doer, and Jimmy Carter would be the decider" (Jordan, 1982: 46-47).

A fundamentally important aspect of the decision-making process that Carter put in place was that it allowed Brzezinski to offer the president his own independent advice. From the outset, believing that "coordination is predominance", Brzezinski sought arrangements which would allow him to shape the agenda and influence decisions. However, for the most part, his initial behaviour was consistent with Carter's desire to promote a collegial system in which the president's full involvement and role in making decisions would be the unifying force. After listening to all of his key advisers, he intended, as the ultimate "decider," to follow his

own beliefs in making decisions. From this perspective, the role of Brzezinski and Vance, as well as that of other senior advisers, was simply to provide the president with "separate streams of advice" and, at least initially, they all appeared to be comfortable with this approach. A reasonable "team spirit" prevailed in the early days and Vance even encouraged the president to seek a variety of views, including those of Brzezinski, so long as he, as Secretary of State, could be the spokesperson for the administration on foreign policy issues and could present his own unfiltered advice to the president prior to foreign policy decisions (Carter, 1982: 50-55; Vance, 1983: 33-39; Brzezinski, 1983: 57-63).

Before long, however, the collegial approach ran into serious trouble as tensions surfaced between Brzezinski and Vance. These tensions were fuelled, first of all, by obvious differences in temperament and approach. Vance was a skilled diplomat and experienced negotiator, patient and persistent in his approach. Brzezinski, on the other hand, was an energetic thinker and conceptualizer, frequently impatient and irreverent. Vance was a dedicated public servant who was highly respected by the permanent foreign service. He preferred to work quietly and effectively behind the scenes rather than in the limelight. Brzezinski was an ambitious and brash tactician who had little tolerance for the cumbersome and time-consuming methods of day-to-day diplomacy. He saw a need to actively engage the media on foreign policy issues and thoroughly enjoyed the dynamics of public debate.

Beyond these obvious and well-documented differences in personality lay some fundamental disagreements about the appropriate ways in which the administration should pursue its foreign policy objectives. Vance believed that the roots of most regional conflicts were to be found entirely within the region itself and that these could be addressed only through local solutions. He was also deeply sceptical about the utility of military force as an instrument of policy in most cases, believing that it tended to alter the objectives sought in unintended and generally negative ways. On the other hand, Brzezinski believed that the roots of many regional conflicts were to be found in the commitment of the Soviet Union and China to expand the influence of communism. He was also far more sanguine about the use of military force, believing that in certain circumstances the rapid application of military power was vital to the long-term sustainment of the kind of world order that would serve American interests. There were also serious differences on a host of other issues

such as the desirability of linking Soviet behaviour to arms control negotiations and the feasibility of getting Western Europe and Japan to play larger global roles. Taken together, as Smith points out, these differences "were too profound to be contained indefinitely." The team spirit which existed at the outset therefore came under strain quite early and by the second year had all but evaporated. For the two-year period leading up to Vance's resignation, "the conflicting philosophies of the Secretary and the National Security Adviser affected every major policy and decision" (Smith, 1986: 35-45).⁶⁰

Over time, Brzezinski's actions became increasingly inconsistent with Vance's desire to be the main spokesperson on foreign policy issues and to present unfiltered advice directly to the president. The problem was that Carter would have preferred a more regular and sustained effort by Vance to explain the administration's position on issues through public appearances, speeches, interviews and, more generally, a visible effort to articulate policy. Since he was not satisfied with the time or priority that Vance gave to this task, Carter increasingly permitted Brzezinski to articulate the administration's positions. Although Brzezinski usually spoke with the approval of the president and in a way that was consistent with the overall policies of the administration, Vance objected to Brzezinski's involvement in this area, believing that only he and the president should play public roles. Moreover, as Vance notes in his memoirs, divergences between his own public statements and Brzezinski's comments increasingly arose over time, becoming "a serious impediment" to the conduct of foreign policy. They also became a political liability, creating an impression both at home and abroad that there was disharmony and dysfunction within the foreign policy team (Carter, 1982: 53-55; Vance, 1983: 34-36; Carter, 1990: 6-7).

Brzezinski's effective use of procedure also served to circumscribe Vance's ability to provide direct, unfiltered advice to the president. Brzezinski's initial efforts focused on establishing ways to integrate policy inputs for the president and facilitate coordination among the principal Cabinet members. Over time, however, he began to take advantage of his daily proximity, virtually open access and unique relationship with the president to go well beyond this policy coordination mandate and to assert himself on policy issues. By setting the agenda, defining the issues for decision at NSC meetings and summarizing the president's decisions afterwards, he assured his place at the focal point of the decision-making process; by interpreting the consensus at committee

meetings, he placed the burden on other participants to appeal to the president if they disagreed with him; by translating Carter's written and oral comments into instructions, he placed himself in an exclusive channel of communication with the president; by submitting weekly NSC reports for the president's eyes only and written memorandum just prior to full NSC meetings, he was able to shape the president's thinking at key junctures; by focusing the efforts of his relatively small and cohesive staff on selected issues, he was able to carefully manage his own priorities; and by exercising control over a wide variety of activities ranging from the preparation of presidential cables and speeches to the foreign travel of other members of the NSC, he ensured that, more than anyone else, he was in the loop on all activities. Moreover, he was able to use his daily national security briefings to the president as a way to influence the agenda and priorities of the administration. As Andrianopoulos points out, Brzezinski fully appreciated "the importance of continuous informal access" and understood "the power of presidential speeches and statements." He thus regularly took advantage of the former to influence the latter (Andrianopoulos, 1991: 138-146).⁶¹

Many of these process initiatives might have been defensible in terms of the need for tight coordination had Brzezinski's role been limited to that of facilitator and coordinator. However, in light of Carter's wish to receive a "separate stream" of policy advice from Brzezinski, these efforts to dominate the process clearly had another dimension to them. Within months it was clear that Brzezinski's role would not be limited to that of an honest broker or neutral custodian-manager of the process who promoted a system of "multiple advocacy" based on free debate and equal access to information and the president. Rather, Brzezinski's role was that of an advocate who held strong views, was expected to express them and was eager to use his position to influence policy. The obstacles to the development of a system of "multiple advocacy" were thus twofold: without Brzezinski acting as an advocate to challenge Vance, it is unlikely that there would ever have been serious debate on the substance of policy proposals, since the beliefs of most of Carter's other advisers were too similar to generate much debate; on the other hand, with Brzezinski acting as an advocate pressing for policy options consistent with his own beliefs, there was no neutral manager of the decision-making process. The result was a tightly-controlled decision-making process in which Brzezinski held some important advantages

that could readily be used to undermine and offset the influence of Vance (Moens, 1990 and 1990a).⁶²

Brzezinski's moves to take a tight hold on the reins of the decision-making process did not immediately translate into policy manoeuvring. As long as policy positions were advocated that were compatible with his personal views, he was content to focus most of his time and energy on his process role. Before long, however, substantive differences between his personal policy analysis and prescriptions and those advocated by others, particularly Vance, arose. A decisive turning point occurred in late 1977 and early 1978 when Brzezinski actively began to seek a more forceful US response to the Soviet and Cuban involvement in the Horn of Africa. From that point on, Brzezinski consistently advocated a tougher approach to the Soviet Union and a more strategic one towards China, eschewing the role of neutral process manager and energetically using all of the process mechanisms available to him to promote his own views. Thus, for example, in opposition to Vance and the State Department, he consistently argued the case that Soviet behaviour in Africa should be linked to US policies in other areas; he worked persistently behind the scenes in Washington and with Chinese officials to ensure that the negotiations on normalization included a dialogue on the geopolitical context; and he stubbornly advocated the use of military force by the shah as his regime was shaken by developments in Iran in 1978. In short, by the end of 1978, Brzezinski had become a fully engaged policy protagonist who was using the process levers he had carefully developed to promote the decisions and outcomes he favoured. As Moens argues convincingly in his study of the first two years of the administration, the entire decision-making process at the end of 1978 can most accurately be characterized as one dominated by frequent and direct conflicts between Vance and Brzezinski (1990a: 914-948).⁶³ This trend continued throughout 1979, with an increasingly negative impact on the administration's ability to act with any degree of unity and coherence.

Some of these problems were highlighted in a study on "National Security Policy Integration" prepared by Philip Odeen and forwarded to the president in September 1979. One of the key conclusions of Odeen's report was that the NSC staff was becoming so absorbed in policy development activities that it was neglecting other vital responsibilities such as bringing all major issues forward for decision, properly managing the process and providing oversight to the implementation of decisions. The report also called for a more formalized process of decision making,

including more coordination before meetings and improved mechanisms for recording decisions and tracking the implementation of them. At the same time, in a revealing commentary on where matters stood, the study acknowledged that Brzezinski and his staff had been acting in accordance with the wishes of the president (Odeen, 1980: 111-129; Kirschten, 1980: 814-818; Hargrove, 1988: 143-146; Dumbrell, 1993: 194-197; David, 1994: 317-318). Moreover, far from moving in the direction of reducing the policy-making role of the NSC staff as the Odeen report suggested he should, by the fall of 1979 the president was rapidly moving in the opposite direction.⁶⁴

The 1979 Tilt Towards the White House

As the Carter administration moved into 1979 and it was clear that its foreign policy program was in trouble, there was widespread criticism of it in terms of both substance and process. Throughout the year, the media generally characterized the administration's response to events around the world as weak and ineffective and regularly criticized the president's management of the Vance-Brzezinski relationship (Rozell, 1989: 113-155). Although he was aware of this criticism, Carter left his foreign policy team and process largely intact during the reorganization that followed his Camp David meetings in July. The only significant change to the team was in the area of foreign economic policy where Blumenthal was replaced by William Miller. The decision-making process was virtually unaffected by the changes; the appointment of Jordan as Chief of Staff did not alter either Brzezinski's access to the president or his firm grip on the decision-making process (Brzezinski, 1983: 74).⁶⁵ Despite the increasing intensity of infighting and the appearance of dysfunction and disarray, Carter essentially decided to "stand pat" in the area of foreign policy while moving rapidly forward with the major shakeup in the area of domestic policy.⁶⁶

In the months immediately preceding the hostage crisis, there were certainly moments when he might have considered making changes. In August, for example, the credibility of the team was again severely challenged when Andrew Young was forced to resign as Ambassador to the UN after a meeting with a representative of the PLO which was in direct contravention of administration policy and which he did not report to the State Department (Jones, 1994: 123-129). The widespread criticism over this incident focused on Carter's apparent inability to manage his foreign policy team and might have provided a timely opportunity to make more

fundamental changes had the president been so inclined. Again in September, when the public furore over the "discovery" of a Soviet combat brigade in Cuba resulted in intense infighting within the administration and harsh criticism of its stewardship of strategic issues, the president might have used the occasion to impose more discipline on the players and the process. Despite these difficulties and the growing consensus that the administration lacked a coherent sense of direction, Carter continued to maintain his confidence in both his foreign policy team and its performance.

At the same time, a subtle but highly significant shift was taking place which was gradually moving the centre of gravity of the decision-making process more and more towards the White House. This shift was the result of several interrelated factors: Brzezinski's growing advocacy role and willingness to use his tight reins on the decision-making process to promote his policy preferences; Carter's increasing reliance on advice from the NSC staff and, conversely, growing frustration about the performance of the State Department; the increasing strength and relevance of the Brown-Brzezinski coalition; and, most importantly, Carter's changing image of the international system. Although the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan would later be a watershed development which resulted in a quantum change in Carter's image, the roots of the shift were already firmly implanted by late 1979.

By this time, Brzezinski's role as an advocate had become a completely unambiguous one as he frequently took full advantage of his position and open access to the president to argue for policies consistent with his personal views. His conduct during the policy debate over the Soviet brigade in Cuba, which took place just prior to the hostage crisis, was typical of this increasing assertiveness. He was firmly opposed to the tough "the status quo is unacceptable" position that the State Department had taken publicly, since he "had little expectation of a Soviet backdown" and "did not wish the United States to be embarrassed publicly" (Brzezinski, 1983: 349). He thus advocated an approach which would stress Cuba's role as an agent for Soviet interests and rely on diplomatic efforts to pressure the Soviets to cooperate. To promote his views, Brzezinski worked behind the scenes to gain the support of others close to the president who he thought would be sympathetic to his views, including Powell, Jordan, Donovan and Rosalyn Carter, and manoeuvred to offset support for Vance by ensuring that attendance at key meetings was as favourable as possible to his own interests. In order to counter

Vance's position, he also expressed his views openly in the media. Moreover, on several occasions, he took advantage of his easy and immediate access to the president to argue the case for his own policy preferences, both orally and in writing. Finally, once the furor over the incident had died down, he conducted a thorough post mortem which convinced the president to give him a more predominant role in the management of issues such as this in the future. In short, he used the broad range of process tools at his disposal to build support for his policy preferences and to persuade the president to implement them (Brzezinski, 1983: 346-353; Vance, 1983: 359-364; Newsom, 1987).⁶⁷

From the outset, Carter considered the approach of the State Department under Vance to be a deliberate and cautious one. He quickly concluded that the conservative attitudes and inertia of this "sprawling Washington and worldwide bureaucracy," while beneficial in terms of restraining precipitous actions, meant that it could not be a major source of innovative ideas and found that Vance "mirrored the character of the organization he led." In contrast, Carter found Brzezinski and his small staff at NSC to be "adept at incisive analysis" and "prolific in the production of new ideas" (Carter, 1982: 51-54). It was thus natural for him to place considerable weight on the advice of Brzezinski and his staff in the most difficult or novel situations, or whenever he wanted to take a more innovative or risky approach. Thus, for example, when the Middle East peace process had reached an apparent impasse in March 1979 and Vance and almost all of his other advisers favoured a more cautious and indirect approach, Carter followed the advice of Brzezinski and Jordan and went to Egypt and Israel to try to salvage the negotiations. Referring to this case in his memoirs, Carter noticed that, "as usual, Zbig was somewhat unorthodox and daring" (Carter, 1982: 415-416; Brzezinski, 1982: 280-281; Vance, 1983: 245).

At times Carter was also frustrated with the loyalty and support he received from officials in the State Department. At one point in the immediate aftermath of the shah's departure in early 1979, for example, he became so disturbed with the resistance of State Department officials to the effective implementation of his decisions and with the continuous news leaks by those who disagreed with these decisions that he called a number of them to the White House to give them a spirited lecture and an ultimatum: remain loyal or resign. During the same period he completely lost confidence in Vance's ability to impose the administration's will on the US Ambassador to Iran (Carter, 1982: 449-50). Over time, the effect

of the president's periodic doubts about the loyalty existing at working level in the State Department and the failure of the entire organization to deliver the kind of creative analysis he frequently wanted was to undermine his faith in the advice he received from this "sprawling Washington and worldwide bureaucracy" on key issues. In short, these doubts established important limitations in the president's mind and increased the relative importance to him of the advice he received from Brzezinski and his small but talented staff in the White House.

Another factor was the increasingly comfortable working relationship that developed over time between Brzezinski and Brown. Although he was a former Secretary of the Air Force and brought a reputation as a brilliant intellectual with him to the Pentagon, Brown focused most of his time and energy on management of the Department of Defense and on its budget for the first few years of the administration and either did not take sides or quietly sided with Vance during most foreign policy debates. He was particularly careful to avoid involvement in anything he considered to be a personal or bureaucratic feud. He was, as Smith points out, generally "cool, discreet, aloof, professional" and generally respected by the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Smith, 1986: 44). Carter had deep respect for his detailed knowledge of the issues and his sharp analytical mind, so that when he did engage in policy discussions he was generally quite effective. By late 1978, Brown had become concerned enough about the ongoing Soviet arms buildup to conclude that a greater defence effort by the United States and its allies was needed, and throughout 1979 he conducted a highly effective lobby to convince both the president and Congress of the need for an increase in defence spending. He also concluded that a more assertive and global strategic framework was required in order to counter the developing pattern of Soviet activities abroad. On both counts, Brown found himself increasingly at odds with Vance and, conversely, increasingly aligned with Brzezinski.

During the first two years of the administration, Brzezinski had been generally disappointed by what he considered to be a lack of forcefulness on the part of Brown in promoting the nation's defence and in articulating clear positions on specific issues such as Soviet activities in Ethiopia and the fall of the shah. His efforts to "egg him [Brown] on" and to gain "his clear-cut support" during the first two years had little effect (Brzezinski, 1983: 44-47). However, once Brown's concern about the deteriorating power position of the United States forced him to become an assertive advocate for a greater defence effort, he and Brzezinski began

to work together very closely. Indeed, by early 1979, Brzezinski was already noting that Brown had become his "staunchest ally in the administration - intelligent, tough-nosed, very supportive" (Brzezinski, 1983: 45). This relationship continued to gain strength for the remainder of the administration and, in contrast to the first two years, it assured Brzezinski that, in his ongoing policy struggle with Secretary Vance, he would have the support of another voice to which the president always listened (Moens, 1990: 50 and 1990a: 925; Moore, 1985: 72; Carter, 1982: 55; Brzezinski, 1983: 44-47; Smith, 1986: 45; Hargrove, 1988: 118; Brown, 1983: 142-159).⁶⁸

Finally, the most important factor contributing to a subtle shift in the centre of gravity of the decision-making process towards the White House was Carter's changing beliefs about the international system. As Rosati points out, this transformation was completed only during 1980, once the combined effect of the hostage crisis and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan had resulted in a dramatic shift in the president's thinking about the nature of the Soviet threat and in what was needed for global security. Nevertheless, as Rosati's study makes clear, the seeds of this transformation had already been sown by the time that the hostage crisis began (Rosati, 1984, 1987 and 1994).⁶⁹

Despite Brzezinski's increasing advocacy of a tougher approach to the Soviet Union and his close relationship with the president, Carter's beliefs about the international system remained essentially consistent with those of Vance during 1977 and 1978. Both maintained a basic image of global complexity and interdependence and retained their optimistic belief that the Soviet Union was constrained in its ability to act against US interests by the complexity of the international system and, while occasionally opportunistic, was generally peaceful in its intentions. Both considered the activities of the Soviet Union in Africa and elsewhere, while certainly not welcome, posed no serious threat to US interests and believed that focusing the administration's efforts on establishing a new global community rather than on East-West issues would serve US interests in the longer term. Throughout 1978, Carter was thus still expressing his "deep belief that the underlying relationship between ourselves and the Soviets is stable" and his view that Brezhnev "wants peace and wants a better friendship" (Rosati, 1984: 165-170).

In 1979, Carter's optimism began to fade. While Vance continued to maintain his optimism about the prospects for building a new global community, Brzezinski became more and more forceful in expressing his

concerns about fragmentation and instability in the international system and the activities of the Soviet Union, especially in light of the Iranian revolution, the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, China's subsequent attack on Vietnam, the crisis in Yemen, the victory of the Sandinistas in Central America and the "discovery" of the Soviet brigade in Cuba. In general, Carter's beliefs remained closer to those of Vance but, for the first time, there were also moments when his thinking was clearly influenced by Brzezinski's more pessimistic prognosis about international cooperation and the intentions of the Soviet Union. The result, as Rosati points out, is that "two divergent world views coexisted uneasily" within the administration as "Carter's image wavered between Vance's optimism and Brzezinski's pessimism." The competing visions of Vance and Brzezinski resulted in especially profound disagreement on all issues related to the Soviet Union, with fundamental differences of opinion over the need for linkage, the requirement for a military buildup and the appropriate response to Soviet activities abroad. "Carter attempted to fuse both optimistic and pessimistic visions," Rosati goes on, "which resulted in an inconsistent image where he sometimes leaned toward Vance, other times toward Brzezinski" (Rosati, 1987: 69-81).

It was clear to some of those close to the president that, right from the beginning, Vance and Brzezinski appealed to different sides of the president's personality, with Vance representing Carter's traditional, careful and methodical side, and Brzezinski representing his bold and more assertive side (Jordan, 1982: 46-47). However, once Carter's beliefs about the nature of the world began to change in 1979, coherent balancing between two advisers was no longer the central dynamic; his changing beliefs was. One problem, as Donovan notes in his memoirs of this period of transition for the president, was that the president "didn't seem to recognize instinctively when ideas are in collision, when two sets of facts cannot be equally pertinent, when desirable objectives are in conflict" (Donovan, 1985: 235). With the president's beliefs in flux, the administration was divided and had no coherent vision as it entered the period of the hostage crisis (Rosati, 1987: 81). Before long, the combined effects of the hostage crisis and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan would result in a more complete transformation of the president's beliefs and in a radically refocused foreign policy agenda essentially compatible with the views of Brzezinski. However, in the months leading up to the hostage crisis, the ambiguous and changing beliefs of the president were already becoming an important factor in the

equation; and the result of the change that had already taken place was to give greater weight to the increasingly forceful and pessimistic views of Brzezinski (Rosati, 1987: 69-81; Holsti and Rosenau, 1986).⁷⁰

The combined effect of Brzezinski's growing advocacy role and willingness to use his unique position to promote his preferred policy options, Carter's frustrations about the performance of the State Department, the increasing strength and relevance of the Brown-Brzezinski coalition, and Carter's changing beliefs about the international system was thus to shift the centre of gravity in foreign policy decision making more towards the White House. In the case of domestic policy, the president had taken decisive action in mid-1979 to tighten his control over the executive departments and agencies by centralizing more decision-making authority in the White House. In the case of foreign policy, despite growing criticism that his policies were confusing and incoherent and his leadership was indecisive and weak (Rozell, 1989: 113-155), Carter was not taking similar action. Nonetheless, a shift in the same direction was taking place for an entirely different reason. Whereas in the case of domestic policy the shift was the result of a clear decision by the president to reorient and revitalize his administration, in the case of foreign policy the shift was more insidious and the result of developments on the global stage, process dynamics and Carter's changing beliefs. There was also a degree of synergism at work, since the growing influence of Brzezinski and the NSC staff at the White House was entirely consistent with the overall shift in the centre of gravity of the domestic policy decision-making process towards the White House taking place at the same time.

The hostage crisis thus began in a context in which there were serious substantive and process problems with the administration's foreign policy program. Initially launched in a spirit of teamwork and collegiality, at this point the decision-making process had become one which was characterized far more by conflict, struggle and manipulation than by accommodation, compromise and persuasion. However, while these process dynamics increasing created the appearance as well as the reality of policy disarray, the president saw no need for serious corrective action. On the contrary, he still believed that the process was essentially meeting his needs and that the ongoing competition between his two main foreign policy advisers, including an ever-increasing advocacy role for Brzezinski, was necessary to ensure that he received "separate streams of advice" on the issues. Thus, despite the problems, the hostage

crisis began with the same team and arrangements that had been in place since Carter took office, but with a president increasingly relying on analysis and advice from the White House.

Nowhere were the foreign policy problems facing the administration and these process dynamics more apparent than they were on the issue of Iran. As it confronted the fall of the shah and the subsequent power struggle in Iran, the administration acted essentially without unity or coherence. Since this particular aspect of its foreign policy record is so relevant and important to understanding the administration's reaction to the hostage crisis, it will be covered separately in the following chapter.

ENDNOTES - CHAPTER THREE

1. The literature on the 1976 electoral campaign is now quite extensive. The summary here is based primarily on the accounts of Glad (1980), Spencer (1988), Gillon (1992) and Kaufman (1993). The more critical, journalistic accounts by Schram (1977) and Lasky (1979), which focus on Carter's drive for the White House, were also useful.

2. Spencer's analysis of this, while highly critical, is the most creative and insightful. He compares the 1976 rise of Jimmy Carter to the 1848 rise of Zachary Taylor. Both were elected, he argues, in circumstances in which the electorate was highly alienated by the established order in Washington. Both lacked substantive qualifications for the job, and both stood out mainly as symbols of fresh leadership and of personal integrity (Spencer, 1988: 19-25). As Glad points out, few presidential candidates conduct issue-oriented campaigns and those who do, like McGovern and Goldwater, whose campaigns fully emphasize the issues, tend to lose. The point here is that, even in comparison to other modern presidential campaigns which were also less than fully issue-oriented, Carter's campaign stands out as a "symbolic crusade" (Glad, 1980: 305-322).

3. Incumbent President Ford tried to exploit Carter's avoidance of specific policy commitments, by arguing that "he wanders, he wavers, he waffles and he wiggles" and that the country needed "real programs instead of mysterious plans to be revealed in some dim and distant future" (cited in Gillon, 1992:174). Jordan's comment, which he made in an interview with Playboy Magazine just before the election, is cited in Spencer (1988: 25). To ensure that the implications of this aspect of what the Carter candidacy stood for were fully understood in the area of foreign policy, Jordan went on to declare that "if after the inauguration you see Cy Vance as Secretary of State and Zbigniew Brzezinski as head of National Security, then I would say we failed, and I'd quit."

4. Since 1945, the Gallup Poll has used the same question to establish the "approval rating" of presidents: "do you approve or disapprove of the way [president's name] is handling his job as president?" Most other polling organizations have also adopted this wording (Edwards, 1990: 3).

5. In a memorandum to the president during the transition period, pollster Patrick Caddell explicitly recognized that the election had not given the new administration a strong mandate, and he recommended that it continue to emphasize style and symbolic activities in its early days (Glad, 1980: 413).

6. In the June-July 1979 period, Carter's approval rating in Gallup Polls stood at 28-29%. This level of support was only a few percentage points above Nixon's in the six-month period leading up to his resignation. Nixon's held in the 24-28% range during that period, a level that is generally considered to have been so low that it undermined his efforts to counter the impeachment process and ultimately forced him to resign. Carter's level in the June-July period was also significantly lower than Johnson's at the time of his decision not to seek reelection. Johnson's rating was around 40% at that time, a level that was low enough to have had a negative impact on his ability to govern and to have influenced his decision not to run. By the time of the hostage crisis, Carter's approval rating had increased slightly to 32%, but it was still lower than that experienced by any president since Truman, with the exception of Nixon during the Watergate crisis (Edwards, 1990: 160-170; Neustadt, 1990: 232). Some polls, such as the Harris poll taken in July 1979, indicated that support for Carter might be even lower than these Gallup results (Gillon, 1992: 265).

7. Neustadt's analysis of the "Lance Affair" is excellent (Neustadt, 1990: 249-257). While Lance was eventually acquitted by the courts of any illegal activities, his conduct was clearly questionable and challenged the claims of the administration that its conduct would be

morally irreproachable. The media was aggressive in its approach to this issue and it was a turning point in the media's attitude towards the new administration (Glad, 1980: 439; Gillon, 1992: 196-197).

8. A Harris poll conducted in September 1979, for example, found that 70% of Americans felt that Carter could not be reelected (Lankevich, 1981: 49).

9. Carter's troubled relationship with Congress is documented in Jones (1988) and Yarbrough (1984). The generally negative way in which Carter was portrayed in the media has been convincingly demonstrated in Rozell (1989). Although Carter's difficulties within his own party have tended to be addressed more indirectly, this aspect of his problems has now also been established by analysts such as McClesky and McClesky (1984) and Gillon (1992). The shift to the right in American politics that took place during the Carter years is now widely acknowledged (see, for example, Hill and Williams, 1984 and Spencer, 1988). In 1978, for example, the passage of Proposition 13 in California and the results of the mid-term elections, which resulted in a more conservative Congress (especially in the Senate), were clear indicators of a "growing public mood of fiscal and social conservatism" (Hill and Williams, 1984: 3; Woolcott, 1984: 45).

10. One clear indication of Carter's competitiveness in this regard was the comment he made a few months before the hostage crisis that, if Senator Kennedy challenged him for the nomination of the Democratic Party, he would "whip his ass" (Glad, 1980: 452; Gillon 1992: 268).

11. There were some initial successes during the first few months which included the Emergency Natural Gas Act, the Executive Branch Reorganization Bill and the Economic Stimulus Package (Hill, 1984: 14).

12. In his critical account of Carter's Cabinet-level appointments, Shroup shows that the overwhelming majority of Carter's key appointments were from "the Eastern Establishment's key policy-planning organizations," such as the Trilateral Commission, Council on Foreign Relations, Committee for Economic Development and the Brookings Institution. Blumenthal, for example, was a member of the first three, as well as a trustee of the Rockefeller Foundation (Shroup, 1980: 103-111).

13. Of the eight most senior White House staff originally appointed, only Zbigniew Brzezinski and Margaret Costanza (Assistant for Public Liaison) were non-Georgians. The average age of the Georgians was only 38, with Jordan, Powell and Eizenstat all in their early thirties. Eizenstat, who had been a speechwriter in the Johnson administration, was the only one of the eight with previous experience in Washington (Ayres, 1984: 144-147; Gillon, 1992: 183).

14. Gillon's account of the way in which the role of the vice-president was elevated during the Carter years is excellent. Mondale had made it clear to Carter that he would only be interested in the position if would be able to play a more central role than previous vice presidents. Carter expected that, as an experienced Senator who understood how Washington works, Mondale would help to compensate for his own inexperience in national politics and would serve as his link to the Democratic Party. During the transition period, they agreed that Mondale would become a "general adviser" who would provide independent advice on a broad spectrum of issues. Mondale was given an office in the White House, immediate access to essential information, a standing invitation to all key meetings and open access to the president. Although their views frequently clashed, a close working relationship based on genuine personal chemistry and friendship emerged. As Eizenstat points out, "what was unique about their relationship was that it was across the board. Carter saw Mondale as his most senior adviser. No one else had that breadth of relationship with the president" (Gillon, 1992: 163-179, 181 and 291).

15. In a 1983 interview with Ayres, Carter insisted that he had adopted the spokes-in-the-wheel model mainly because it was his preferred way of operating: "That's the way I structured my warehouse, that's the way I structured my governor's office, and that's the way I structured the White House" (Ayres, 1984: 151).

16. These oil import fees were eventually rejected in legislation that overrode Carter's veto in mid-1980 (Hill, 1984: 17-18).

17. The federal government share of expenditure in the GNP is a measure of governmental involvement in the economy. The objective, in other words, was to reduce government involvement.

18. As Woolcott points out, Carter's conversion to a tighter monetary policy alienated traditional Democrats and came too late to convince fiscal conservatives that his administration could sustain an effective anti-inflation policy over time (1984: 44 and 47).

19. The general thrust of Carter's domestic program was to consolidate and reform, rather than to extend, the welfare state and to reduce regulation and government intervention in the economy (Hargrove, 1988: xvi). While one might generally characterize this program as a post-New Deal liberal one (Hargrove, 1990: 606), Carter's desire to assist the disadvantaged was clearly tempered by his desire for management efficiency and fiscal prudence (Jones, 1988: 10). This resulted in constant difficulties with the traditional Democratic Party establishment. Gillon's account of this is excellent (Gillon, 1992: 163-299).

20. As Hargrove points out, Carter was willing to accept compromises to his policy proposals only after an all-out effort to sell what he considered to be the optimal policy had failed. Moreover, his proposals were usually developed without consultations with either the Congress or the public. The main criticism of this approach is that his policy initiatives were not joined to strategies of political feasibility (Hargrove, 1988: 1-32). This was a constant source of concern for Mondale. At one meeting with several Senate committee chairmen, for example, Carter simply lectured them about their duty to support his proposals, prompting Mondale to comment that "Carter's got the coldest political nose of any politician I ever met. All he had to do was sit there and listen" (Gillon, 1992: 192).

21. In his recent overview of the literature on the Carter presidency, Reichart points out that Carter's background as an engineer is frequently cited as a major influence on his approach to policy formulation (Reichart, 1990: 605). Mondale describes Carter's engineer-like approach in the following way: "He figured that if he told you the details, the central and sometimes very technical arguments, then honest minds would be driven by the power of the calculation. Of course it doesn't work that way" (Mondale, 1990: 244). Elsewhere Mondale says, "He wanted to lead the country through hard, gifted work. He wanted to persuade the country, like every good engineer does, with numbers and figures, not passion and eloquence" (Gillon, 1992: 202).

22. Gillon's biography of Mondale is replete with examples of Carter's willingness to take tough decisions against the advice of some of his closest political advisers who wanted him to give more weight to the political risks and costs. Thus, for example, beginning in late 1978, Carter decided to pursue a more aggressive anti-inflation policy which included social spending cuts, against the advice of some of his key advisers, including Mondale, who believed that the political costs would be devastating (Gillon, 1992: 254-256).

23. As a devout Southern Baptist, the idea of sin was often a central one in Carter's thoughts. He frequently referred to Niebuhr's formulation that "the sad duty of politics is to establish justice in a sinful world" and clearly considered the wheeling-and-dealing atmosphere in Washington as part of that world (Jones, 1988: 10). Mondale, referring to his own frustrations in getting Carter to focus on the political aspects of problems, states that Carter "thought politics was

sinful." Seeing most issues through a highly political prism himself, Mondale was constantly frustrated by what he considered as "anti-political attitudes" on the part of Carter (Gillon, 1992: 201).

24. Evaluations of the performance of the Carter White House have been, as Ayres points out, "overwhelmingly negative" by insiders as well as analysts. Even key members of the White House have since agreed that it was far too decentralized, especially during the first few years. Powell candidly admits that "we found that we needed a greater degree of centralization than we thought at the outset" (Ayres, 1984: 144-153) and Eizenstat simply notes that "it is critical to have one person in charge" (Pfiffner, 1988: 30). Watson, who became Chief of Staff during the last seven months of the administration, is more categorical, asserting that the spokes-of-the-wheel approach was a "fatal mistake" which resulted in a lack of cohesion and coordination in the decision-making process (Pfiffner, 1988: 23).

25. Moore was generally considered to be a poor choice, a "man out of his league" (Ayres, 1984: 154). In an effort to improve its relations with Congress, the administration nearly doubled Moore's staff in 1978, adding individuals with more experience in Washington (Glad, 1980: 423). Mondale also worked hard to improve the administration's overall relationship with Congress, as well as to gain Congressional support for specific policy proposals (Gillon, 1992).

26. Eizenstat, for example, has been a consistent critic of this approach to appointments. When Califano was given carte blanche to choose his entire management team at HEW, Eizenstat concluded "That's the whole ballgame" (Pfiffner, 1988). For Eizenstat, "This in turn led to many appointees whose loyalty was mainly to the Cabinet office or his or her own agenda, rather than to the President and our agenda" (Friedman, 1992).

27. Carter had made four previous speeches on energy policy. The national audience for his first one had been 80 million but the audience had dwindled steadily to 30 million for his fourth one. Following the drama of the Camp David summit, Carter's audience for the "crisis of confidence" speech was by far his largest (Rozell, 1989: 128-131).

28. Some critics did criticize the president for not understanding the essential problem, which they saw to be one of the American people losing confidence in their president, not in themselves (Rozell, 1989: 133-135).

29. In addition to Califano, Blumenthal and Schlesinger, Brock Adams (Transportation) and Griffin Bell (Attorney General) were replaced. The five new Cabinet members that replaced them were, respectively, Patricia Harris, William Miller, Charles Duncan, Neil Goldschmidt, and Benjamin Civiletti (Carter, 1982: 60).

30. Carter appears to have been happy with the press office, despite concluding that the administration's relationship with the media was "unlikely to improve" under Powell's guidance for the foreseeable future (Carter, 1982: 117). He also decided to stick with Moore, despite the harsh criticism of Moore's performance from members of Congress and despite the ongoing problems with congressional liaison. To have considered Moore's office part of the problem would have required him to see the relationship of the administration to Congress as one of bargaining and coalition building, an area where Moore's performance could have been improved upon readily, rather than as one in which Congress obstructed the "trustee's" efforts to implement a program designed to meet the national interest.

31. Rozell summarizes the main themes of "the failing presidency" consensus that was gaining momentum in the press during the July-November period as follows: "Among the criticisms made at this time was the view that Carter was not an inspirational leader. Rather, he was 'low-key', 'rationalistic', 'mechanistic', and lacking the 'exuberance of power'. Carter allegedly did not understand the necessity of coalition-building. Journalists perceived the president as moving haphazardly

from issue to issue, from crisis to crisis, rather than defining a vision for the nation's future" (Rozell, 1989: 144).

32. The key appointments at the second level were Warren Christopher as Deputy Secretary of State, Charles Duncan as Deputy Secretary of Defense (William Claytor was appointed to this position when Duncan replaced Schlesinger as Secretary of Energy in July 1979), and David Aaron as Deputy National Security Adviser. Christopher too was a member of the Trilateral Commission and the Council on Foreign Relations; Aaron was a member of the latter; and Duncan, who was Carter's second choice for Secretary of Defense (Carter, 1982: 55), was a former president of Coca Cola (Shroup, 1980: 103-111).

33. Three "management styles" of presidents are commonly referred to in the literature on the modern US national security decision-making process: "the competitive model" which encourages open competition to provide the president with advice and analysis among individuals, departments and agencies (Roosevelt and early Johnson are the best examples), "the formalistic model" which emphasizes hierarchical organization, formally structured reporting procedures and filtered advice and analysis (Eisenhower and Nixon are the best examples) and "the collegial model" which, while encouraging diversity of opinion and free discussion of policy alternatives, emphasizes group problem solving and teamwork (Kennedy and Bush are the best examples). In actual fact, as Snow and Brown point out in their succinct but very insightful summary of the US experience since World War II, each president has used the NSC machinery in his own unique way (1994: 44-70). For example, since he wanted to emphasize both the authority of cabinet heads and the capabilities of the NSC staff, "Carter's version of the collegial model," they point out, "also contained some ingredients of the formalistic model" (1994: 54).

34. According to Brzezinski, "the way the president wanted me to operate ... was to give my advice in addition to everyone else" (Brzezinski interview). Interestingly, at least in principle, Vance also believed that Carter should seek independent advice from a number of sources, including Brzezinski (Vance, 1983: 34; Hargrove, 1988: 116).

35. The important role that Mondale played as both a diplomat and lobbyist is often overlooked. Gillon's recent biography of Mondale, which is excellent, brings out this aspect rather clearly. In an early and visible indication of the role that Carter wished him to play on the global stage, Mondale was dispatched to Europe and Japan with a public send-off from the White House lawn in which the president announced: "Fritz speaks for me." His international diplomacy on the issues of apartheid in South Africa and refugees in Southeast Asia are especially noteworthy. His value to Carter's Middle East diplomacy was clearly demonstrated when Carter, who had wanted to leave Mondale in Washington to look after other business during the 1978 Begin-Sadat-Carter summit, had to bring him to Camp David to assist him in his efforts to get Begin to show more flexibility. As a lobbyist, his effort in late 1979 to promote SALT II in the Senate was perhaps his most notable one, even though the Senate never ratified the treaty (Gillon, 1992).

36. It was, of course, not quite as simple in practice. Depending on the issue, there were other foreign policy and political advisers involved. As the Salt II process moved forward, for example, Carter increasingly had to take into account the views of the Joint Chiefs of Staff since he realized that their support would be essential in the ratification process (Carter, 1982: 218-222). Also, on some issues, his inner circle of political advisers and confidants extended somewhat beyond the White House to include his wife, Rosalyn, and a number of close friends, most notably Atlanta lawyer Charles Kirbo. Carter had an extremely close relationship with his wife and considered Kirbo his "closest friend" (Carter, 1982: 30-31 and 49; R. Carter, 1990: 217-238; Donovan, 1985: 242-243). They were both invited to a number of key meetings and were sometimes drawn into the political process. Both were heavily involved, for example, in the efforts to get the Panama Canal

treaties through Congress (Carter, 1982: 169-171). The important point here is that the overall pattern was one of "separate streams of advice," with the main players being those identified here.

37. As Brzezinski points out, the point of departure for the administration's objectives was Carter's personal philosophy (Brzezinski, 1983: 48-49). This was especially true with respect to his desire to make US foreign policy more humane and moral, which profoundly affected the way that the administration defined and pursued its specific objectives in the area of human rights.

38. Carter knew that some key senators whose votes were needed on the Panama Canal Treaties were also part of the "Taiwan lobby" and, as such, would have withdrawn their support had the normalization process, which required a move away from Taiwan, gone forward too quickly (Carter, 1982: 192-193). The Senate agenda was also very full due to the heavy domestic agenda.

39. Diplomatic recognition of states is, according to the US Constitution, a presidential prerogative, so the "Taiwan lobby" had little recourse. Without the legislation the president required to implement US representation in Taiwan, normal diplomacy and trade would no longer be possible (Carter, 1982: 201 and 210).

40. Brzezinski saw the human rights issue through an East-West prism. He was extremely concerned that the US was becoming "lonely" on the global stage and believed that emphasizing human rights as a major component of the administration's foreign policy was "the best way to answer the Soviets' ideological challenge" since it would serve to highlight the US democratic system and practices, in sharp contrast to those of the Soviet Union (Brzezinski, 1976 and 1983: 124).

41. As Smith points out, "An articulate and effective human rights lobby already existed in Congress" (Smith, 1986: 50). In 1976, the Arms Control Export Act declared that it was "a principal goal of the foreign policy of the United States to promote the increased observance of internationally recognized human rights by all countries" and placed significant restrictions on security assistance and economic aid to countries that demonstrated a "consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights" (Brzezinski, 1982: 124).

42. The views of former members of the administration are, of course, less critical (see, for example, Carter, 1982: 141-152; Vance, 1983: 28-29; Brzezinski, 1983: 124-129 and 144-145). Nevertheless, referring to the issue of human rights in his memoirs, Carter admits: "I did not fully grasp all of the ramifications of the new policy" and Brzezinski notes that "our principles were not always applied with an adequate sense of nuance and specificity" (Carter, 1982: 144; Brzezinski, 1983: 144). Much of Muravchik's thorough critique of the Carter administration's human rights policy focuses on the inconsistent way in which it was applied (Muravchik, 1986). Smith's succinct critique is also quite good (Smith, 1986: 49-55) and Spencer also makes some telling points (Spencer, 1986: 35-100). Another high-profile and influential expression of this criticism was Jean Kirkpatrick's argument that the Carter administration had "lost" Nicaragua and Iran because of its incompetent application of a naive human rights policy (Kirkpatrick, 1982).

43. For a full account of the SALT II issue see Hargrove, 1988: 132-137; Carter, 1982: 212-265; Brzezinski, 1982: 146-190; and Vance, 1983: 99-119. The specific provisions of the agreement, such as the one allowing the Soviet Union to retain its heavy Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles, for which there was no US counterpart, were often cited in the debate both in the Senate and in public but, as Williams points out, "much of the debate reflected a more general resentment with the fact that Moscow had attained strategic parity and on some indicators was actually ahead of the United States" (Williams, 1984: 92). It should be noted here that, despite the failure to ratify the SALT II Treaty, it served as the de facto framework until the START Treaty was signed in

1991. Its provisions were never seriously challenged by either side, even during the Reagan years.

44. Carter did acknowledge some linkage to SALT II in the sense that he publicly stated that, while his administration would not initiate the linkage, Soviet behaviour was placing the ratification of a SALT II Treaty in Congress at risk (Vance, 1983: 88). With respect to human rights issues, Carter was willing to use linkage in a direct way. When Sharansky and Ginzburg were put on trial, for example, Carter imposed some restraints on the export of high technology to the Soviet Union, against Vance's advice (Brzezinski, 1982: 322-325).

45. Carter wanted a firm commitment from the NATO allies to deploy this weapon system before going ahead with the program. West German Chancellor Schmidt was particularly outraged when the decision to defer production was made since he had been working with the other European allies towards an agreement which would have made deployment possible. This decision undercut his efforts completely. In the US, the decision came at a time of growing congressional and public concern about what appeared to be declining US preparedness and will in face of an increasingly assertive and powerful Soviet Union (Williams, 1984: 94-96).

46. The best known and perhaps most influential of the pressure groups was the Committee on the Present Danger, which consisted of leading Democrats such as Eugene Rostow and Paul Nitze as well as Republicans (Williams, 1984: 95-96). Perry's account of the Air Force lobby against the B-1 decision and the Navy's lobby to reverse Carter's decision on the carrier is excellent. The Air Force conducted a quiet campaign that almost overturned the B-1 decision while the "revolt of the Navy," as it is now called, gained Congressional support for an additional carrier, forcing Carter to exercise his veto. While the Navy was not able to gain enough additional support to override the veto, the whole episode embarrassed the president, fuelled the anti-Carter defence lobby and further alienated the military (Perry, 1989: 244-277).

47. The issue of the Soviet brigade was clearly a manufactured one since it had been in Cuba since the early 1960s and posed no real threat to the US. Nevertheless, Carter's characterization of the situation as "not acceptable" while accepting the status quo certainly contributed to the impression that his administration lacked a coherent and consistent strategy (Rozell, 1988: 144-145). The incident was also important in the sense that it delayed consideration of the SALT II Treaty in the Senate.

48. The centrepiece of the administration's nonproliferation policy was the 1978 Nuclear Nonproliferation Act, which established criteria for the export of nuclear material and prohibited export to countries that did not accept international safeguards, and an amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act, which prohibited economic assistance to countries not accepting these safeguards. In early 1979, in accordance with this amendment, aid was terminated to Pakistan. The administration also cancelled the Clinch River breeder reactor program and terminated its support for a pilot reprocessing plant in North Carolina (Brzezinski, 1983: 129-134). The administration's efforts in the area of conventional arms transfers are examined by Smith (1986: 61-65), Sick (1983: 68-78) and Brzezinski (1983: 144-175).

49. Given their importance as background to the hostage crisis, the administration's relationships with the shah, the shah-appointed Bakhtiar regime and the Khomeini-appointed Bazargan regime will be examined in more depth in Chapter 4.

50. This is not to say that the behaviour of the Soviet Union during the Carter years should be thought of as independent of actions of the administration. Indeed, seen in a broader historical context, the behaviour of any particular state towards the US at any specific moment is, of course, the product of a number of factors, including the past

and current policies of the US in dealing with that state and the effectiveness with which it has pursued these policies.

51. Carter expressed these views in a 1983 interview with Moore (Moore, 1984: 68).

52. In Brzezinski's view, "Carter rarely, if ever, thought of foreign policy in terms of domestic politics, while Mondale rarely, if ever, thought of it otherwise (Brzezinski, 1983: 35). Mondale, without much success, continually tried to convince the president that foreign policy problems must be looked at "in the context of the political environment in which they must be fought" (Gillon, 1992: 227).

53. Despite the emphasis in his memoirs on foreign policy issues, during his years as president Carter actually devoted more of his time to domestic policy and politics (Moore, 1984: 67; Orman, 1987: 22-44).

54. Brzezinski argues that the problem was more one of trying to pursue too many objectives and of failing to communicate a coherent viewpoint to the public than it was one of lack of an overall strategy or perspective (Brzezinski, 1982: 56-57). Whatever the merits of that argument, in his memoirs, as Hargrove points out, Carter "does not discuss strategic foreign policy objectives in terms of a theory of the enduring relations among nations but rather introduces specific problems to be solved" (Hargrove, 1988: 111).

55. Moens, who notes that Carter did not often change his mind once he had made a decision, also notes that "Carter usually allowed his final decision to be appealed by his advisers" (Moens, 1990: 36). However, Moens does not offer any historical evidence to support this assertion and a thorough reading of the memoirs of Carter, Vance and Brzezinski fails to show where this might be the case, except for the dramatic example of the hostage rescue decision in which Vance's appeal did not succeed in changing the president's mind. There are many examples where Carter reversed earlier decisions, such as his decision to withdraw troops from Korea, but these reversals occurred only after a considerable lapse of time. In the case of the troop withdrawals, for example, as Vance notes in his memoirs, "each time Harold Brown or I tried to raise the subject with the president, we found him adamant." Indeed, according to Vance, Carter "dug in" and would not permit reconsideration of the case for over two and a half years (Vance, 1983: 127-130).

56. With respect to Camp David, Carter's closest advisers were split on their views as to whether the risks outweighed the possible gains. Vance, for example, saw it as "a daring stroke" and "warmly supported" it (Vance, 1983: 217) while Mondale opposed "what he considered to be a risky initiative so close to the midterm elections (Gillon, 1992: 236).

57. In a very revealing comment on the issue of timing during a strategy meeting on the China file, Carter told Brzezinski that "his entire political experience has been that it does not pay to prolong or postpone difficult issues" (Brzezinski, 1983: 201).

58. Vance, who recognized the risks and saw the potential for a failure that would sap the political strength of the administration, would later call this trip "a breathtaking gamble and an act of political courage" (Vance, 1983: 245-246). Although they eventually supported his decision, most of Carter's senior advisers were quite concerned about the consequences of failure, particularly Mondale and Powell. Brzezinski and Jordan were the most supportive, since both believed the consequences of the complete collapse of the Camp David Accords would be an enormous setback, Jordan in terms of the domestic political consequences and Brzezinski in terms of the US position in the Middle East. In the end, according to Brzezinski, Carter told his advisers that he wished to "lead and act like a President" and that "he had reached the conclusion that only a bold stroke can actually be the proper response" (Carter, 1982: 416; Brzezinski, 1983: 279-283; Vance, 1983: 245-246; and Hargrove, 1988: 129-130). Brzezinski, whom Carter calls "unorthodox and daring" in his memoirs, sometimes wanted Carter to

be more cautious in the sense of making plans to deal with the possibility of failure for these "bold strokes." Just before the Camp David summit, for example, Brzezinski argued that "we have to prepare ourselves for the possibility of massive disappointment, a letdown, and even damage to Presidential prestige" (Brzezinski, 1983: 251).

59. Carter insisted on this procedure because he felt that leaks of information to the press would be inevitable if these reports were circulated before they were sent to him. He did tell Vance that he could review them at the White House, but this proved to be highly impractical. Vance initially objected to Brzezinski about having the SCC responsible for arms control and crisis management, but appears to have accepted Brzezinski's rationale on these issues after discussions with him (Vance, 1983: 36-38; Brzezinski, 1983: 62-63).

60. The best sources on Vance's basic philosophy and approach are his own memoirs (1983) and McLellan's biography (1989). The best sources on those of Brzezinski are his memoirs (1983) and Andrianopoulos's study of Kissinger and Brzezinski (1991). Although brief, the overviews of Smith (1986: 35-45) and Dumbrell (1993: 194-200) are also quite good.

61. One concrete example of Brzezinski's use of his daily national security briefings to influence the president's agenda was the way in which, on Fridays, he would suggest topics that should be discussed at the foreign policy breakfasts that followed his briefings. Andrianopoulos's analysis of Brzezinski's use of both formal and informal mechanisms to increase his control over the decision-making process is comprehensive and fair (Andrianopoulos, 1991: 138-146).

62. Moens examines the issue of multiple advocacy in the first two years of the Carter administration. Using Alexander George's basic model (George, 1972), Moens finds that while an open and structured process compatible with multiple advocacy existed at the beginning of the administration, a high level of value conformity precluded the kind of diversified debate essential for achieving multiple advocacy in practice. Once Brzezinski engaged himself fully in an advocacy role, the open nature of the process was destroyed, again precluding effective multiple advocacy (Moens, 1990 and 1990a). Moens attributes Brzezinski's advocacy role to the failure of multiple advocacy in the early stages of the administration. It was, he argues, "the critical absence of policy diversity among the advocates that to a large extent brought about Brzezinski's shift to the role of aggressive policy advocate" (Moens, 1990: 123). However, given Brzezinski's forceful personality, it is hard to imagine that, over time, he could have played any other role.

63. Moens's account of Brzezinski's move towards full blown advocacy role is quite good, although it is based on only four cases: the initial "deep cuts" proposal for SALT II, the war in Ogaden, the normalization agreement with China, and the fall of the shah (Moens, 1990 and 1990a).

64. The Odeen report was one contribution to "The President's Reorganization Project." It was forwarded to the president in September 1979, but was not made public until April 1980 when the Senate Foreign Relations Committee conducted hearings on the "role and accountability" of the position of National Security Adviser (Hargrove, 1988: 156). The report included a list of 15 recommendations, ranging from developing a more "systematic crisis-planning approach" to bringing in "a richer mix of people with experience in the departments," which were all intended to improve the coordination of the decision-making and implementation processes (Kirschten, 1980: 816-818; Odeen, 1980: 111-129). Some analysts have suggested that the very fact that the study, which Brzezinski opposed and later tried to undermine, reached the president is evidence of limits to Brzezinski's influence (Kirschten, 1980: 814; Dumbrell, 1993: 197). That said, as will be explained in the following section, while the president generally endorsed most of its recommendations (Kirschten, 1980: 818), the Odeen report did not result in a major shake-up because the president was largely satisfied with the way that many of the arrangements criticized by Odeen were serving him

and no significant steps were taken to reduce Brzezinski's advocacy role. On the contrary, it continued to increase in the months that followed.

65. As Brzezinski notes in his memoirs, referring to Jordan's appointment as Chief of Staff, "this in no way affected either my relationship with the President or my dealings with Jordan. Carter made it very clear, and I heartily agreed, that his appointment did not alter either my standing or my relationship with the President, or my control over the NSC machinery" (Brzezinski, 1983: 74).

66. It is clear from his memoirs that Carter never wavered from his belief that Vance and Brzezinski were both critically important members of this team since their different strengths, in his view, allowed a healthy "natural competition" to take place over ideas and policy recommendations. Along with Mondale, Brown and "others required to address a particular issue" they formed, in Carter's words, "a good team" (Carter, 1982: 54-55). One strong indication that Carter was content with the decision-making process came when, in the aftermath of Vance's resignation, Muskie pushed for changes at a special NSC meeting convened, at Muskie's request, to consider existing procedures. After a thorough discussion of the issues, Carter sided with Brzezinski in supporting the process already in place (Brzezinski, 1983: 502).

67. The Soviet brigade incident demonstrated Vance's ability to use the process effectively too. With Brzezinski on a vacation in Vermont when the furore began, Vance quickly took charge and effectively used an impressive network of supporters, including Cutler, Mondale and an ad hoc group of senior statesmen, to help him argue the case for his own approach. In the end, he managed to convince the president not to take the kind of broad approach to "Soviet adventurism" that Brzezinski favoured, but was not able to sustain his initial "we must have withdrawal" argument as the incident played out over time. The point here is that one would fully expect that, as Secretary of State, Vance would have used the full range of process tools available to him to promote his policy preferences in the most effective way possible. On the other hand, one might equally expect that, as the manager of the whole decision-making process, Brzezinski would have exercised more restraint (Brzezinski, 1983: 346-353; Vance, 1983: 359-364). Newsom, who as Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs at the time was intimately involved in the handling of the incident at the State Department, blames the whole affair on "the casual use of intelligence, the independent objectives of key lawmakers, the unrealistic expectations of diplomacy, and the excessive presidential tolerance of diverse public expressions." With respect to the diplomacy issue, he argues that, in his use of the words "status quo," Vance hoped that the Soviets would help the administration out of its domestic political problem in order to ensure the ratification of SALT treaty in the US Senate, but "He lost the gamble" (Newsom, 1987: 57-59).

68. Moens argues that Brown's overly passive role in the foreign policy debates during the first two years was one of the factors that led to dysfunction in the decision-making process (Moens, 1990: 913-948).

69. The major limitation of Rosati's careful and detailed analysis of the "images" of Carter, Vance and Brzezinski and, later, Muskie is that it is based on a content analysis of their public statements which, of course, may not have always been entirely consistent with their personal beliefs. Nevertheless, it is a very useful study which, in addition to establishing the beliefs of the president and his foreign policy advisers, examines the beliefs-behaviour relationship in a realistic and convincing way (Rosati, 1984, 1987 and 1994).

70. Holsti and Rosenau's research on the patterns of foreign policy beliefs of America leaders in the 1976-80 period is relevant here. By using "three rather well-developed, internally consistent foreign policy belief systems" (Cold War internationalist, post-Cold War internationalist and semi-isolationist) they found that, for the vast majority of America leaders, the turbulent events of this period did not

alter their basic belief system. They conclude that, for most leaders, their belief systems were sufficiently strong "to interpret the events of 1976-1980 as more often confirming than challenging pre-existing beliefs." Vance, who was clearly a post-Cold War internationalist in this scheme, and Brzezinski, who was a Cold War internationalist, were, in other words, typical of American leaders in interpreting events through a coherent and consistent belief system during this period. Carter, on the other hand, was not typical. The result was the transformation of the image of the man at the top while his two key advisers continued to interpret events through fundamentally different and irreconcilable belief systems. This was clearly a formula that would result in difficulties (Holsti and Rosenau, 1986).

CHAPTER FOUR - THE US-IRAN POLICY CONTEXT

The hostage crisis began three years after Jimmy Carter was elected as president. During those three years, his administration went through three distinct phases in its relationship with Iran: a phase of continued support to the shah that ended only when his regime was completely crippled in late 1978; a phase of transition that ended with the collapse of the Bakhtiar government shortly after Ayatollah Khomeini's triumphant return from Paris in early 1979; and a phase of cautious rapprochement with the Khomeini-backed Bazargan government, which ended with the resignation of Bazargan shortly after the hostages were taken in late 1979. Each of these phases can be distinguished by the dynamics of the US-Iran relationship, the administration's basic approach to the regimes in power and the degree of focus of key decision makers, including the president, on events in Iran.

This chapter will examine each of these three phases. It will focus on the strains in the US-Iran relationship during each phase and on the specific ways in which Carter administration responded, highlighting some key process issues. It will then describe the seizure of the embassy, examine the administration's initial reaction to it and identify the "power centres" involved in the decision-making process from the outset, thus preparing the way for the discussion of the administration's handling of the hostage crisis itself in subsequent chapters.

The narrower focus of this chapter on a single area of foreign policy, the management of the US-Iran relationship, will permit a somewhat more in-depth look at the decision-making process than was possible in the previous chapter. That said, this chapter will also cover over a thousand days in the life of the Carter administration and, as such, it will not be possible to attempt a detailed application of the political process model. Rather, the objective is to provide an overview of the administration's handling of Iran issues up to the point when the hostage crisis began in early November 1979 in order to highlight some key themes which will be relevant and useful when the political process model is applied in detail in subsequent chapters. The chapter will thus lay out the basic historical context for the hostage crisis in terms of US-Iran relations, with a particular emphasis on process issues, to complete the task of setting the stage for an immediate and sharp focus on the dynamics of the decision-making process between the seizure of the embassy and the failure of the rescue operation. This analysis will, in other words, complete the

preparation for the direct and detailed application of the political process model to Operation Eagle Claw.

Continued Support to the Shah: 1977 and 1978

When the Carter administration took office in January 1977, it did not define any new policy directions with respect to Iran. The administration's initial objective was to continue the close bilateral relationship of the Nixon-Kissinger-Ford years in order to ensure that Iran remained the kind of strong and reliable ally that could play a key role in helping the US to counter any possible expansion of Soviet influence in the Middle East and to maintain the free flow of oil and petrodollars (Moses, 1989: 9; Moens, 1990: 139; Carter, 1982: 435; Brzezinski, 1983: 357-358; Vance, 1983: 314-317). No new policy initiatives were planned because, as Sick points out in his account of this period, "Iran was not considered to be a problem" (Sick, 1985: 25).

Over the course of the next year, there were some tensions in the relationship, caused mainly by the new administration's policies in the areas of human rights and arms transfers. With respect to human rights, the extent to which the administration exerted pressures on the shah to improve his record on human rights, the impact of these pressures in terms of actual influence on the shah's behaviour, the degree to which his reforms constituted meaningful progress, and the extent to which his reforms contributed to his eventual demise are all highly debatable issues. What is certain is that, at the outset, the administration was critical of the shah's past record on human rights. The shah was acutely aware of this and sought to deal with it by stressing to US officials the unique situation in Iran, the logic of his own priorities and pace of reform, his commitment to modernization on a broad number of fronts, including major thrusts in areas such as women's rights and education, and the strategic importance of US-Iran cooperation. He clearly wanted to maintain close commercial and strategic ties to the US and was therefore sensitive to the human rights agenda of the new administration and determined to work through the problems presented by it. Indeed, both immediately prior to Carter's election and throughout the first year the shah announced several visible initiatives in the area of human rights, such as decreasing the use of torture, releasing political prisoners and reforming the judicial system (Sick, 1985: 22-24; Vance, 1983: 314-324; Brzezinski, 1982: 354-358; Pahlavi, 1980: 149-153; Dumbrell, 1993: 161-164).¹

The other major area of contention was the shah's desire to continue with his ambitious military procurement program. The Nixon-Kissinger-Ford policy had been to allow the shah to purchase virtually whatever he felt he needed and there were billions of dollars of outstanding orders for military hardware with a wide variety of US companies when Carter took office. From the outset, it was obvious that this "blank cheque" approach to arms sales to Iran was at odds with the arms transfer policy of the new administration which aimed at reducing both the volume of arms sales and the use of these sales as a means of pursuing foreign policy objectives. The two specific aspects of the new policy which were most problematic were that it prohibited the US from being the first to introduce any new weapon system into a region and stipulated that the human rights record of the purchasing state be taken into account before sales were approved (Sick, 1985: 24-27; Moens, 1990: 140). In practice, the administration essentially exempted Iran from its arms transfer policy, honouring all previous contracts and approving additional requests for advanced aircraft, tanks and other materiel. The 1977 sale of AWACS aircraft to Iran was a clear contradiction of the administration's own policy since it brought, for the first time, this advanced radar system into the Persian Gulf region. In short, despite obvious problems with the shah's record on human rights, no substantial changes to the "blank cheque" approach were made. Indeed, continuity in arms sales to Iran was the major reason that the administration failed to achieve its publicly-announced goal of reducing international arms sales in fiscal year 1978 from the level of 1977 (Moens, 1990: 140-141; Sick, 1985: 23-25).²

There were some early tensions in the administration's handling of US-Iran relations, particularly over the proposed sale of AWACS. The administration approved a proposal for fewer AWACS aircraft than the shah had requested and was forced by Congress to withdraw even this proposal from consideration until it had received written assurances from the shah that Iran would take the necessary steps to protect this sensitive technology. The reduction to his request, the delay in the approval process and the harsh criticism of his human rights record during congressional hearings humiliated and angered the shah (Moens, 1990: 139-141; Sick, 1985: 22-29).³ The shah was also frustrated and angry about what he considered to be unfair criticism from those whom he would later refer to as "the human rights champions" in the State Department (Pahlavi, 1980: 165).

Despite these early tensions, the overall thrust of the administration's policy towards Iran during its first year was to sustain good relations with the shah. Before long, Carter was publicly praising the shah for the political and judicial reforms that he implemented during this period and Vance and other officials were giving private assurances that the administration would not link its arms transfer policy to the human rights record of the shah (Moens, 1990: 140-141; Vance, 1983: 318). The administration also continued to place a heavy emphasis on close cooperation in the area of intelligence gathering and carefully avoided giving any public support to specific demands for reform by opposition groups in Iran, including those of secular nationalists (Moens, 1990: 140; Sullivan, 1981: 21).

By the end of 1977, it was clear that the administration had decided to place its emphasis on continuity rather than on confrontation in US-Iran relations. By this time it was clear that Carter considered the shah to be a strong ally and genuinely appreciated his moderating influence in the Middle East, especially his willingness to sell oil to Israel despite the Arab boycott and his support for the Middle East peace process. Carter and the shah had also established a comfortable personal relationship, with the shah visiting the US in November and Carter visiting Iran in late December.⁴ During these two visits, Carter privately discussed the issue of human rights abuses with the shah, but he did not press him to move more quickly than he was already moving. In a widely-publicized statement while in Iran on New Year's eve, Carter publicly praised the shah's regime as "an island of stability in a turbulent corner of the world." From that point on, the opposition forces in Iran, which had taken considerable courage from Carter's earlier pronouncements on human rights, considered the administration to be completely allied with the shah and therefore against meaningful change (Carter, 1982: 433-436; Vance, 1983: 321-324; Sick, 1985: 28-31; Pahlavi, 1980: 145-174; Moens, 1990: 140).

By the spring of 1978, the riots and demonstrations that would ultimately force the shah to leave Iran were in full swing. The roots of the crisis were extremely complex and deeply embedded in socioeconomic and political circumstances in Iran. The immediate problem was that the shah faced powerful societal forces that included a social revolt against industrialization and urbanization, an Islamic revolt against Western values, a nationalist revolt against Western influence and a political revolt against his dictatorial rule (Bill, 1988: 261-263; Moens, 1990:

157-158). The shah's early reaction to the domestic unrest set the pattern for much of 1978. In essence, his approach was a "carrot and stick" one in which he reacted with a violent crackdown to suppress the opposition while, at the same time, announcing new initiatives to liberalize the political system. Throughout the summer, this approach proved to be increasingly ineffective, as the intensity of both the secular and religious opposition to the shah's regime grew.

The administration did not react to developments over the summer months for several reasons. First, it did not wish to undermine the shah by openly challenging either his objectives or his methods; second, it did not consider the unrest in Iran to be a real threat to the shah's rule; and third, other issues such as normalization with China, SALT, the crisis in Nicaragua, the new defence budget and, above all, the Middle East peace process, placed such heavy demands on the president and his key foreign policy advisers that it was extremely difficult to find time to focus on the situation in Iran (Carter, 1982: 438; Brzezinski, 1982: 359; Moens, 1990: 142; Sick, 1985: 34-50).⁵ For these reasons, despite the escalating cycle of unrest, the violent countermeasures taken by the shah and evidence that the deepening crisis was shaking the confidence and willpower of the shah, the administration continued to throw its support unequivocally behind the shah, both publicly and privately, and to avoid making contacts with opposition groups. Brzezinski did press for better intelligence and for a harder look at options, but his overriding assumption was that, for geopolitical reasons, US interests were tied to the survival of the shah's regime. His interest during this period thus did not precipitate any comprehensive policy debate (Moens 1990: 142-143; Sick 1985: 56-63).⁶

Near the end of October, the State Department produced its first comprehensive analysis for the president. However, William Sullivan, the US Ambassador to Iran, opposed several key elements of this analysis, especially its call for increased contacts with the opposition. "Our destiny," he responded, "is to work with the shah." Brzezinski adamantly disagreed with the entire thrust of the State Department's analysis, including its calls for additional concessions by the shah, for the US to oppose any move towards a military regime and for establishing contacts with opposition forces. As a result of these disagreements, the State Department's analysis never reached the president and no meeting was called to discuss the different perspectives of his senior advisers.⁷ As Sick points out in his memoirs, "Strange as it may seem, by the end of

October 1978, after some ten months of civil disturbances in Iran, there had not been a single high-level policy meeting in Washington on this subject" (Sick, 1985: 60; Moens, 1990: 143). Despite a solid consensus in Washington that US interests were inextricably tied to the survival of the shah's regime and the shah's manifest inability to arrest the inexorable slide of Iran into crisis, the administration entered November without having given serious consideration to the possibility the shah might not survive. Senior decision makers assumed that he would somehow be able to weather the storm and there was no sense of urgency or alarm (Sick 1985: 65). Simply put, the shah's deepening predicament had not yet been placed on the agenda of senior decision makers.

In early November, the shah himself finally forced the administration to focus on the seriousness of the situation when, during a meeting with Sullivan in Tehran, he indicated that, beyond considering options in terms of forming a new civilian government or installing a military one, he was actually contemplating stepping down. Alarmed by this turn of events, Sullivan, for the first time since the crisis began, asked Washington for policy guidance, setting into motion a decision-making process which soon involved all of the key players. An SCC meeting was hastily called on 2 November, the first high-level meeting on Iran since the crisis began (Sick, 1985: 62-64; Carter, 1982: 438-439). Over the course of the next two and a half months, the Iranian situation was frequently on the agenda of senior decision makers, including the president. The consensus that the administration should continue to support the shah continued to hold until late December, although differences emerged over the basic approach the shah should take to restore order and over the question of whether the US should establish contacts with opposition forces. These differences, which were never fully resolved, eliminated the possibility of any focused and effective US influence on what had already become a desperate situation for the shah.

In essence, the State Department's position during the November-December period was to continue to support the shah, while encouraging him to build a broader base of political support and to avoid a bloody military crackdown. In general, it was quite pleased with the shah's decisions and actions throughout November, as he appointed a military Prime Minister, exercised greater restraint in his efforts to restore order, arrested some key officials on-charges of corruption and announced some new reforms, including the release of some high-profile political prisoners. However, despite these initiatives, the situation continued to

deteriorate and, from Tehran, Sullivan made periodic attempts to shift the focus of the debate from the question of how to support the shah to the question of what to do if the shah were to fall. On 9 November, he sent a telegram to Washington entitled "Thinking the Unthinkable" in which, in light of rapidly eroding support for the shah, he recommended that the administration begin contingency planning for the collapse of the shah's regime and improve its contacts with opposition forces. At his point, however, there was no support in Washington for such steps and none of Carter's senior advisers, including Vance, were prepared to support such a fundamental shift in the US approach.

By early December, the assessment in the State Department slowly began to change. As massive riots and a general strike gripped Iran and Sullivan became more forceful in expressing his view that the shah's days were numbered, many of those working Iran issues in the State Department began to argue that the US should take action to preserve its interests in the post-shah future of Iran, including the establishment of contacts with opposition forces. In mid-December, an independent review conducted by George Ball concluded that the shah's regime was finished unless he acted immediately to turn over most of his real authority to a new civilian government. At about the same time, the Director for Iran at the State Department, Henry Precht, began to argue that the shah's chances of survival were at best marginal. By late December, as new wave of violence shook Iran and the precariousness of the shah's position became more and more apparent, Vance and his senior advisers finally reached the conclusion that the shah was finished unless he immediately ceded substantial and broad authorities to a civilian government (Carter, 1982: 441-442; Vance, 1983: 327-333; Sick, 1985: 119-123; Moens, 1990: 144-148; Sullivan: 1981: 204; David, 1993: 58-64). Vance therefore attempted to persuade other key decision makers that the US should urge the shah to establish a civilian government "with firm military support that would restore order and guide Iran from autocracy to whatever new regime the people themselves decided upon." Following another desperate appeal from Sullivan, he began to argue that the US should begin a dialogue "with responsible political elements in the government, the opposition, and the military" (Vance, 1983: 332).⁸

Throughout this critical period, Brzezinski pushed for the administration to provide the shah with clear assurances that it would support his use of military force to restore order. He also argued that any further concessions to the opposition by the shah would serve to

undermine his position and that all liberalization efforts should therefore be put on hold. For Brzezinski, the most logical position for the administration to take was to support the shah's use of military force since "the situation called for decisive action to restore order and his own authority" (Brzezinski, 1983: 363; Moens, 1990: 144-145). While his recommendation that the administration should provide the shah with assurances of support for a harsh military crackdown on the opposition was never accepted by the president, Brzezinski's energetic advocacy of this position and his behind-the-scenes manoeuvring to gain support for a harder-line approach became a fundamental part of the decision-making process. During the entire November-December period, as Moens points out, not only did Brzezinski become an open and aggressive advocate of the "iron fist" option within the administration, he also used his influence in indirect and unorthodox ways to get the administration to support his preferred course of action and the shah to adopt it (Moens, 1990: 155-156).

Brzezinski utilized a broad range of tactics. Immediately following the 2 November meeting of the SCC to discuss Sullivan's request for policy guidance, for example, he personally called the shah to stress that the US would support him "without reservation whatsoever, completely and fully" and "to encourage him to act forcefully before the situation got out of hand" (Brzezinski, 1983: 364-366). Although he had Carter's permission to make this call, Brzezinski's characterization of the administration's position clearly pushed beyond the limits of the far more measured written message of support that had been agreed to at the SCC meeting and which was sent to the shah through regular channels.⁹ Moreover, over the course of the next two months, Brzezinski had frequent discussions with the Iranian Ambassador to the US, Ardeshir Zahedi, who shared his view that the shah should use his military capability to crack down forcefully on the opposition. Brzezinski and Zahedi maintained and regularly used this "back channel" to promote the "iron fist" option. To try to gain support for this option in Washington, Brzezinski also made direct appeals to the president, moved to increase the profile of Energy Secretary Schlesinger in the decision-making process since Schlesinger's views were generally compatible with his own. He also excluded Precht from SCC meetings once Precht had concluded that the US should withdraw its support from the shah and seek a "modus vivendi" with the Khomeini forces (Brzezinski, 1982: 354-382; Sick, 1985: 65-129; Moens, 1990: 144-151).

Right up until the final days of December, Carter remained committed to the survival of the shah, believing that "he deserved our unequivocal support" as "the leader around whom we hoped to see a stable and reformed government organized and maintained in Iran" (Carter, 1982: 440). He continued to express sympathy and support for the shah and reluctance to pressure him into moving more quickly or decisively.¹⁰ Wishing to avoid both the reality and appearance of undermining the shah's regime, he dismissed all suggestions that the US begin to establish contacts with moderate opposition forces. At the same time, he also rejected Brzezinski's advice that the US should encourage the shah to use the military more aggressively to restore order. Indeed, he completely rejected the notion of a bloody crackdown by the shah because he regarded the "iron fist" option as both immoral and repugnant (Carter, 1982: 439-443; Moens, 1990: 146-152).

While his steadfast desire to do nothing that would undermine the shah and to avoid a bloody crackdown ultimately set the parameters for the administration's approach, Carter did not become intimately engaged in the decision-making process on a day-to-day basis. The Iranian crisis, in other words, did not become one of the key issues which he personally managed. On the contrary, when compared to his involvement in other foreign policy issues such as the Panama Canal treaties, the SALT negotiations and the Middle East peace process, Carter remained fairly detached from the details of the day-to-day events in Iran. There were heavy demands on his time during the November-December period from elsewhere, including the increasingly difficult energy, currency and inflation issues; mid-term elections and the mid-term Democratic convention; and foreign policy problems elsewhere, such as the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia and the crisis in Nicaragua. This was also a period in which he was making an enormous personal investment in the post-Camp David phase of the Middle East peace process and in the negotiation of the normalization agreement with China (Lankevich, 1981: 36-39). The result was that, as Sick notes in his comments on the president's role during this period, "Carter did not engage himself actively in the day-to-day policy-making during the Iran crisis in the same way that he did in many other policy issues" (Sick, 1985: 173).

The result of Carter's limited involvement, Brzezinski's efforts to promote the "iron fist" option, and Sullivan and Vance's efforts to promote policies that would avoid bloodshed and prepare the way for a transition of power was that no clear US position was presented to the

shah. Most of the instructions to Sullivan were formulated at the SCC level where lengthy debates about the tone and specific language to be used took place. At various points both Vance and Brzezinski took their cases directly to the president who refused to allow instructions that would either have encouraged the shah to take an "iron fist" approach or have significantly withdrawn US support for his regime. The messages sent to Sullivan were thus carefully worded compromises that left considerable uncertainty about where the administration stood on the practical options facing the shah. To make matters worse, both Brzezinski and Sullivan continued to communicate their own messages and both Carter and Vance made public statements that were not entirely consistent with the assurances of support the administration was giving to the shah (Sick, 1985: 110).¹¹

Near the end of the December, the shah proposed three concrete policy options and asked for US views: forming a civilian coalition government, leaving the country after turning over most of his powers to a "council of notables" and using the military to crack down harshly on the opposition forces (Vance, 1983: 331). At a SCC meeting called to deal with the shah's request, Vance argued that the administration should begin "to talk immediately with responsible political elements in the government, the opposition and the military" and, at the same time, should reaffirm its opposition to any military crackdown. Brzezinski, now supported by Brown and Schlesinger, strongly opposed any active involvement with opposition forces and argued in favour of a strong message of support to the shah which would still give him the option of taking the "iron fist" approach. The result was another compromise message which indicated the administration's preference for a coalition government, but also support for "a firm military government under the shah" should he consider it essential to govern effectively. Unhappy with this compromise formulation, Vance met with the president alone following the meeting and together they changed this key phrase to a more equivocal one: "a government that would end disorder, violence and bloodshed." Their intention was to make it clear that, while the administration would support a military government if it became necessary to end the bloodshed, it would not support an "iron fist" policy solely intended to save the shah's regime.¹² This response disappointed the shah who wanted a definitive US position with clear recommendations about what precisely he should do. The next day, frustrated by the ambiguous signals he was receiving from Washington, lacking the willpower to act decisively on his own, and feeling increasingly weakened and isolated, he announced that he

would ask Shapur Bakhtiar, the leader of a secular nationalist group called the National Front, to form a civilian coalition government and, for the first time, the shah began to openly discuss the possibility of leaving the country (Moens, 1990: 151-152; Vance, 1983: 331-333; Sick, 1985: 124-127; Brzezinski, 1983: 375-376).

The November-December period was thus essentially one of continued support to the shah. At several key points, Carter rejected both suggestions that the administration begin a dialogue with opposition groups in Iran and suggestions that clear signals should be sent to the shah to encourage him to take an "iron fist" approach. Beyond setting these broad policy parameters, the president was not fully engaged in the sense of making the crisis in Iran one of his top issues. He did not, in other words, bring his issue-oriented, problem-solving style of leadership to bear on this particular problem or act as the policy premier in the daily decision-making process. In this context, other senior decision-makers continued to struggle over policy options while events unfolded rapidly in Iran, with some, most notably Sullivan and Brzezinski, continuing to manoeuvre behind the scenes to promote policy options which were outside the parameters the president had established. This dynamic clearly undermined the unity, coherence and decisiveness with which the administration was able to offer advice to the shah. It also created a high state of policy disarray as the administration entered the next phase of the crisis.

Phase of Transition - The Bakhtiar Regime

The six-week period following the shah's appointment of Shapur Bakhtiar as prime minister was an extremely volatile one in Iran. Throughout the month of January, widespread riots and strikes were the central dynamics of Iranian politics. Following Khomeini's triumphant return to Iran on 1 February until Bakhtiar resigned on 11 February, sporadic violence continued while massive and frequently spontaneous demonstrations in support of Khomeini took place. With each passing day, it became more and more evident that administration had lost whatever ability it might have had earlier to influence events in Iran. While there was more personal involvement in the decision-making process on the part of the president, the administration's policy during this period still suffered from a lack of strategic direction, continuous disagreements and bureaucratic struggles.

Having accepted the shah's offer to form a coalition government on 2 January 1979, Bakhtiar, a secular moderate who had been educated in the West, immediately ran into difficulties. Rather than support him, several other prominent members of the National Front decided to throw their support behind Khomeini who, from Paris, immediately attacked the legitimacy of the Bakhtiar government. Nevertheless, despite his narrow base of support and the continued interference of the shah, Bakhtiar made a determined effort to consolidate his position, take a more liberal path, retain the support of the military and persuade the shah to leave Iran. Although it clearly faced overwhelming problems from the outset, the administration recognized and supported the Bakhtiar regime for the entire six weeks that it clung to power (Carter, 1982: 442-450).

From Tehran, as soon as the shah selected Bakhtiar as prime minister, Sullivan began to forcefully argue that the administration should encourage the shah to leave Iran in order to decrease the probability of a coup by the military and to maximize whatever chance Bakhtiar had of succeeding. On 3 January, Vance made this recommendation to the president. Despite Brzezinski's opposition, Carter approved a message to the shah which expressed strong support for the Bakhtiar government and "concurred" with the shah's suggestion, which he had made earlier to Sullivan, that he "leave the country for a well-deserved rest" once the new government was in place. At the same meeting, concerns about the continued unity and effectiveness of Iranian military were also discussed. On the recommendation of Deputy Secretary of Defense Duncan, the president agreed to dispatch the Deputy Commander of US Forces in Europe, Robert Huyser, who had worked closely with the Iranian military over a period of many years, to Iran to maintain contact with military leaders. Huyser arrived in Tehran the next day, with instructions to focus on promoting cohesion and support for the Bakhtiar regime within the military and, should the regime collapse, on helping the military to restore order (Carter, 1982: 442-443; Sick 1985: 130-132; Vance 1983: 334-336; Brzezinski, 1982: 376-378; Moens, 1990: 152-153).

In early January, Sullivan began to push once again for the administration to establish direct contacts with Khomeini and his agents in Iran. Agreeing with this assessment, Vance recommended that a direct channel be opened with Khomeini in Paris to urge him to give the Bakhtiar regime time to restore order before returning to Iran. Believing that direct talks with Khomeini would be taken as an indication that the US was abandoning the shah, would undermine whatever chance Bakhtiar had for

success and could split the military, Carter rejected this recommendation.¹¹ However, within days, he did phone French President Giscard d'Estaing to ask him to urge Khomeini to give the Bakhtiar regime a chance to restore order and authorized Warren Zimmerman, Political Counsellor at the US Embassy in Paris, to conduct the first of what turned out to be a series of secret meetings with Ibrahim Yazdi, a senior aide to Khomeini. No direct approach to Khomeini was ever authorized and, in the end, Zimmerman's meetings accomplished little more than an exchange of views, with Zimmerman pressing for a delay before Khomeini returned to Iran and Yazdi pressing equally hard for the US to terminate its support of the Bakhtiar regime (Carter, 1982: 443; Vance, 1983: 336-37; Sick, 1985: 140-147).

Meanwhile, in Tehran, cleavages between the views of Sullivan and Huyser quickly emerged and created problems. Sullivan, who had invested heavily in a plan to establish direct contacts with Khomeini in Paris, became increasingly alienated and frustrated as his advice was ignored. When he received a message instructing him to focus his efforts on supporting Bakhtiar, promoting the unity and loyalty of the military and getting the shah to leave, he sent an immediate response which characterized the president's positions as "incomprehensible" and "insane." Angered by this apparent insubordination, Carter asked Vance to bring Sullivan back from Tehran and was persuaded not to only by Vance's plea that it would be a mistake to replace the ambassador at such a critical time. Although Vance's intervention saved Sullivan from being fired, from that point on, Carter had little confidence in Sullivan's reports and advice (Carter, 1982: 446; Sick, 1985: 137-138).

By the time that the shah departed Iran on 16 January, the foreign policy decision-making process was in shambles. Vance still relied on the daily reports and advice he received from Sullivan, who believed that the Bakhtiar regime was rapidly losing control of the situation and the army was steadily disintegrating. Having lost confidence in Sullivan, the president increasingly relied on the reports and advice from Huyser, who remained generally optimistic about the prospects for Bakhtiar to remain in power supported by a reasonably unified military. Meanwhile Brzezinski, who still believed that a military coup was the only option that could protect US interests in the area, remained in contact with Zahedi, who was now in Tehran, digested Huyser's reports very thoroughly, and did everything possible to keep open the option of a military takeover by the Iranian military. Shortly after the shah's departure, for example,

Brzezinski wrote a long, personal memo to the president which argued that a gradual deterioration of the situation in Iran was likely and that the US should be prepared to support a military coup within the next two weeks.¹⁴ In light of their fundamentally different perspectives and objectives, the Vance-Brzezinski relationship began to deteriorate rapidly. Vance was aware that Brzezinski was maintaining his contacts with Zahedi and saw the Huyser mission as a vehicle to ensure that the Iranian military was prepared for a coup. He therefore instructed Sullivan to discourage a military coup and, in an obvious veiled reference to Brzezinski, to ensure that nobody, including Huyser, was misled by any "unauthorized communication" from Washington (Vance, 1983: 337-338; Moens, 1990: 152-153; Brzezinski, 1983: 380-389). It was thus in a context of growing confusion and mistrust in the administration's decision-making process that Khomeini returned to Tehran at the beginning of February to an emotional welcome by hundreds of thousands of supporters.

With its decision-making process in this state of disarray, the administration essentially watched from the sidelines as Khomeini outmanoeuvred Bakhtiar in the days leading up to Khomeini's return and immediately following it. In late January, Bakhtiar tried to arrange a meeting with Khomeini in Paris to discuss the crisis, but Khomeini refused to meet with him unless he resigned. Bakhtiar then took practical steps, including the closure of all airports, to block Khomeini's return. However, by the end of January, Bakhtiar had come to the realization that his standoff with Khomeini was playing to the advantage of Khomeini. He therefore announced that the ayatollah could return unimpeded, hoping that tensions among the religious opposition groups would be exposed and that the charismatic appeal of Khomeini would weaken once he returned to Iran (Sick, 1985: 147-148; Carter, 1983: 448; Vance, 1983: 340-341).

Following Khomeini's triumphant return, the administration continued its ineffectual support of the Bakhtiar regime as it doggedly clung to power, despite Sullivan's plea that the US was becoming "identified with evaporating institutions" and should adjust to the reality that Khomeini had won (Vance, 1983: 341). Within days, Bakhtiar's attempts to negotiate with Khomeini and to prevent Khomeini from setting up a provisional government in Iran had completely collapsed. Sensing complete victory, Khomeini named Bazargan as the head of a new provisional government on 5 February. A few days later, fighting broke out at military bases near Tehran when several units swearing allegiance to Khomeini rebelled against the senior leadership of the military. The Bakhtiar regime immediately

dispatched elite Imperial Guard troops to crush this uprising but, after two days of escalating fighting in which some of the Imperial Guard troops defected to the side of the rebels, the military high command decided to withdraw all troops under its control to their barracks, to announce its neutrality in the political conflict and to negotiate an accommodation with Bazargan (Vance, 1983: 340-342; Sick, 1985: 150-156).

Throughout this critical period of transition in Iran, the infighting within the administration continued and tensions reached even higher levels. Huyser, whose presence in Iran was increasingly drawing criticism from opposition groups and creating a security risk, returned to Washington to brief the president on 5 February. With Sullivan still in Tehran, Huyser highlighted some profound differences between his own views and those of Sullivan, especially on the question of whether the military could still play a role in the crisis. Whereas Huyser expressed confidence that the cohesion of the military could still be maintained and that it was adequately prepared to restore order on behalf of Bakhtiar, Sullivan had concluded that the Iranian military was a "paper tiger" and that, if ordered to intervene, much of it would move over to the side of Khomeini. In light of what he considered to be daily signs of further disintegration in this direction, he believed that military forces should remain on the sidelines and that political forces should be allowed to determine the future of Iran. While still not prepared to support a military takeover, Carter was angry that Sullivan still seemed to have a vision of the way ahead that was completely at odds with his own and with the instructions he was receiving from Washington. That evening another forceful message was sent to Sullivan stressing that the administration's policy continued to be one of the firm support for the Bakhtiar regime, including encouragement of the regime's use of military force, if necessary, to maintain the order it needed to succeed (Sick, 1985: 145-154; Carter, 1982: 445-449; Vance, 1983: 331; Huyser, 1986). At the president's request, a senior State Department official was also sent to Tehran to "straighten out Sullivan or remove him" (Carter, 1982: 449).

This period was, as Sick points out, "a moment of intense personal and political frustration" for the president. In addition to the deteriorating situation in Iran and his differences with Sullivan, he was facing increasing criticism from sources as diverse as the exiled shah's party and influential Americans, including former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, about how the administration had "lost" Iran through its own ineptitude. He was also getting extremely frustrated and angry at the way

in which the administration's policy positions were constantly undermined by leaks and bureaucratic warfare and by what he considered to be too much competitiveness and incisiveness on the part of Brzezinski and an overly tolerant attitude about the actions of subordinates on the part of Vance. This frustration and anger finally boiled over during the first week of February when it was widely reported in the media that the State Department believed that the Bakhtiar regime would not survive for more than a few more days (Carter, 1982: 449-450; Brzezinski, 1983: 389-390; Sick, 1985: 153). This was the context in which he assembled the entire senior leadership of the State Department and those at lower levels dealing directly with Iran and forcefully threatened to fire them if there was "another outbreak of misinformation, distortions or self-serving news leaks." He then met with a similar group of NSC staff members and directed them to avoid "excessive competition" and "to form closer working relations with their equivalents at State" (Carter, 1982: 449-450).

Recognizing the increasing seriousness of the situation in Tehran in light of the heavy fighting and discipline problems being experienced by the military, Brzezinski convened an emergency meeting of the SCC on the morning of 11 February to discuss the safety of the 10,000 Americans still remaining in Iran and what the US might still be able to do to influence the course of events. Although everyone else at the meeting believed that the decision of senior military leaders to withdraw all troops to their barracks was an unequivocal indication that they had lost their will to take any further action, Brzezinski stubbornly clung to his hope that a military takeover might still be possible. He therefore forced further consultations with Sullivan, who reported that the military was in the process of making its accommodation with Bazargan, and with Huyser, who believed that military leadership might still be willing to act if it were assured of the complete support of the US, but did not recommend that the US offer this support.¹⁵ Brzezinski also consulted the president, whose main concern at this point was the safety of the Americans remaining in Iran. Given the compelling evidence that the resolve of the military to support the Bakhtiar regime had collapsed, Brzezinski finally, for the first time since the crisis began, gave up on the military option as a realistic one. Later that same day, Bakhtiar and the members of his Majlis (parliament) resigned and he went into hiding (Sick, 1985: 153-155; Carter, 1982: 450; Vance, 1983: 341; Brzezinski, 1983: 390-393).¹⁶

In short, the January to mid-February period was one of support to the shah-appointed Bakhtiar regime. It was also one in which deep

divisions within the administration were apparent about whether Bakhtiar had any real chance of success and about the approach that should be taken to Khomeini and the military, with the president still opposing both contacts with Khomeini and the use of the military for any purpose beyond maintaining order. With Sullivan attempting to work beyond the limits of his instructions and Brzezinski continuing to press for a military takeover, the decision-making process was in a high state of disarray for much of this six-week period. The president's loss of confidence in Sullivan and subsequent reliance on alternative channels for information and advice further added to the uncertainty and confusion. Meanwhile, the president's frustration at the growing criticism of his policies and at what he perceived to be a lack of loyalty and support within the administration boiled over, resulting in strong repudiations of Sullivan and direct threats by the president to fire those who opposed or tried to circumvent his policies or decisions.

The president was regularly consulted during this transition period and was more involved than he had been in the November-December period, but he was still frequently preoccupied with other events at key moments, such as his nearly week-long summit in Guadeloupe with Schmidt, Giscard d'Estaing and Callaghan during the period in which Bakhtiar was putting together his government and Deng Xiaoping's historic three-day visit to Washington during the critical period just before Khomeini's return. The president was much more involved than he had been during the November-December period, but Iran was still not a top priority issue for the president and he was therefore not the focal point of the day-to-day decision-making process. Most decision making took place at the SCC level where fundamental differences of opinion, in-fighting, back-channelling and behind-the-scenes manoeuvring plunged the entire process into near chaos. Without a forward-looking strategy, a single voice or the full engagement of the president, the administration thus continued to respond in an "undisciplined and sporadic" way (Sick, 1985: 170). It was therefore in no position to define effective ways to deal with Khomeini as Iran moved quickly and painfully through the Bakhtiar period. As it had done in the case of the shah, the administration simply continued to maintain its support of Bakhtiar until he was actually physically ousted from the scene by the overwhelming political force of the opposition. In the wake of these realities, the administration had little leverage or credibility with the provisional government that Khomeini had appointed on his return.

Phase of Rapprochement - The Bazargan Regime

For nearly 9 months, from the time that Bakhtiar fled the scene on 11 February until the hostage crisis began on 4 November, the administration made cautious but persistent efforts to reach an accommodation with the Khomeini-appointed Bazargan regime. The period was one of incredible turmoil within Iran as an intense and frequently violent struggle took place for control over the future shape of the political system and the direction of change. In Washington, within days of the collapse of the Bakhtiar regime, there emerged, for the first time since senior decision makers had become involved in early November, a consensus on what US policy towards Iran should be. While disagreements soon emerged over the issue of whether the shah should be welcome in the US, there was general agreement that, in terms of US-Iran relations, the only sensible approach was to focus on developing relations with Bazargan and the moderate secular forces that he represented. This consensus held right through until Bazargan's resignation in the immediate aftermath of the seizure of the embassy on 4 November, and it allowed the administration to return to the process whereby the State Department took the lead in communicating with the new regime, developing a network of contacts with it and making policy recommendations on specific issues.

The first few days following the collapse of the Bakhtiar regime were extremely volatile ones. Bazargan moved quickly and impressively to consolidate his control by naming Ibrahim Yazdi as deputy prime minister and Karim Sanjabi as foreign minister, both moderate secular nationalists who had been educated in the West. The new regime indicated that it wished to continue relations with the US and discussions about the safety of US citizens still in Iran and the security of sensitive military and intelligence equipment began immediately. At the same time, large gangs, armed and virtually uncontrolled, were roaming the streets of Tehran, representing a wide variety of interests ranging from Islamic fundamentalism to marxism. On 14 February, one of the marxist groups, the Fedayeen, overran and occupied the US embassy. Within 24 hours, however, Yazdi and a group of pro-Khomeini forces arrived, successfully negotiated the release of Sullivan and the rest of the embassy staff, and agreed to provide additional protection for the embassy in the form of "revolutionary guards."¹⁷

On 16 February, in light of the encouraging signs that it had received, the administration formally announced that the US would recognize and maintain "normal diplomatic relations" with the new regime

(Vance, 1983: 343; Carter, 1982: 450). While senior decision makers clearly recognized it might take time and require considerable patience, they believed that a convergence of interests would ultimately allow the relationship with the new regime to develop. As Vance puts it in his memoirs, "we believed that over time U.S. and Iranian interests in a strong, stable, non-Communist Iran should permit a cooperative, if far less intimate, relationship to emerge" (Vance, 1983: 343). Even Brzezinski, who had to this point favoured a military solution in Iran - initially some sort of military crackdown and then an actual military takeover - now shifted his focus to the more limited geopolitical objectives of helping Iran to preserve its national integrity and independence and of convincing the new regime that its security interests would still be served through a good working relationship with the US (Brzezinski, 1983: 471).¹⁸

One of the realities facing the administration in the aftermath of the collapse of the Bakhtiar regime was that CIA officers were no longer safe in Iran. Suspicions and resentment about the CIA ran deep in revolutionary Iran because of the CIA's role in the 1953 coup which had brought the shah to power and its close relationship over the years with SAVAK, the shah's secret police and intelligence organization. In light of the growing instability in Iran and the increased threat to CIA personnel that this represented, the administration had already closed one of its two special stations for monitoring electronic signals in the Soviet Union by the time that the Bakhtiar regime collapsed on 11 February, leaving open only the one which it considered most essential to verifying Soviet compliance with the terms of SALT II, which were still being negotiated. In the aftermath of the 14 February takeover of the embassy, the CIA withdrew its main detachment from Tehran. A few days later, it withdrew all remaining personnel in Iran following an incident at the second listening station during which CIA personnel were physically threatened by the local police responsible for their protection. Since the ability of the US to verify compliance with the provisions of any new arms control agreement with the Soviet Union was a key issue at the time, the loss of this listening post was a significant setback for the administration and the decision to withdraw was not taken lightly (Turner, 1991: 20-23; Bill, 1988: 290). As Turner notes in his account of this period, in an only slightly veiled reference to Brzezinski, "it was not easy to convince the crisis management team in the White House that these people had to be evacuated" (1991: 23). The result of all of this was

that by late February the CIA no longer had a presence in Iran; it was only in the late summer, just months before the hostage crisis began, that it began to reestablish this presence by slipping a few officers back onto the embassy staff. Although the situation did not develop in a way that allowed the administration to revisit the issue of the listening stations, the potential advantages of rebuilding a good security relationship with Iran because of its close proximity to the Soviet Union remained one of the administration's paramount considerations over the coming months.¹⁹

Within Iran, the Bazargan period was one in which Khomeini steadily brought the country under his direct control. By the time that Bazargan took power in mid-February, much of the real political power was already in the hands of the revolutionary organs: the Revolutionary Council which Khomeini had filled with individuals loyal to him prior to his seizure of power; the more than a thousand "Komitehs" around the country which were headed by mullahs or ayatollahs; the paramilitary arm of these "Komitehs", the Revolutionary Guards, who acted as vigilantes of the revolution, searching out and dealing ruthlessly with all opposition; and the revolutionary courts which moved quickly to deal harshly with hundreds of leading members of the military, the police, and the shah's secret service (SAVAK) and government. Moreover, Khomeini retained what was, in effect, the power to veto any decision taken by the Bazargan Cabinet. Even Bazargan's periodic attempts to resign when his decisions were reversed by Khomeini were overruled by Khomeini. As Bazargan would later describe it, his government quickly became a "knife without a blade" (Ledeen and Lewis, 1981: 195-203).

From the outset, it was clear that Khomeini's ultimate objective was to establish an Islamic Republic. In pursuing this objective, he displayed great political acumen, moving quickly to alleviate the suffering of one of the most important elements of his power base, the extremely poor, and to inspire efforts to eradicate all forms of western culture and influence. His tactics were subtle and his focus long-term, as he moved to consolidate his power by slowly isolating the various opposition groups rather than taking them on directly. By letting the Bazargan government make decisions and then, depending on both the substance of the decision and the public reaction to it, allowing it to stand or forcing it to be changed, Khomeini retained the real strings of power without involving himself in the day-to-day vagaries of Iran politics during this extremely volatile period. He also set in motion a constitutional reform process which guaranteed that his supporters would

have the final say. By the late summer, having steadily consolidated his power, he began to move more decisively against opposition groups, especially the leftist groups, to ban public demonstrations, to limit the activities of the press and to denounce communism. He also took over as commander-in-chief of the armed forces and immediately initiated a ruthless military campaign against the Kurdish population in the north in response to its calls for greater autonomy. Thus, by the fall of 1979, it was clear that, while Bazargan was still formally in charge of the Iranian government, Khomeini's grip on the entire political system had progressed to the point where his power was nearly absolute and he was using this power to methodically and effectively establish a theocratic state. Moreover, as his confidence grew, he severed diplomatic relations with Israel, called for the export of his revolution and increasingly voiced his hostility to the "American devils" and their president whom he frequently called "the great satan" (Ledeen and Lewis, 1981: 195-230; Bill, 1988: 271-276; Sick, 1985: 201-204).

Despite the obvious consolidation of political power in the hands of Khomeini and his growing criticism of the US, the administration continued to pursue its low-profile strategy of accommodation with the Bazargan government, a strategy which was, as Ledeen and Lewis point out, widely supported by Iran watchers in the academic community. Now resigned to the reality of the Iranian revolution and believing that Khomeini was at least better than the communists, Brzezinski turned his energies to the development of a new strategy for the Persian Gulf region. By late 1979, the essential elements of this new strategy had emerged: security consultations with states in the region, designation of military units for rapid deployment and planning for increased access to facilities and presence in the region. These were codified into "the Carter Doctrine" following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan at the end of 1979. Meanwhile, both Carter and Brzezinski were content to leave the problem of reaching an accommodation with the new regime in Iran to the State Department (Ledeen and Lewis, 1981: 195-230; Bill, 1988: 276-277; Sick, 1983: 68-76 and 1985: 186-188; Odom, 1992: 159-161).

Left on its own, the State Department quietly courted the Bazargan regime.²⁰ In April, in light of the difficulties he had with the president and was having with the new regime because of his previous relationship with the shah, Sullivan was recalled and, after some difficulties were experienced in getting the new regime to agree to a replacement, Bruce Laingen was appointed as chargé d'affaires.²¹ Laingen arrived in Tehran

in June and immediately set as his objective the restoration of the full diplomatic and military relationship. Over the next few months, working closely with the State Department, Laingen slowly established more effective links with the Bazargan regime. By late summer, his efforts had even extended to the area of military cooperation. Taking advantage of the close contacts which Philip Gast, the senior US military representative in Iran, had maintained, the administration slowly began to reestablish the military supply relationship, turning its back on both the human rights abuses taking place and the fact that the Bazargan regime's interest in reviving the supply relationship was based on its desire to sustain an effective military campaign against the Kurds.²² The embassy also arranged to provide Bazargan and his inner circle with two briefings by the CIA, one in August and another in October.²³ Moreover, the Laingen-State Department effort to rebuild the relationship resulted in a series of secret, high-level meetings in October, including a meeting in New York between Vance and Yazdi, who was now Iran's foreign minister (Ledeen and Lewis, 1981: 222-228; Bill, 1988: 283-285).

Throughout this period, the administration overlooked some important warning signs that indicated that the path to the complete normalization of relations could not be achieved simply by means of an accommodation strategy. Some of these signals came directly from the Bazargan regime. At the Yazdi-Vance meeting in early October, for example, Yazdi pressed hard for the extradition of Iranian "criminals" who had taken refuge in the US and complained about continued interference by the administration in the internal affairs of Iran.²⁴ Other signals came more generally from Iranian society, where anti-American sentiment was on the rise, fuelled by the increasingly forceful rhetoric of Khomeini.²⁵ Moreover, as Ledeen and Lewis point out, even "a casual reading of the Iranian press in October would have revealed a state of high alarm about the activities of the 'great satan' Carter and the 'American devils.'" As well, by October, several Islamic militant groups were calling for direct action to be taken against the US (Ledeen and Lewis, 1981: 226-229).

Even more significantly, the administration did not come to terms with the reality of Khomeini's tightening grip on the political system. Indeed, throughout the entire period leading up to the seizure of the embassy on 4 November, the administration continued to underestimate the vision and growing political power of Khomeini. As a result, it did not deal directly with the real power broker in Iran, but rather focused its efforts on working with a government that was increasingly being

restricted and limited. Although some modest efforts were made to establish contact with clerics close to Khomeini, most notably with Beheshti, no direct contact was ever established with Khomeini. Moreover, by treating the Bazargan regime as if it held the key to the future of Iran and pursuing its accommodation strategy in an increasingly energetic and visible way, the administration was actually provoking Khomeini and the vast majority of the population for whom restoration of the previous US-Iran relationship was completely unacceptable, since it was seen to be one of virtually to took domination. Despite this, throughout October, the administration actually stepped up its efforts to pursue its dialogue with the Bazargan regime, with Precht making a highly visible trip to Tehran in late October and, on 1 November, just days before the embassy was stormed, Brzezinski meeting with Bazargan and Yazdi in Algiers during the celebrations of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Algerian independence. To suspicious Iranians, these events had the appearance of another stage in US efforts to manipulate Iranian leaders and undermine the revolution (Ledeen and Lewis, 1981: 195:230; Bill, 1988: 276-286; Newsom interview).

The issue of the shah's entry into the US was the one issue during the Bazargan months in which Carter maintained his personal involvement and the one issue on which Brzezinski took an entirely different stand than Vance and the embassy in Tehran. Despite the open invitation to enter the US that had been issued in January, the shah had decided to go to Egypt and from there to Morocco. By the time he approached the administration in late February about his move to the US, Khomeini had returned to Iran, the Bakhtiar regime had collapsed and the US embassy had been overrun by armed militants. Initially, the administration simply asked the shah to postpone his request. However, by early March, with both the Moroccans and the shah pushing the issue, the president was forced to make a decision and he denied the shah's request. Although Brzezinski argued that, for both moral and geopolitical reasons, the US should not deny asylum to an old friend, Carter and most of his other senior advisers were not prepared to accept the increased risk to Americans in Iran, particularly to embassy personnel. It was also clear to them that the shah's entry into the US would be completely inconsistent with the administration's strategy of accommodation with revolutionary Iran.²⁶ Brzezinski continued to argue that the shah should be allowed to enter the US and several influential former friends of the shah, including Henry Kissinger and David Rockefeller, sustained a fairly intense lobby to get the administration to reverse its position, but the president never

seriously reconsidered the issue until the shah's health deteriorated to the point where it looked like consideration on solely humanitarian grounds was warranted.²⁷ Meanwhile, largely through the efforts of Kissinger and Rockefeller, arrangements were made for the shah to move to the Bahamas. After two months in the Bahamas during which he complained about the lack of security and the exorbitant costs, the shah moved to Mexico in June. Over the next few months his health deteriorated rapidly as he experienced a variety of serious medical complications, most related to his lymphoma (Sick, 1985: 176-181; Carter, 1983: 452-454; Ioannides, 1984: 69-89).

At the end of September, the administration learned of the seriousness of the shah's illness and began to reconsider its position. On October 18, the shah was examined in Mexico by Dr. Kean, a specialist from New York, who strongly urged the administration to allow the shah to enter the US for urgent medical treatment. Based on the joint assessment of Dr. Kean and the State Department's medical director, Vance reversed his previous position and, at the foreign policy breakfast on October 19, recommended to the president that the shah be allowed to enter the US for immediate treatment. Carter once again expressed his concern that the shah's arrival in the US, even under compelling humanitarian circumstances, might result in Americans being held hostage or killed in Iran.²⁸ In light of the president's concern, Vance instructed the embassy in Tehran to inform Bazargan and Yazdi of the shah's condition and of the plans to allow him to be treated in the US and to seek their assistance in protecting Americans from any hostile reaction in Iran. When Laingen and Precht, who was still in Tehran at the time, reported on October 21 that, although unhappy, Bazargan and Yazdi had been rather subdued in their reaction and had agreed to provide additional protection to the embassy, the president approved the shah's entry to the US. The following day, the shah arrived in New York on a chartered jet and was immediately admitted to the hospital for surgery and treatment (Smith, 1981; Carter, 1982: 454-456; Sick, 1985: 184-186; Vance, 1983: 371-373).

The immediate reaction in Iran was not violent. A major demonstration outside the embassy in Tehran to protest the shah's presence in the US took place on 1 November, but it remained relatively peaceful and controlled, with the Bazargan government cooperating fully by providing additional protection. However, that same day, in Algiers, Brzezinski met with Bazargan, Yazdi and Mustapha Ali Chamran, the Iranian Minister of Defence. Pictures of Brzezinski shaking hands with the

Iranian delegation were soon displayed on television and in the newspapers in Iran, raised the temperature of anti-American feeling to a new level and severely undermined the credibility of Bazargan and his Cabinet. These images played on old fears and, for the vast majority of Iranians, they provided clear evidence that, like its predecessors, Bazargan's regime was colluding with the US (Bill, 1988: 294-295).²⁹

The context in which the embassy was taken over on 4 November 1979 was thus one in which the US was relentlessly pursuing a policy of accommodation with the Bazargan regime while, in Iran, the real political centre of gravity was inexorably moving towards Khomeini. On the one hand, the administration vigorously attempted to reestablish good working relationships across the entire spectrum of previous cooperative activities, including military supplies and intelligence sharing. On the other, as Khomeini became more and more confident that the extreme left and the extreme right were no longer capable of posing a serious threat to the revolution, he sharpened his anti-American rhetoric, with profound implications for the way in which the vast majority of Iranians perceived US actions and interests. The result was a complex US-Iran dynamic in which the administration experienced some limited success in pursuing its strategy of accommodation with the Bazargan regime while, at the same time, hostility towards the US and all things American was growing in Iranian society. Having invested so heavily and exclusively in one strategy, the administration was thus in a bad position when the Khomeini-inspired societal forces erupted, resulting in the hostage crisis and the rapid exit of the Bazargan regime from the political scene.

Seen in light of the themes developed in the last two chapters, it is clear that the administration was experiencing serious substantive and process problems with its whole foreign policy program when the hostage crisis began. With respect to Iran, the administration had never shown much understanding of the revolution and its policies had clearly been ineffective.³⁰ On the few occasions when senior decision makers had been fully engaged, during the final days of the shah's rule and the brief period of Bakhtiar regime, the result had been some of the most intense in-fighting, back-channelling and behind-the-scenes manoeuvring the administration had experienced to date. Not only had fundamental differences of opinion surfaced, the way they played out had greatly weakened the administration's ability to exert any meaningful influence at all on the course of events in Iran. The forced retreat to the strategy of accommodation following Khomeini's triumphant return to Iran had given

the administration a reprieve from the destructive dynamics of this particular struggle, but serious conflict about the ends and means of US foreign policy continued to manifest itself in other areas as Brzezinski increasingly pursued the role of advocate, a role reinforced by a steady shift in the centre of gravity of the decision-making process towards the White House. In short, the administration was not only experiencing grave difficulties with the foreign policy issues on its agenda, it was already seriously divided when the hostage crisis began.

The Embassy Takeover and Immediate Aftermath

The shah's entry into the US provided Khomeini with an opportunity to mobilize public opinion in support of the ongoing revolutionary process. With a national referendum on the new constitution only a month away, he immediately seized the issue to rally support behind his leadership and to further discredit those who were not yet prepared to endorse the kind of constitution he wanted, most notably sizable elements of the student population, middle class, intelligentsia and traditionalist clergy, as well as parts of the government itself, including Bazargan." Linking the shah's entry into the US to his political opponents, Khomeini denounced the entire government bureaucracy, insisting that the "American-loving rotten brains" within it "be purged from the nation." Shortly thereafter, his Islamic Republican Party called for a mass demonstration at the US embassy on 1 November to protest "American imperialism." Although the Bazargan government was able to keep most of crowd away from the vicinity of the embassy, approximately two million demonstrators took to the streets chanting "death to America" for harbouring "the criminal shah." On 2 November, after pictures of the Brzezinski-Bazargan meeting had been widely displayed in the media, Khomeini publicly demanded that the US hand the shah over to Iran, and on 3 November, the day before the embassy was taken, he called for "students and theological students to expand with all their might their attacks against the United States and Israel, so that they may force the United States to return the deposed and criminal shah" (Vance, 1983: 372-373; Sick, 1985: 198-205; Bill, 1988: 294-295).

The extremist students who organized the attack on the embassy began planning for it shortly after the shah arrived in New York. Although he almost certainly did not personally order the action, it is possible that Khomeini was aware that an attack on the US embassy was being planned and that his statements were intended as unequivocal signals that the plan

should be implemented."² At the very least, as Khomeini's rhetoric steadily escalated during the first few days of November, it was clear to the students that he would welcome "the lesson" they intended to give the US and anyone else who was willing to collaborate with "the great Satan." The students had every reason to believe, in other words, that their action would receive the support of Khomeini and his trusted inner circle of advisers. However, from the available evidence, it appears certain that they expected their action would be essentially symbolic in nature and would last, at the most, for a few days (Sick, 1985: 197-198; Ledeen and Lewis, 1981: 229; Bill, 1988: 273-274; Vance, 1983: 374-375; Kifner, 1981: 175-188).

Despite the previous incidents in which the embassy had been overrun in February and May, the facility was still quite vulnerable. Some additional security measures had been taken, such as nearly doubling the number of Marine guards and adding new steel doors to the chancery building so that the staff could hold out under siege for a couple of hours, providing greater time to allow the Iranian government to provide assistance and for the destruction of secret files and sensitive equipment.³ Also, in September, following persistent complaints by Laingen and his staff, the Bazargan government replaced the undisciplined and poorly trained Revolutionary Guards stationed around the perimeter of the compound with uniformed regular police. Nevertheless, the embassy complex could still be rather easily overwhelmed by the kinds of large mobs that roamed the streets of Tehran and, knowing that it could not hold out for long without the help of the Iranian government, the embassy frequently sought assurances from the Bazargan regime that the embassy would be protected. Indeed, on the very morning of the takeover, Laingen and two of his staff, Political Counsellor Victor Tomseth and Security Officer Michael Howland, were at the Foreign Ministry seeking additional assistance and protection for the embassy (Sick, 1985: 195; Bill, 1988: 220-221; Vance, 1983: 368-374).

On the morning of 4 November, a crowd of demonstrators began to form outside the embassy, shouting anti-American slogans. At about ten thirty, some three thousand of them, led by a well-organized group of extremist students, climbed over the walls and forced their way into several buildings.⁴ Five staff members who were in the consulate building were able to escape from the embassy complex to a side street. Most of the others barricaded themselves behind the new steel doors in the chancery where they held out for as long as they could, destroying classified

material and passing situation reports back to Washington. After about two hours, one group of students, which had broken into the upper stories of the chancery and had taken several captives, threatened to harm their hostages and cut into the steel doors with an acetylene torch unless the doors were opened. At this point, the doors were opened and most of the staff members surrendered. A few others, who were locked in the communications vault, held out for about another half hour until they had finished destroying the secret documents and coding equipment they had with them. Two and a half hours after they had led the mob over the embassy walls, the militant students were holding sixty-three American hostages and had seized a large volume of classified messages, letters and memos. Three other Americans, Laingen, Tomseth and Howland, were then taken into "protective custody" at the Foreign Ministry. The five who had escaped from the consulate building and the agricultural attache, who had not been at the embassy at the time of the seizure, reached the Canadian embassy where they were given refuge for several weeks and, eventually, assistance in escaping Iran (Sick, 1985: 195-196; Vance, 1983: 373-375; McFadden et al, 1981: 3-16; NSAD 97).

Locked into its strategy of accommodation with the Bazargan regime, the immediate response of the Carter administration to these events was to press for an immediate intervention by the Foreign Ministry. The general expectation of the senior management in the State Department was that the hostages would be released within a few hours, as soon as the government intervened (Vance, 1983: 375). This expectation was reinforced by Yazdi who compared the incident to a sit-in at a university in the US and offered assurances that the incident would be resolved "within 48 hours." Since he had personally been instrumental in resolving the incident of 14 February, the administration initially took considerable comfort from his expression of confidence that, once he had explained the situation to Khomeini, religious leaders would cooperate and convince the students occupying the embassy that they had made their point and should give up their hostages and leave. This sense that the Bazargan regime would be able to work through this situation quickly as it had on 14 February was, however, extremely short-lived (Sick, 1985: 196-197; Vance, 1983: 375).

The first ominous sign of the real seriousness of the situation came when Ahmed Khomeini, the ayatollah's son, went to the embassy late that day to congratulate the students on their successful action. The next day, 5 November, statements of support came from the leader of the Revolutionary Guards, from a host of religious leaders, including Beheshti

who now headed both the Iranian Revolutionary Party and the Revolutionary Council, and from Khomeini himself. Both the students who had taken over the embassy and the Bazargan government seemed genuinely surprised at this sudden turn of events. Showered in praise by religious leaders and much of the Iranian public, the students quickly found themselves at the centre of a new round of revolutionary fervour which far exceeded their modest expectations and involved a dramatic confrontation with the US. Frustrated and humiliated by their impotence to intervene, Bazargan and his Cabinet had little choice but to resign. On 6 November, Khomeini accepted their resignations and turned the day-to-day operations of government over to the Revolutionary Council (Vance, 1983: 376; Carter, 1982: 458; Sick, 1985: 196-205; Bill 1988: 294).³⁵

Meanwhile, in the US, the Carter administration was also taken by surprise and senior decision makers quickly realized that the entire accommodation strategy that had been pursued over the previous nine months was in total shambles. Having placed all of its hopes on Bazargan, the administration had no place to turn. Although it had now become obvious, as Vance notes in his memoirs, that the real authority rested solely with Khomeini (Vance, 1983: 375), the administration had not established any effective channel of communication to Khomeini or his inner circle (Sick, 1985: 206). Thus the crisis began with the administration's Iran policy in utter disarray. With the Bazargan regime now banished from the scene, it had nobody to negotiate with or to turn to for assistance, and with the entire diplomatic corps held hostage, there was nobody on the ground in Tehran to represent the administration's interests or to begin to forge new links with Khomeini or the Revolutionary Council. Moreover, with the only CIA officers in Iran now held hostage, the administration's ability to gather up-to-date intelligence was virtually non-existent and its relationship with the Iranian military was now limited and strained. To make matters worse, the hostages were being held in the middle of a major city half way around the world, where mobs increasingly hostile to the US now roamed virtually at will. The administration was therefore in an extremely difficult and vulnerable position as the hostage crisis rapidly transformed the domestic situation in Iran, US-Iran relations, and the geopolitics of the entire Persian Gulf region. In light of the immediate stakes involved, however, it had little choice but to try to react calmly and define a way ahead that did not place the lives of the hostages in even greater danger.

Once the hostages were taken and the administration's accommodation policy was clearly stymied, the entire foreign policy decision-making structure, including the president, became fully engaged. For the previous nine months, with the exception of the question of the shah's entry into the US, the administration had allowed the State Department to handle the day-to-day policy issues concerning Iran and, in practice, the State Department itself had decentralized most of its decision-making authority to Laingen and Precht. In the immediate aftermath of the seizure of the embassy on 4 November, this decision-making process changed, abruptly and fundamentally.

With its employees held hostage, the State Department immediately established, in accordance with standard operating procedures, a task force to deal with the crisis (the "Iran Working Group"). Under the supervision of Precht, this group began to operate twenty-four hours a day, monitoring the situation in Tehran and coordinating the diplomatic efforts to ensure the safety of the hostages and to secure their release. Right from the start, the hostage crisis also brought the senior management of the State Department, including Vance, Christopher and Newsom, intimately into the decision-making process. Vance, particularly, felt a personal sense of responsibility for the fate of his imprisoned colleagues and, from the outset, it was obvious that he and his senior team at the State Department would play a central role in framing the administration's response to the crisis (Vance, 1983: 373-375; Brzezinski, 1983: 481; Newsom interview).

Within hours of the embassy seizure, Brzezinski also became highly engaged. On the morning of 5 November, he chaired a meeting of the SCC on the hostage crisis. This was the first of a series of high-level meetings that would be held almost daily for several months, most of them chaired by Brzezinski (Sick, 1985: 207-213). For the previous nine months, Brzezinski had essentially watched from the sidelines as the State Department pursued the policy of accommodation. Once it was clear that these efforts had failed and that the Khomeini-student alliance might succeed in sustaining a long-term affront to US "national honour," Brzezinski sprung into action, driven by his immediate concerns about the implications of the crisis for US security interests in the Persian Gulf area and worldwide. The hostage crisis was precisely the kind of issue which made his adrenaline flow, and his mind turned quickly to the possibilities for military action. Within 24 hours, he had taken charge of a small military planning group, which included Brown, Jones and

Turner, to oversee the development of all military options and, within 48 hours, the group was already beginning to look at the possibility of a rescue operation (Sick, 1985: 207-214; Brzezinski, 1983: 480).

Brzezinski's move back into the day-to-day decision-making process on Iran was thus rapid and decisive. During the final days leading up to the fall of the shah and during the brief period of the Bakhtiar regime, Brzezinski had been essentially breaking new ground in his role of advocate. Now, nine months later, he was more confident, assertive and comfortable in that role, and more skilled at taking advantage of his position in the White House to get the outcomes he preferred, as demonstrated two months earlier in dealing with the issue of the Soviet brigade in Cuba. He was also aware that Carter had lost considerable faith in the State Department over its handling of the whole Iran issue and considered it his responsibility to provide advice as well as to manage the process, especially now that a new, dangerous and novel situation confronted the administration. Once the president, on Brzezinski's recommendation, approved the study of the entire range of military options, it was virtually inevitable that Brzezinski and Vance, whose views on the utility of military force were diametrically opposed, would again be on opposite sides of some fundamental issues as they had been almost a year earlier in the debate about the proper response to events in Iran. This time, however, given the shift in the centre of gravity of the decision-making process towards the White House, the president's lack of faith in the State Department's handling of the whole Iran file, and the president's growing tendency to see the international system as unstable and dangerous, Brzezinski now held some new advantages.

Ultimately, of course, Brown, Jones and others involved at the Department of Defense would also be key players in developing and assessing the military options. Jones personally supervised these activities, including those of a special Joint Task Force set up to develop the rescue operation. The Department of Defense had enjoyed an extremely close working relationship with the Iranian military during the period when the shah was in power and many of its senior officers, including Huyser and Gast, had served in Iran, so it was well placed to consider the vulnerability of Iran to specific military threats and operations. The close working relationship that Brown had developed with Brzezinski during their previous months and their shared concerns about Soviet intentions in the Persian Gulf region and elsewhere meant that they were unlikely to run into much disagreement in the military planning

group. From the outset, Brown voiced no objections to Brzezinski taking charge of the group. He was obviously prepared to work through Brzezinski rather than going directly to the president with his views and advice.

As the crisis deepened with the resignation of Bazargan, it became obvious that accurate intelligence would be vital. At the first SCC meeting on 5 November, Turner gave a briefing on the militant students who had taken over the embassy and on the prospects for negotiations (Sick, 1985: 214). All CIA officers had been withdrawn from Iran in February and were just beginning to slip back into the country at the time the embassy was seized. Since the only ones back in Iran were now being held hostage, Turner's information about the captors was sketchy. The State Department needed information to determine the condition of the hostages and to help with whatever negotiations might take place and the Defense Department needed up-to-date information about the precise locations of the hostages and the behaviour patterns of the students to use in developing a rescue plan. As he scrambled to provide this information to those who needed it, Turner became a key player on both the military planning group and the crisis management team that was set up by the SCC.

To the point of the embassy seizure, Carter had never made Iran policy one of his priority issues. Even during the final days of the shah's rule and during the problem-filled days of the Bakhtiar regime, he had other things on his mind and had never given the kind of priority to Iran that he had to other issues. This situation changed dramatically with the beginning of the hostage crisis. Even more than he had in the case of other priority issues such as the Panama Canal treaties and the Middle East peace process, Carter personalized the crisis and devoted unprecedented time and energy to resolving it. As he notes in his memoirs:

The safety and well being of the 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 honour and security of our nation (Carter, 1982: 459).

On this issue, more than any other during the entire four years as president, he became a trustee president, acting on what he considered to be the national interest and the interests of the hostages and their families. He became totally engaged, exercising the kind of issue-oriented, problem-solving type of leadership he had used on other top priority issues. In short, he became the "policy premier" for the hostage

situation, standing firmly at the centre of the decision-making process and taking "separate streams of advice" from his key advisers, including his closest political advisers, Mondale, Jordan and Powell, before making decisions.

The key decision makers from the outset were therefore Vance, Brzezinski, Brown, Jones, Turner, Mondale, Jordan and Powell. While other members of the State Department, DoD, CIA and NSC staff would play important roles at various stages over the next few months, it would always be under the personal supervision of the senior decision makers who headed these organizations. At the centre of this process stood the president. Indeed, having chosen for the first time to make Iran one of his top issues, the hostage crisis began with Jimmy Carter taking a firm personal grip on the decision-making process - with all the strengths and weaknesses that this implied.

ENDNOTES - CHAPTER FOUR

1. The precise relationship between the Carter administration's human rights policy and the fall of the shah has been the subject of considerable controversy. Spencer, for example, argues that it was pressure from the new administration in the area of human rights that forced the shah to conduct his whole liberalization program (Spencer, 1988: 65-82). Similarly, Bill argues that Carter's human rights policy was a major factor in opening the floodgates of the revolution (Bill, 1988: 226-233). On the other hand, Sick downplays both the extent to which the shah's liberalization program was a result of pressures from the human rights campaign and the impact of the liberalization effort on the larger scheme of things (Sick, 1985: 168-174).
2. Sales in fiscal year 1978 exceeded those for fiscal year 1977 by \$4 billion, with sales to Iran again accounting for a large share of the total (Moens, 1990: 140-141; Sick, 1985: 23-27).
3. Carter personally reduced the number of AWACS from 10 to 7 when he reviewed the proposal (Sick, 1985: 26).
4. During the shah's visit to Washington, the police used tear gas in their attempt to control demonstrators who had gathered near the White House (one group to stage a demonstration against the human rights abuses of the shah and another to stage a counter-demonstration), causing significant embarrassment for the shah when noise and tear gas reached the White House lawn during the arrival ceremony for him. Although those involved in these demonstrations were mainly Iranian students who had descended on Washington for the occasion (there were more than 60,000 Iranian students in US schools at the time), the incident showed that human rights abuses in Iran had become a visible public issue in the US (Carter, 1982: 433-434; Sick, 1985: 28-29; Dumbrell, 1993: 163; David, 1993: 53).
5. Diplomatic and intelligence reports throughout this period consistently concluded that, despite the unrest in Iran, the shah's regime itself was not threatened. In August, for example, a CIA report concluded that "Iran is not in a revolutionary or even pre-revolutionary situation" (Carter, 1983: 438) and a Defense Intelligence Agency analysis concluded that the "shah's rule was stable for at least another decade" (Moens, 1990: 142). In addition, the US Ambassador to Iran, William Sullivan, who was in Washington for much of the summer, saw no significant threat to the shah from developments in Iran to that point (Brzezinski, 1983: 359). With hindsight, it is clear that these assessments lacked a realistic understanding of the situation in Iran, at least in part due to the reluctance of the administration to develop contacts with opposition forces and the close relationship that US intelligence agencies had developed with the Iranian secret service (SAVAK). With respect to the demands on senior decision makers at the time, Brzezinski states simply that "our decision-making circuits were heavily overloaded." More specifically, he admits that "until the crisis became very grave, the attention of the top decision makers, myself included, was riveted on other issues, all extraordinarily time-consuming, personally absorbing, and physically demanding" (Moens, 1990: 142; Brzezinski, 1983: 359).
6. In retrospect it is clear that the shah's terminal illness (lymphoma) and the side effects of the treatment he was undergoing for it may have been important factors in shaking his confidence and will power as well (Moens, 1990: 143; Sick, 1985: 163-164).
7. Moens concludes that "Instead of calling a meeting to discuss the memo or sending the memo to Carter, he [Brzezinski] shelved it permanently" (Moens, 1990: 143). Sick, on the other hand, argues that the State Department's analysis was never sent to the White House (Sick, 1985: 60).

8. Vance's personal intervention took place on 28 December. In addition to arguing that the US should establish a broader dialogue with the various political groups in Iran and urge the shah to establish a civilian government, Vance wanted to send Sullivan clear instructions to dissuade the shah from using the army to save his regime. After meeting with other senior decision makers including Brzezinski, Brown, Turner and, separately, the president, Vance was able to send instructions which made it clear that the US would support a military government only to end the disorder, violence and bloodshed, not to apply an "iron fist" to sustain the regime. There was, however, little support for Vance's position with respect to establishing a dialogue with the opposition elements in Iran, and no instruction to do so was sent (Vance, 1983: 331-33).

9. During the call on 3 November, in a revealing question which went right to the heart of one of the central difficulties during the November-December period, the shah asked Brzezinski, "Is your Ambassador briefed?" The written message that had gone to Sullivan on 2 November instructed him to tell the shah that the US "recognized the need for decisive action and leadership to restore order and his own authority," but it also emphasized the need to "resume prudent efforts to promote liberalization and to eradicate corruption" once order was restored. It was reserved in tone and did not emphasize the need "forceful" action (Brzezinski, 1982: 364-366).

10. In his memoirs, Carter recognizes that the shah was reacting to events too slowly. "It seemed," he says, "that every time the shah finally decided to make a conciliatory move, it was a few days too late to satisfy anyone, even his closest advisers and supporters" (Carter, 1982: 442). Yet, at the same time, as Vance points out, Carter wanted to stay in step with the shah on the issues of forming a new government and talking to opposition forces (Vance, 1983: 331). The result is that the administration did very little to pressure the shah to move more quickly.

11. On December 7, for example, in response to a question about whether the shah would survive the turmoil in Iran, Carter replied, "I don't know. I hope so. This is something that is in the hands of the people of Iran. We have never had any intention and don't have any intention of trying to intercede in the internal affairs of Iran" (Sick, 1985: 110).

12. In going to the president in this way, Vance showed that he too could use his access to the president to promote his own objectives in the face of opposition from Brzezinski. When pressed, he was, in other words, capable of conducting his own "end run" of the normal decision-making process (Moens, 1990: 151). By agreeing to this change, Carter was actually just adhering to the parameters he had established throughout the November-December period. While not agreeing with Vance about the need to engage the opposition in consultations, Carter clearly sided with him in consistently rejecting Brzezinski's attempts to have the administration support the shah taking an "iron fist" approach to crushing the opposition. At a visceral level, as Moens points out, the idea of encouraging bloodshed to further US interests was repugnant to Carter (Moens, 1990: 146). In this context, the shah too, as Sick notes in his memoirs, "did not have the heart" for the large-scale bloodshed that this option represented (Sick, 1985: 126).

13. Sullivan, on his own, had allowed his officials to establish contact with Ayatollah Beheshti, who was emerging as one of Khomeini's senior lieutenants in Iran. Working with Beheshti and the State Department, these officials had developed an elaborate proposal for Theodore Eliot, a senior State Department official who spoke Farsi, to travel to Paris to meet with Khomeini directly. Brzezinski, who opposed the plan, insisted that the shah be consulted. Although Sullivan did this and the shah voiced no objection, after consulting both Vance and Brzezinski, Carter turned off the Eliot mission to the surprise and chagrin of

Sullivan who had invested heavily in the preparations for it (Sick, 1985: 132-138).

14. Brzezinski's preferred course of action during the entire Bakhtiar period was for the US to encourage the Iranian military to stage a coup. He made this argument directly to Carter during the first week of January, but Carter firmly rejected the idea (Brzezinski, 1983: 378).

15. The view that the military should no longer be considered part of the equation was reinforced during the meeting when it was learned that the Chief of the Supreme Command Staff, General Gharabaghi, was meeting with Bazargan. Huyser was back in Europe at the time of the meeting. An attempt was also made to call Philip Gast, the senior military officer in Iran who, as Chief of the US Military Assistance Advisory Group, had worked closely with Huyser in Iran and had taken over the tasks of maintaining contact with the Iranian military and reporting back to Secretary Brown. Gast, who would later play an important role in the rescue operation, could not be reached (Sick, 1985: 153-155; Vance, 1983: 341; Brzezinski, 1983: 390-393).

16. Sick ends his detailed account of these events with a fitting epitaph that he reviewed from the US Defence Attaché in Tehran, Tom Schaifer, who was to become one of the hostages: "Army surrenders; Khomeini Wins. Destroying all classified" (Sick, 1985: 156).

17. There was one complication. One of the marine guards, who had been wounded during the takeover and taken to a local hospital, was kidnapped by the Fedayeen and held for almost a week before being released (Turner, 1991: 21-24). The same day of the attack on the embassy, Adolph Dubbs, the US Ambassador to Afghanistan, was kidnapped by rebels in Kabul and killed in a reckless assault on the rebel position by Afghan government forces. In Tehran, Sullivan reacted coolly to the Fedayeen assault and calmly ordered the Marine guards and embassy staff to destroy all classified files and communications equipment and then to give themselves up without resistance. The "revolutionary guards" offered by Yazdi were the paramilitary arm of the pro-Khomeini Komitehs, the ubiquitous local collectives that seized much of the real political power in Iran throughout this tumultuous period (Ledeer and Lewis, 1981: 198).

18. Although Brzezinski clearly demonstrated his willingness to deal with the new realities, he privately lamented his earlier lack of success in getting the administration to support or, if necessary, promote a military takeover in Iran. To do this he felt that he might have made more effective use of Schlesinger, Brown and Duncan, all of whom were sympathetic to his views (Brzezinski, 1983: 393-395).

19. The embassy in Tehran served as a regional base for the CIA, so the implications of the removal of all personnel from Iran in early 1979 was a severe blow to the US intelligence community. The extent to which the embassy was involved in gathering intelligence on other countries in the region, most notably the Soviet Union, Turkey, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Iraq, was revealed publicly in 1982 when the students who took over the embassy in November 1979 published fifty-four volumes of captured CIA documents (Epstein, 1987: 33-41).

20. During the spring and summer of 1979, the degree of decentralization in the decision-making process reached the point where the State Department's Director for Iran, Henry Precht, "essentially ran a one-man show." Precht had argued from the beginning "that once the shah was gone, moderate elements would reassert themselves and gradually establish a regime compatible with long-term US interests." Indeed, his personal stake in this outcome and the rapid decentralization of decision-making authority to him were major factors in determining the way that the policy of accommodation was implemented (Sick, 1985: 187).

21. William Cutler was nominated to replace Sullivan in June, but Iran rejected the nomination on the grounds that, as US ambassador in Zaire, he had helped the US to interfere in the internal affairs of that country.

22. In order to sustain this campaign effectively, the Iranian Ministry of Defence needed to reopen the pipeline of spare parts for equipment it had previously purchased from the US, including fighter aircraft, helicopter gunships and transport vehicles (Ledeen & Lewis, 1981: 223-226).

23. When these briefings were exposed through documents recovered by the militants that took over the embassy on 4 November, they were used as political capital in the power struggle in Iran. Abbas Amir-Entezan, who served for a period as Bazargan's deputy prime minister before being appointed as Ambassador to Sweden, worked closely with US political counsellor John Stempel and CIA officer George Cave to make these briefings possible. Amir-Entezan was subsequently tried for treason in March 1980 and sentenced to life imprisonment (Sick, 1985: 192; Bill, 1988: 287-293).

24. Yazdi's main issue during this period appears to have been his concern about possible US assistance to the Kurds. At an intelligence briefing a few days later in Tehran, the second one given to the Bazargan regime by CIA and embassy officials, Yazdi expressed deep concern to Charge d'Affaires Laingen about the war with the Kurds and suggested that the US (perhaps the CIA acting on its own) and Israel were working with the Iraqi Kurds to attempt to destabilize the revolutionary government (Bill, 1988: 288-293). By this time, knowing full well that the Iranian interest was driven by its needs for the campaign against the Kurds in the north, the administration had resumed a modest program to supply spare parts to Iran, hoping that this would help improve relations with the Bazargan regime. Despite this, Yazdi suspected that the US had renewed its support to the Iraqi Kurds, support which had been intended to help the shah keep Iraq off balance but was suspended at the shah's request in 1975. The idea of such support was threatening to the Bazargan regime because of the close ties between the Kurdish populations in the two countries (Ledeen and Lewis, 1981: 225-226). However, for Yazdi's allegation of renewed US support to have been true, the administration would have had to be deliberately playing both sides of the confrontation in northern Iran. There is no evidence to suggest that this was the case.

25. As early as April, the embassy in Iran had reported that Khomeini was stepping up his verbal attacks on the US. In May, the embassy was again overrun by about 100,000 demonstrators who broke through the perimeter defences and tore down the American flag. By the summer of 1979, "the anti-Americanism of the Khomeini-led masses" had become an inextricable part of the political landscape (Vance, 1983: 344-345; Ledeen and Lewis, 1981: 221-222).

26. In May, when the US informed Tehran that it would allow the shah's children to continue their education in the US, the Bazargan regime issued a warning that there would be serious problems if the shah were allowed into the US. In an assessment sent to Washington in late September, Laingen stated that, in light of the increased influence of the clerics, the US could expect an even stronger reaction to the shah's arrival in the US than would have been the case earlier (Sick, 1985: 180-183; Vance, 1983: 344; Carter, 1982: 452; Gast interview).

27. Brzezinski's continued disagreement with the administration's policy concerning the shah led Carter to lament that "Rockefeller, Kissinger, and Brzezinski seem to be adopting this as a joint project" (Carter, 1982: 452).

28. Carter had, on several occasions, previously expressed this same concern. In late February, for example, when Brzezinski first pressed him to allow the shah to enter the US, Carter reacted angrily, saying that "he did not want the shah in the United States playing tennis while Americans in Tehran were kidnapped or killed" (Sick, 1985: 178).

29. As Bill points out, it is still not clear who actually requested the meeting. In his memoirs, Brzezinski asserts that Bazargan "requested a meeting with me" while Yazdi claims that it was the other way around.

Whatever the exact sequence of events, two things are clear. First, Laingen and others had been pressing for high-level meetings of this nature and this one was consistent with the general policy of accommodation that the administration was pursuing; and second, the meeting turned out to be "a severe political miscalculation" by both sides (Bill, 1988: 294-295).

30. Bill gives a thorough elaboration of this theme in his excellent study entitled The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations (1988: 216-315). David's analysis of this is also quite good (David, 1993: 51-109). In retrospect, at least some members of the administration now admit that they had a weak understanding of what was really going on in Iran. Vance, for example, who understood Iran far more than many of the others, candidly admits in his memoirs that "our understanding of forces at work in Iran was limited" (Vance, 1983: 376). Similarly, Turner admits that the administration had an inaccurate view of the Islamic forces at work and where Khomeini "was going to go and how much he might fulfil his promises to create a theocracy and so on." In an interview conducted for this study, he concluded by acknowledging that "we missed a lot of that" (Turner interview).

31. Some of the strongest opposition, of course, came from the far corners of Iran, particularly from the Kurds in the north. To deal with secessionist forces, however, Khomeini's strategy was extremely direct: he used military force. The issue of the shah's entry into the US was useful in the more complex struggle for the hearts and minds of the mainstream population. Although he avoided confrontation with Khomeini on the issue, Bazargan actively opposed the constitution and, just prior to his departure for Algiers where he met Brzezinski on 1 November, he had forcefully registered his personal protest with Khomeini (Sick, 1985: 202-204).

32. As Bill points out, Khomeini was probably exercising leadership in the traditional Shiite way. In this tradition, the leader develops his policies only after he has sought to understand the will of his followers. Similarly, the followers look to the leader for guidance before acting. Leadership is thus more circular than it is hierarchical, since "the relationships are formed within a kind of sealed circle where the leader both leads and follows and the followers both follow and lead" (Bill, 1988: 273-274).

33. One puzzling issue with respect to security is why, particularly after the decision was made to allow the shah to enter the US for treatment, action was not taken to destroy documents not absolutely essential to daily operations. One possible reason is that the administration was so focused on its strategy of accommodation with the Bazargan regime that it placed too much faith in the assurances it was given rather than taking a more realistic, hard-nosed look at the risk of sensitive documents falling into Iranian hands.

34. The group of "students" who eventually held the hostages in the embassy was actually composed of a combination of student leaders from educational institutions in Tehran, other militant students, unemployed young people who called themselves students, and young Islamic revolutionaries, some of them well trained in interrogation and propaganda techniques. Some of the revolutionaries, as one of the hostages would later point out, "were old enough to be graduate students working on their fourth or fifth degrees" (McFadden *et al.*, 1981: 119-125). Nevertheless, as Kifner points out, "the best evidence suggests that the students were what they said they were: young Islamic zealots" (Kifner, 1981: 175-188).

35. It is, of course, interesting to speculate about the what might have happened had the administration opened direct talks with Khomeini back in the early days of the revolution. If the administration had pursued this option, and Khomeini had allowed the kind of direct dialogue that it represented, the whole context might have evolved differently and the hostages might never have been taken by the militant students. It is also possible that, even if the embassy had been seized anyway, the

existence of a direct channel to the real power broker in Iran might have allowed the crisis to be resolved in the early days. That said, it is also possible that Khomeini would not have allowed such a channel to impact the way the crisis played out. As Bill points out in an unpublished essay entitled "The Iranian Revolution and the Changing Power Structure" sent "for Hedley Donovan's eyes only" to the White House in March 1980, "In this period of political extremism and post-revolutionary zeal, Ayatollah Khomeini found himself in a delicately difficult and potentially explosive political situation." Concerned about a push for power by both the marxist left and hard-line remnants of the old regime, he argues, Khomeini chose to side with "his natural allies and Shi'i constituents" on the radical right who also represented "the largest classes upon which the new power structure itself was based." This was, he concludes, "one major reason why Khomeini was very reluctant to act against the wishes of the student group who occupied the American Embassy in November 1979. He could in no way afford to alienate his own base of social support" (JCLD 3). Even with a direct channel, in other words, Khomeini may have let the whole thing play out the same way since his immediate domestic political objectives were the overriding consideration for him at this point.

CHAPTER 5 - EARLY MANAGEMENT OF THE CRISIS

In the early days of November 1979, senior decision makers in the Carter administration expected that the hostages would not be held for long. After Khomeini had publicly endorsed the takeover of the embassy and Bazargan had resigned, they realized that this situation would not be resolved as easily as the one on 14 February, but virtually nobody would have believed that the crisis could have lasted for the 444 days that it did. The general mood was one of broadly-based concern about the safety of the hostages and other Americans in Iran, a sense of urgency about getting over the necessary hurdles to reach a solution and confidence that, if the administration negotiated in good faith, a solution would be found (Turner, 1991: 27-29; Sick, 1985: 206; Brzezinski, 1983: 477-478; Carter: 1982: 457; Vance, 1983: 377).

Despite all of their misunderstandings and misreadings over the previous twelve months and their limited understanding of all of the forces at play on the Iranian political scene, Carter and his inner circle of foreign policy advisers did understand from the outset that the main driving force behind the seizure of the embassy was the struggle for power in Iran (Sick, 1985: 206). They also understood that, as Vance points out in his memoirs, "Khomeini alone had the power to free the hostages" (Vance, 1983: 376). Following a series of high-level meetings on 6 November, including a full meeting of the NSC, the two elements of what was to become the main thrust of the administration's diplomatic strategy for the next few months were set. One of these elements would be to try to establish contact with Khomeini, or whoever could speak for him, in order to monitor the condition of the hostages, learn more about why they were being held and begin to negotiate their release. The other was to try to bring political, economic and legal pressure to bear on Iran to convince Khomeini and his followers that it would not be in their best interests to continue to hold the hostages (Vance, 1983: 377; Sick, 1985: 213-216; Saunders, 1985: 72-74).

Military options were also discussed during the first two days of the crisis but, as Turner notes in his memoirs, "because no one expected the crisis to last long, there was almost no interest in these options" (Turner, 1991: 32). Moreover, there were obvious problems with military options. During the meetings on 6 November, Brown and Jones gave an extremely pessimistic assessment of the chances that a military rescue operation could be conducted in the near term and, in light of the

vulnerability of the hostages to retaliation from their captors, it was obvious that taking punitive military action such as air strikes would be counterproductive and should therefore be considered only if the hostages were being harmed or the situation deteriorated further. Nevertheless, at a meeting of the full NSC late on the afternoon of 6 November, Carter directed that work proceed to develop a workable rescue plan and to examine the entire spectrum of other military options (Sick, 1985: 207-215; Turner, 1991: 32-34; Vance, 1983: 377). The result was that, as the administration pursued its strategy of negotiations and pressure over the following weeks and months, military options were also developed.

For a period of about 20 weeks, from 4 November to late March, the administration energetically pursued every opportunity to negotiate the release of the hostages. At the same time, it took an impressive array of political, economic and legal steps to try to convince the revolutionary leadership in Iran to release the hostages. This effort was spearheaded personally by the president, with senior officials in the State Department and, later, his Chief of Staff acting as his primary agents. Simultaneously, consistent with the wishes of the president, contingency planning for military operations began. A rescue planning team was quickly assembled in the Pentagon and began to develop a rescue option while other teams examined a number of punitive options. Both activities were supervised by a small military planning group chaired by Brzezinski. Although he was periodically briefed on specific aspects of the work of the military planning group, the president was not personally involved in the military planning in the same way that he was with respect to the implementation of the negotiations and pressure strategy. Indeed, after the first month of the crisis, he took an essentially arms-length approach to the military planning.

This chapter will examine both the diplomatic strategy and the military planning, which proceeded concurrently from the beginning of the crisis on 4 November to a key meeting of the NSC at Camp David on 22 March, at which point the negotiations had almost completely collapsed and attempting a rescue had become a more serious possibility. With the president personally supervising all aspects of the efforts to negotiate and bring pressure to bear on Iran and with Brzezinski personally riding shotgun on the military planning activities, both of these efforts were pursued with vigour, determination and a sense of urgency. However, for most of the period, the administration genuinely believed that a breakthrough in the negotiating process was just around the corner and

active consideration of military options was, for the most part, placed on the back burner. When the negotiating efforts reached an apparent impasse in late March, the degree to which the military planning had moved forward during the previous 20 weeks became a highly significant factor which helped to frame the debate. Having worked hard to create a credible rescue plan, the military planning group was able to place the rescue option before the president at this crucial juncture, an option which held out hope that the hostage crisis might be solved in an alternative and more dramatic way.

Given that the background to the hostage crisis, in terms of both the overall political context and the US-Iran policy context, has already been presented in Chapters 3 and 4, the focus of this chapter will be immediate and sharp on the way in which the actual decision-making process unfolded as the administration's diplomatic efforts and military planning proceeded simultaneously. The chapter will, in turn, examine the ways in which the diplomatic strategy of negotiations and pressure was pursued, the military options were defined and assessed and the rescue option was steadily developed. Once this is done, the chapter will turn to an examination of this period from the unique perspective of the only person who could take a decision to launch the rescue mission and who had made the hostage crisis his highest priority issue: President Jimmy Carter.

Consistent with one of the central thrusts of the political process model, this chapter will consider the decision-making process leading up to the key NSC meeting at Camp David on 22 March as a group activity and, consistent with the adaptation of the model described in Chapter 2, this group activity will be seen to include senior decision makers in the Joint Task Force as well as the most senior foreign policy decision makers in the Carter administration. Having already identified these decision makers at the end of the previous chapter, this chapter will focus on their goals, values, beliefs and perceptions, on the policies and interests they represented, on the various pressures on them, on the strategies they employed and on the evolving dynamics of the process as they tried to bring their ideas and influence to bear on the administration's approach to the hostage problem during the first four and a half months of the crisis. The chapter will also examine the ways in which decision making at the political level and decision making at the military-operational level touched and influenced each other during this period. The result will be a narrative account of this period, one which will attempt to open up the black box of the decision-making process

within the administration as widely as possible in order to highlight issues relevant to the development of the political process explanations which will be presented in Chapter 7. In short, as described in Chapter 2, this chapter will take the first step in the detailed application of the political process model to the case of Operation Eagle Claw.

Negotiations and Pressure: The First Twenty Weeks

The meetings on 5-6 November defined the administration's priority objectives and the way that they would be pursued, through negotiations and pressure, over the next several months. Before it could negotiate, however, the administration had to find someone to negotiate with. The resignation of Bazargan and Khomeini's decision to turn the day-to-day operations of the Iranian government over to the Revolutionary Council left the administration with virtually no effective contacts in Tehran. Having realized that the embassy seizure was the result of political dynamics in Iran and that only Khomeini would ultimately determine the fate of the hostages, the administration moved quickly, on a wide variety of fronts, to try to establish some sort of direct or indirect channel of communication with him. At the same time, it began to move forward, both unilaterally and through the UN and other international agencies, with a campaign of political, economic, legal and even religious pressures designed to "increase Iran's isolation from the world community, and bring home to its leaders in Tehran the costs to the revolution and to Iran of continuing to hold the hostages in violation of international law" (Vance, 1983: 377).

These meetings also set in place the process whereby major decisions would be taken. A crisis management team was set up under the auspices of the SCC and it met daily, including weekends, for the next several months. In addition to Brzezinski, who chaired the meetings, the main participants were Vance, Brown, Turner, Jones, Civiletti, Duncan and Miller. Mondale, Jordan and Powell also frequently attended these meetings, as did several senior advisers to some of the Cabinet members, most notably Christopher, Newsom and Saunders from the State Department and Aaron, Sick and Odom from the NSC. Following the meetings, a summary of the discussion and issues for presidential decision was prepared by the NSC staff and forwarded to the president. Brzezinski then presented the president's reactions to this report at the next meeting (Sick, 1985: 210-212; Brzezinski, 1983: 477-478; Turner, 1991: 28). While Sick, who attended the meetings and drafted the reports for Brzezinski's signature, is

undoubtedly accurate in his claim that "the decision process was crisp, the information flow was complete and orderly, each department was responsive to presidential guidance in a disciplined and coordinated manner, and monitoring of policy action was continuous" (Sick, 1985: 211), this procedure allowed Brzezinski to keep tight control over the process, an advantage that would become significant later in the crisis.¹

Right from the start, Carter was fully engaged in the decision-making process. Not only did he review the daily reports from the SCC and ask questions or offer guidance, he regularly convened both ad hoc meetings of key advisers and formal NSC meetings. Once the magnitude and seriousness of the crisis became apparent, he accepted full responsibility for what had happened and saw himself as the ultimate trustee of both the fate of the hostages and the longer-term interests of the US. Over the next fourteen months, the issue became, by his own admission, almost an obsession (Carter, 1982: 594). At the same time, his issue-oriented, problem-solving style of leadership was never more pervasive or dominant. The problem he wished to solve was to bring the hostages home and he plunged into his work with energy, enthusiasm and dedication. This was his issue and he became the "policy premier," standing at the centre of the decision-making process, taking time to explore virtually every conceivable possibility for action and energizing the whole administration with his enormous personal investment in the outcome. Indeed, this highly personal search for solutions by the president became the central defining feature of the whole process.

On the third day of the crisis, 6 November, even before word of Bazargan's resignation had been received, Carter went into action. Early in the morning, he called a meeting of his top advisers in the Oval Office. His mood was one of anger and frustration; he was clearly fed up and had concluded that the efforts to build a good working relationship with revolutionary Iran were now finished. He believed that the religious leaders, who had thrown their support to the students the previous day, now had the US "by the balls" and he wanted to find a way to bring the hostages home and break relations with Iran. He also wanted his advisers to examine ways to punish and apply pressure on Iran (Sick: 1985: 209-210).

This early morning meeting set the mood for the SCC and NSC meetings that were held later in the day. Referring to this day in his diary, Carter wrote "I spent most of the day, every spare moment, trying to decide what to do" (Carter, 1982: 458). During the day, he began to think

in more and more concrete terms. By the time that the NSC meeting took place late in the afternoon, in addition to thinking about ways of establishing channels of communication with the revolutionary leadership, he was already thinking in terms of a possible freeze on Iranian assets in the US and other economic steps, such as an economic blockade, that might be taken to apply pressure against Iran (Sick, 1985: 215). By the end of the day, the essential elements of the negotiations and pressure strategy had been set through the personal interventions of the president.

For the most part, Vance's initial approach was compatible with that of Carter. It was entirely pragmatic: the US should simply do what it could to get the hostages back (Turner, 1991: 30). Having served as an emissary to Korea for President Johnson following the seizure of the *Pueblo* with 83 Americans on board in 1968, his natural reference point was that crisis, which was resolved peacefully after eleven months of diplomacy. Indeed, he refers to the *Pueblo* incident in his memoirs as an example of the virtue of patience in hostage situations.² Vance also felt a personal sense of responsibility for his employees being held hostage and was concerned about the conditions under which they were being held and the unpredictability of both the students holding them and the hostile crowds that gathered daily outside the embassy burning American flags and effigies and shouting slogans such as "death to Carter" and "death to America." Nevertheless, he also believed that, as pawns in the power struggle that was taking place in Iran, the hostages would be valuable to those holding them only as long as they were unharmed (Brzezinski, 1983: 481; Vance, 1983: 144, 378 and 408-409; McLellan, 1985: 16). He was comfortable with the general thrust of the approach being adopted by the president and he acted as a voice of calm and reason in the implementation of it. He wanted to avoid actions that would place the revolutionary leadership of Iran in a box or would stir up hysteria among the population. Thus, for example, when Carter appeared to be leaning towards breaking diplomatic relations with Iran immediately, Vance advised against it because he believed it would not only close off a potential channel of communication, but also raise fears in Iran that the US was preparing for military action and thus increase the risk of harm to the hostages (Sick, 1985: 209; Vance, 1983: 378). Similarly, when Brzezinski suggested that the US should punish Iranian diplomats in some reciprocal way, Vance argued that this would simply cut off one of the best and most sympathetic channels of communication that was available (Brzezinski, 1983: 479; Turner, 1991: 52). Vance thus served as the calm and practical alter ego

to the president on the whole strategy of negotiations and pressure as well as the primary implementer of it.

Brzezinski essentially played the role of devil's advocate with respect to the negotiations and pressure strategy and, as chairman of the SCC, helped to manage the process. Except for an early approach to the president about the possibility of sending a private emissary to speak directly with Khomeini, he left the problems of establishing effective channels of communication to and negotiating with the revolutionary leadership in Iran to the State Department.³ In the search for ways to apply pressure to Iran, he played a somewhat more active role. As he notes in his memoirs, "The President himself was anxious for more action, and he used me to press the other principals in the SCC to come up with more effective and biting measures" (Brzezinski, 1983: 479). He thus worked hard to energize the process but, even in the area of applying pressure to Iran, he did not play a major advocacy role.

Given the president's desire to pursue a strategy of negotiations and pressure and Brzezinski's willingness to confine himself to the role of process manager in the implementation of it, Vance and Brzezinski did not clash often during the first few weeks of the crisis. Their only fundamental disagreement took place when Vance suggested that the shah should be encouraged to leave the US. In contrast to Vance, whose immediate reaction was one of paramount concern for the hostages, Brzezinski's was one of concern about the effects the crisis would have on the national honour, credibility and international role of the US.⁴ He therefore opposed urging the shah to leave since he believed that giving in to the demands of the students and forcing the shah to leave would undermine the interests of the US in the longer term. However, after an initial exchange in an SCC meeting in which "the strain was evident" (Turner, 1991: 31), Brzezinski was remarkably restrained in the way that he acted as an advocate on this issue, at least relative to how far, over the course of the previous twelve months, he had proven he was willing to go on some issues. Indeed, it was Vance, not Brzezinski, who went directly to the president to push his arguments that it would be helpful for the shah to leave (Brzezinski, 1983: 480-482; Turner, 1991: 30-31).⁵

The overall effect of Carter personally taking charge of the crisis, Vance's calm, measured and total commitment to bringing the hostages home without bloodshed and Brzezinski's willingness to leave the day-to-day implementation of the negotiations and pressure strategy to the State Department, was that the administration initially implemented the strategy

with relative unity and coherence. There were, in other words, no major disagreements among the key decision makers as efforts began to establish new channels of communication with the revolutionary leadership in Iran, to engage in negotiations that would lead to the release of the hostages and to apply pressures to force the process to move forward as quickly as possible. Brzezinski played an effective role as process manager and, as will be seen later in this chapter, channelled his harder-line thinking and creative energies into the activities of the military planning group.

Even as the administration was defining the basic thrusts of its strategy, it tried to establish a line of communication directly with Khomeini. On 5 November, the president approved a plan to send two private emissaries, Ramsay Clark and William Miller, to Iran to meet with Khomeini and other revolutionary leaders. The State Department then managed to contact Ayatollah Beheshti, a key figure in both the Islamic Republican Party and the Revolutionary Council, who reacted positively and agreed to discuss the issue of the hostages with the Revolutionary Council. However, shortly after news of this initiative was leaked to the media, Khomeini decided not to allow the two emissaries into Iran. Whatever doubt existed to this point, this unambiguous signal from the only person in Iran who could have ordered a quick end to the hostage crisis made it clear that launching a negotiating process would not be easy (Sick, 1985: 207-214; Turner, 1991: 29-37; Vance, 1983: 376-377; Saunders, 1985: 74-77).⁶

Given this initial rebuff from Khomeini, the administration turned its focus to looking for alternative ways to establish channels of communication. After receiving a request for assistance from Carter, Pope John Paul II sent a special emissary to see Khomeini on 10 November, but no progress came out of the meeting (JCLD 32).⁷ A delegation from the Palestine Liberation Organization also went to Iran with the quiet encouragement of Vance. After ten days of difficult discussions with Khomeini and the students holding the hostages, the result was that 13 female and black hostages "not suspected of espionage" were released. This reduced the number of hostages being held in Tehran to 53, 50 at the embassy and 3 at the Foreign Ministry (Sick, 1985: 224-225, Vance, 1983: 378).⁸

Frustrated in its immediate efforts to secure the release of the hostages, the administration began to look for ways to apply economic and diplomatic pressure on Iran. During the first month of the crisis, it took several actions designed to isolate the country and bring pressure to

bear on the revolutionary leadership. On 9 November, it placed the US-Iran military supply relationship on hold by suspending all shipments of equipment and parts to Iran; on 12 November it banned all imports of oil from Iran; and on 14 November it froze all Iranian assets held in American banks, including foreign branches.⁹ Most other forms of commerce with Iran were also stopped, with the exception of shipments of food and medicine. The administration also moved quickly on the diplomatic front, encouraging other governments to use their influence to persuade Iran that its interests would not be served by holding the hostages. In response to US initiatives in the UN, the Security Council issued appeals for the release of the hostages on 9 November and again on 27 November. On 29 November, the US petitioned the International Court of Justice to declare that Iran's actions violated international law. Acting with unusual speed, the court ruled, on 15 December, that the hostages should be released immediately (Sick, 1985: 225-230; Vance, 1983: 378; Saunders, 1985: 93-94; Carter, 1982: 461-463; JCLD 19).

The administration continued to search for other ways to apply economic and diplomatic pressure to Iran in the following months, but without much success. On 4 December, after four days of debate, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 457 which called for the release of the hostages and the peaceful settlement of differences between the US and Iran and for the Secretary General to use his "good offices" to achieve these ends. During the remainder of December, the administration launched an intensive campaign to gain broad international support for a comprehensive regime of economic sanctions against Iran. This effort received an important boost during meetings of the Security Council over the Christmas period which Vance personally attended. On 31 December, the Security Council passed Resolution 461, which reaffirmed Resolution 457 and stated that the Council would meet again on 7 January to review the situation and would adopt "effective measures" under articles 39 and 41 of the UN Charter if Iran did not comply with the Council's direction (Saunders, 1985: 97-102).

Following these preliminary moves, the administration's efforts to establish a regime of sanctions against Iran quickly ran into trouble. By the time of the 31 December vote, it was already clear that it would be difficult to achieve consensus on what "effective measures" were appropriate (Vance, 1983: 381). The administration wanted to spell out these measures in advance, but other countries were reluctant to do so for fear of risking long-term damage to their economic relationship with Iran.

Despite a distinct lack of enthusiasm at the UN, the administration continued to press for the implementation of sanctions, culminating in a Security Council vote on 13 January in which the Soviet Union exercised its veto. Although the administration declared that the US would proceed to implement sanctions unilaterally and asked other nations to do likewise, in the absence of the legal framework that would have been provided by a valid Security Council resolution, there was virtually no international support for such a move. The Europeans, who had previously given assurances that they would participate in sanctions, unanimously refused to do so, arguing that patience was needed to allow the political situation in Iran to stabilize and that, in the absence of a UN-authorized legal framework, sanctions would have a negative impact on their relations with other Muslim countries, drive Iran further from the influence of the West and, perhaps, force Iran to turn to the Soviet Union for help. This lack of international cooperation on the issue of sanctions, particularly by the Europeans, became a constant source of frustration for the administration over the next few months (Vance, 1983: 380-383; Carswell and Davis, 1985: 192-197).¹⁰

On the diplomatic front throughout the December-March period, the administration continued to press for condemnation of the Iranian action and there was, as Sick points out, "a virtual onslaught of messages, pleas, statements, personal emissaries, condemnations, and resolutions of all natures from governments, institutions and individuals around the world, descending in torrents on Iranian officials and representatives." However, for the most part, these were limited to relatively quiet expressions of concern about the day-to-day treatment of the hostages and of encouragement about the need to release the hostages soon. They did not involve concerted threats or actions that might have increased the isolation of Iran in the way that the administration would have liked (Sick, 1985: 217).

The one dramatic exception was the Canadian action to assist six Americans to escape Iran in late January. One of these six had been away from the embassy when it was seized and the other five had escaped as the mob began to enter the compound. The six sought refuge at the Canadian Embassy and were hidden for three months at the residences of the ambassador and his deputy while the CIA and the embassy secretly planned for their escape. On 28 January, along with a team of CIA officers which had gone to Tehran to help with the operation, the six escaped on an Air France flight to Switzerland. As a result, Canada was forced to close its

embassy and withdraw its remaining diplomats from Tehran. This action was widely seen in the US as a decisive act of support, as a "heartening reaffirmation of friendship" by Canada (Turner, 1991: 90-94). It also demonstrated to the international community that the US was not alone in viewing the hostage situation as an illegal and immoral act. In Iran, of course, it was perceived as a hostile act which strained Canadian-Iranian relations for many years.¹¹

During the November-December period, Carter frequently demonstrated more impatience with the hostage situation than Vance, who exercised a calming influence on the president. At the insistence of the president, tougher measures were frequently considered such as breaking diplomatic relations with Iran and implementing a total trade embargo which included food. In these discussions, Vance consistently argued "that diplomatic doors were still open and that harsh U.S. action would not only close those doors but increase the danger of a violent reaction against the hostages" (Saunders, 1985: 97). Some steps beyond the initial ones were taken in an attempt to sustain momentum and increase the pressure on Iran, such as forcing Iranian students in the US to report to the Immigration and Naturalization Service and reducing the consular staffs at Iranian missions in the US, but these were largely symbolic and extremely limited in scope. The main initiatives were taken during the first ten days of the hostage crisis and complications were discovered with virtually every other measure that was subsequently considered, so few of them went beyond initial discussion in the SCC (Turner, 1991: 49-60; Carter, 1982: 462; Vance, 1983: 378).¹²

One area where, despite Vance's reservations, the administration moved rather decisively was with respect to Iranian threats to put the hostages on trial. On November 20, in the immediate aftermath of the release of the 13 black and female hostages, Khomeini threatened to put some of the remaining hostages on trial for espionage. Following an emergency meeting of the NSC at Camp David on November 23, a private message was sent to Khomeini, through the Swiss Embassy in Tehran, warning him that placing any of the hostages on trial "would result in the interruption of Iranian commerce." While both Vance and Mondale expressed strong reservations about issuing a direct threat of this nature, Carter felt that he simply could not "sit here as president and watch the trials." Although the message was never formally acknowledged by senior Iranian decision makers, as Sick notes in his memoirs, "Iranian public and

private statements immediately began backing away from the threat of trials" (Sick, 1985: 233-235; NSAD 73).

Another paramount concern for the administration during the first few weeks of the crisis was the harsh physical and psychological treatment of the hostages. It was clear from the accounts of the 13 hostages released in mid-November that the treatment of the hostages by their captors was extremely harsh, especially those suspected of espionage.¹³ In light of this evidence, the administration launched a campaign focused on drawing international attention to the conditions under which the hostages were being held and on placing pressure on the captors to treat them more humanely. This campaign appears to have been at least partially successful in that, shortly thereafter, Khomeini offered public assurances of good treatment of the hostages and admonished the students to treat their hostages in accordance with "Islamic traditions of humane behaviour." Moreover, the private message sent to Khomeini on 23 November stated that harm to any of the hostages would result in direct retaliatory action by the US. This message was reinforced with a public statement by the president that, if any of the hostages were harmed or put on trial, "the consequences for Iran would be extremely grave" (Vance, 1983: 379; Sick, 1985: 231-235; Turner 1991: 56; Iran Hostage Crisis, 1981: 43).

Vance was also concerned about the growing hostility to US interests and personnel in the region. On 21 November, following false reports by a radio station in Pakistan that the US had been behind an occupation of the Great Mosque in Mecca, the US Embassy in Islamabad was burned and two US servicemen were killed. The US mission in Lahore was also attacked. Less than two weeks later, on 2 December, the US Embassy in Tripoli was attacked and parts of it burned. Concerned that these incidents could be the leading edge of an Islamic uprising, Vance ordered all nonessential personnel out of the region and, over the following few weeks, nearly a thousand US government officials and dependents were evacuated from Islamic countries (Sick, 1985: 232-234; Iran Hostage Crisis, 1981: 43-49).¹⁴

Against this background of ongoing efforts by the administration to isolate and apply pressure to Iran through diplomacy and economic pressure, Vance and his officials responsible for Iran worked feverishly to establish effective channels through which to engage the new regime in substantive negotiations. These were extremely elusive to identify and frustratingly difficult to sustain and develop once they were opened. Dozens of potential channels were explored during the November-December

period, ranging from Americans with good contacts in Tehran to third parties who were considered to have influence with the new regime. The results of this intense search for ways to communicate, directly or indirectly, with the revolutionary leadership in Iran led to two major negotiating efforts involving intermediaries. The first, which became the primary focus of the administration's negotiating efforts during the November-December period, revolved around the attempt to use the UN, with Secretary General Waldheim acting as an intermediary, to work out arrangements for the release of the hostages. This effort collapsed shortly after Waldheim's unsuccessful trip to Iran in early January. The second, which became the primary focus of the administration's efforts throughout the January-March period, revolved around the efforts of a French lawyer and an Argentinian businessman, both with good contacts with the revolutionary leadership, to establish a step-by-step scenario that would allow the Iranian government to eventually take custody of the hostages and then release them (Christopher *et al*, 1985; Moses, 1989).¹⁵

Within a week of the seizure of the embassy, the new Iranian foreign minister, Abolhassan Bani-Sadr, had defined the three most basic demands of the new Khomeini-backed Revolutionary Council: the return of the shah's assets, an end to US interference in Iran's affairs and an apology by the US for previous "crimes" against Iran (Vance, 1983: 378; Saunders, 1985: 81). In response, on November 17, the administration passed its own initial terms for resolving the hostage crisis to the Iranian government through Waldheim: the hostages had to be released before the US would be prepared to discuss Iran's grievances or other issues necessary to resolve the crisis; once they were released, the US would be willing to support the establishment of an international commission to investigate allegations of human rights violations under the shah; the US would make its courts available to the Iranian government to pursue its financial claims against the shah; and the US would like both governments to affirm their intention to act in strict accordance with international law, including the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (Vance, 1983: 379; Saunders, 1985: 84).¹⁶

Over the next few days, working with representatives of Bani-Sadr and the administration, UN officials were able to narrow the differences between the two positions considerably and arrangements were made for Bani-Sadr to fly to New York to address the UN Security Council and to negotiate the final details of an agreement with Vance. Just as details for the visit were being finalized, on 28 November, Bani-Sadr was suddenly

dismissed as foreign minister and replaced by Sadeh Ghotbzadeh. Within days, Ghotbzadeh made it clear that he believed there was "no room for negotiation at present," and the momentum that had been building towards a negotiated solution was quickly lost (Sick, 1985: 226; Saunders, 1985: 95).

Ghotbzadeh did give some early indications that the Revolutionary Council was looking for a way out of the hostage crisis, but no substantive negotiations took place during the first month he was foreign minister.¹⁷ There was no shortage of initiatives or of governments, organizations and individuals who wished to help; indeed, as Sick notes in his memoirs, such a wide variety of attempts were made to establish negotiating channels during this period that trying to sort through the various messages and intermediaries created by this "flurry of semi-covert diplomatic activity" was, in itself, a problem (Sick, 1985: 240). Notwithstanding all of this activity and the ostensibly sincere desire of at least some members of the Revolutionary Council to find a solution to the crisis, frustration within the administration at the lack of progress in the days following the dismissal of Bani-Sadr as foreign minister mounted very rapidly. As a result, the administration's primary focus shifted towards "how to tighten the noose without making it impossible to persuade the Iranians to negotiate" (Saunders, 1985: 95). It was during this period that the administration made its most energetic and forceful attempt to establish an effective regime of UN sanctions against Iran. This effort was launched at a National Security Council meeting on 4 December and led to UN Security Council Resolution 461 on 31 December.

In late December, just before the Security Council vote on Resolution 461, Waldheim entered a new negotiating track. In essence, this new approach was to try to break the impasse by responding to the Iranian desire to set up an international tribunal to allow Iran to publicly air its grievances against the shah and the US. By the time that the vote on Resolution 461 took place, Waldheim was already on his way to Tehran to meet with Iranian leaders to discuss ways in which this could be done. He carried with him a statement of the US position which was somewhat more flexible than the one issued on 17 November. The key point was that, while the administration continued to insist that "all U.S. personnel must be released from Iran prior to the institution of any international tribunal," it also indicated its willingness "to work out in advance of a release a firm understanding on arrangements for the airing of Iranian grievances before an appropriate forum after the hostages have

been released." The statement also emphasized the administration's willingness, once the hostages were released, "to seek in accordance with the UN Charter a resolution of all issues between the United States and Iran" (Vance, 1983: 399; Saunders, 1985: 108).

Waldheim arrived in Tehran on 1 January. During three hectic days there, during which he was generally treated badly and sometimes physically threatened, he was unable to get anything more than an expression of interest in the use of some sort of international commission sponsored by the UN to investigate Iran's grievances. Khomeini flatly refused to meet with him and the students at the embassy did not allow him to visit the hostages. Several meetings with Ghotbzadeh and one with Beheshti and several other members of the Revolutionary Council produced no movement towards narrowing the irreconcilable gap between the Iranian demand that certain conditions be met before the hostages were released and the US demand that the hostages be released before any other issues were resolved. On his return, Waldheim gave a full report of his visit to Carter and Vance at the White House and to the Security Council in New York. Despite Waldheim's personal view that the militants holding the hostages were acting independently of the Revolutionary Council and, indeed, even of Khomeini, and that sanctions would not help secure the release of the hostages, the administration continued to focus its efforts on sanctions in the immediate aftermath of Waldheim's visit, culminating in the 13 January vote in the Security Council in which the Soviet Union, in apparent retaliation for the US reaction to its invasion of Afghanistan three weeks earlier, exercised its veto (Vance, 1983: 399-401; Sick, 1985: 247-248; Saunders, 1985: 107-111).¹⁸

At this stage it was obvious that the idea of some sort of international commission had some potential to bridge the gap between the administration and the various factions with influence in Iran. At least some members of the Revolutionary Council, most notably Ghotbzadeh, believed that such a mechanism could help clear the air by allowing Iran to air its grievances and the administration was now willing to work out the details of how the commission would do its work before the hostages were released. While there was still no simple answer as to how the work of the commission might be linked to the release of the hostages, there appeared to be some room for compromise. However, with the failure of Waldheim to achieve any tangible progress during his trip to Tehran, it was also clear that no major breakthrough was imminent. Lacking an effective channel through which to discuss the specific details of a

commission and the way in which its activities might be linked to the hostage issue, the administration concluded that it had little choice but to continue its search for additional ways to increase the economic and political pressure on Iran (Saunders, 1985: 102-111; Moses, 1989: 108-130).¹⁹

It was at this point where the veto by the Soviet Union had blocked the sanctions initiative that a promising new channel, through two intermediaries with close ties to the Revolutionary Council, was established and the administration's primary focus immediately shifted to negotiations through this new channel. Indeed, in light of this new and promising negotiating track and the ongoing reluctance of most allies to join the US in establishing an effective regime of sanctions, the administration even agreed to a request from some allies to delay the imposition of sanctions until after the presidential elections in Iran on 29 January to see if the new president would engage in serious negotiations. Over the next few days, as negotiations through this new channel began, the administration put the issue of economic sanctions on the back burner and, on 24 January, the president accepted Vance's recommendation that sanctions be deferred indefinitely while negotiations through the new channel were pursued. It was only when efforts to secure the release of the hostages through this channel unravelled in mid-March that the administration again began to press the Europeans and other allies to implement comprehensive economic sanctions against Iran (Sick, 1985: 247-249; Saunders, 1985: 98-102; Vance, 1983: 399-403).

As this new channel was opening up, the administration issued another statement of its position which tried to develop further the idea of a commission of inquiry and to foster a new sense of urgency and cooperation in light of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan at the end of December. While the first point of the statement was that the immediate release of the hostages was "essential to the resolution of other issues," the statement was far more conciliatory in tone and demonstrated greater flexibility than previous ones. It indicated that the US understood and sympathized with the grievances about the former regime felt by many Iranians, reaffirmed the administration's commitment to work out in advance how a UN-sponsored international commission would hear these grievances and report on them, and pledged cooperation once the commission began its work. It expressed willingness to discuss the threat posed by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and to consider steps that might be taken "in order to enhance the security of Iran, including the resumption

of the supply of military spare parts." It also communicated the administration's willingness to facilitate legal actions by Iran in US courts, terminate the freeze on Iranian assets and reestablish normal commercial relations once the hostages were released. Finally, the statement concluded with assurances that, at the appropriate time, the administration was willing to make a public declaration that it understood the grievances of the people of Iran, recognized the current government as legitimate and respected "the integrity of Iran and the right of the people of Iran to choose their own form of government." This new statement formed the basis of the US position over the next several months and eventually formed the basis for the agreement that was reached in early 1981 (Vance, 1983: 400-401; Saunders, 1985: 113-114).

The new negotiating channel involved the use of two Paris-based intermediaries, a French lawyer, Christian Bourguet, and an Argentinian lawyer and businessman, Hector Villalon, each with close ties to members of the Revolutionary Council in Iran. The initial proposal to get these individuals involved came from General Torrijos of Panama, who sent two representatives to meet secretly with Jordan in Florida on 12 January.²⁰ Bourguet and Villalon then met with Jordan and Saunders in London on 19 January, and again with key administration decision makers, including the president, on 25 January in Washington, the day that Bani-Sadr was elected as president. Subsequent meetings with Jordan and Saunders over the next two weeks in Paris and Bern led to a complicated step-by-step scenario based on the formation of a commission and designed to create a climate of mutual cooperation in which the release of the hostages would be possible (Vance, 1983: 402-403; Sick, 1985: 251-257; Saunders, 1985: 114-127).

The scenario would begin with a Iranian request to send a UN Commission to hear Iran's grievances. The US would support this request "provided that the Iranians would request it as a means to achieve an early end to the crisis and would state in writing that the commission would be able to see each of the hostages" (Vance, 1983: 402). Once this was agreed, Waldheim would appoint members to this "fact finding" commission and it would leave for Iran once the Iranians announced, in the name of Khomeini, that it would be allowed to see all of the hostages. Once in Iran, the commission would hear Iranian grievances against the shah and the US, meet privately with Iranian authorities, tell them that the treatment of the hostages was inhumane, and announce it would not submit its report to the UN until the hostages were transferred to a hospital, under the joint control of the government and the commission.

Finally, the commission would report to the UN, recommending the establishment of a joint US-Iran commission to deal with bilateral issues, including the freeze on Iranian assets. Khomeini would then pardon the hostages and expel them from Iran (Vance, 1983: 402-403; Sick, 1985: 255-257; Saunders, 1985: 125-127).

By early February, the political scene in Tehran appeared to be shifting in a direction that would make such a scenario possible. Bani Sadr, was sworn in as president on 4 February and subsequently named as interim head of the Revolutionary Council, and Ghotbzadeh, who had emerged as the main point of contact for Bourguet and Villalon, were acting with apparent decisiveness and self-confidence. Both were outspoken in their determination to resolve the hostage crisis, with Ghotbzadeh even threatening to use military force if the students did not accept his authority over the negotiations. In light of the apparent resolve of the Iranian government, the militant students began to show more flexibility in their statements and to provide more information about the condition of the hostages. With Khomeini now sending mixed signals, the students even indicated a willingness to release the hostages, providing Khomeini endorsed the plan and told them to do so (Sick, 1985: 257-263).²¹

Following the Bourguet-Villalon-Jordan-Saunders meeting in Bern on 9-10 February, the final plan was agreed and set in motion.²² However, the scenario ran into difficulties right from the beginning. First, the original message from the Iranians, which was sent to Waldheim on 13 February, failed to even mention the hostage crisis. This error was corrected and a commission of five members was appointed by Waldheim on 17 February. Three days later, a second message, which was sent to authorize the commission to come to Tehran, misinterpreted the commission's terms of reference. After hearing arguments from some of his advisers against continuing the process until the Iranians demonstrated that they were able to follow the script, Carter agreed that the commission should proceed to Iran, but only after Waldheim told both the commission and the Iranian government that he recognized only the agreed terms of reference (Vance, 1983: 402-404; Saunders, 1985: 127-130).²³

Despite this rough beginning, the administration's confidence that the scenario might work was raised after Jordan met secretly with Ghotbzadeh in Paris on 17 February. This meeting, which was arranged by Bourguet and Villalon, was the first direct meeting between representatives of the Iranian government and the administration and it was clearly one that involved considerable personal risk to Ghotbzadeh.

At the meeting, Ghotbzadeh gave Jordan assurances that the scenario had the support of both the elected leadership and the Revolutionary Council. He also told Jordan that Khomeini had been briefed on the overall approach and had raised no objections to it. Further, Ghotbzadeh expressed determination that the Iranian government would "abide by every detail of the scenario" and confidence that, providing the administration remained patient and avoided harsh rhetoric, the crisis would be resolved within a matter of weeks (Jordan, 1982: 162-168; Turner, 1991: 95-97; Carter, 1982: 488 and 511-512; Saunders, 1985: 135; R. Carter, 1984: 320).

Shortly thereafter, it became clear that Ghotbzadeh had underestimated the difficulties as the commission ran into extreme difficulties, even before it arrived in Tehran on 23 February. Indeed, one of the most significant developments occurred while the commission was still en route, as Khomeini announced that the hostage issue would be decided by the Majlis (parliament), which was not scheduled to be elected until 14 March. Moreover, before the Majlis could settle anything, it would have to organize itself, select a prime minister and name a new cabinet, a process that, even without runoff elections, would take several months. At this point, the alternatives were either to terminate the mission or to allow it to continue in the hope that it could at least succeed in getting the hostages out of the hands of the militant students. Uncertain about what Khomeini's precise intentions were, the administration opted in favour of continuing (Vance, 1983: 404; Sick, 1985: 264-266).

Once the commission began its work, more problems were encountered as the students refused to allow it to see the hostages and refused to transfer the hostages to the custody of the government. As the commission began to investigate Iran's grievances against the shah and the US, Bani-Sadr and Ghotbzadeh worked hard to convince Khomeini to order the students to turn over the hostages to the government. By 6 March, it looked like they might succeed as the students announced that they would transfer the hostages to the custody of the Revolutionary Council. However, over the course of the next few days, facing strong opposition from hard-line members of the Revolutionary Council and stalling tactics from the students, they failed in their efforts to take control of the hostages. Following a 10 March meeting of the Revolutionary Council which he attended, Khomeini sided decisively with the students by issuing an instruction that the students should not allow the commission to see the hostages until after the commission had issued an appropriate report. The

students quickly realized the president and foreign minister did not have the support of Khomeini as they had claimed, and they immediately withdrew their offer to transfer the hostages to the custody of the government. Although Ghotbzadeh appealed to the commission to stay and give him time to get the scenario back on track, the commission departed Tehran on 11 March. As the commission was leaving, Bani-Sadr had sent a personal message to Carter promising that the hostages would be transferred to the custody of the government within fifteen days of the election of the Majlis, which was scheduled to take place on 15 March. (Vance, 1983: 404-405; Sick, 1985: 265-271; Saunders, 1985: 130-132).

Despite all of these setbacks, Vance still argued that the plan should be kept alive and Jordan and Saunders were again dispatched to Bern to meet with Bourguet and Villalon on 12-13 March. Together they tried to salvage the scenario by revising it. The key feature of the revised plan called for the commission to return to Tehran to complete its work, but only after the government had taken control of the hostages. Given Bani-Sadr's promise of a transfer by 30 March, the revisions made to the scenario and the obvious need for time to again attempt to persuade other countries to join the US in implementing sanctions against Iran, the president set the end of March as the new deadline for additional sanctions. At an NSC meeting on 18 March, he also indicated that he wanted the administration to once again focus on finding ways to increase the pressure on Iran. Having been intimately involved in overseeing the negotiations during the previous several weeks, he was bitterly disappointed and called a special meeting of the NSC at Camp David on Saturday, 22 March to review the administration's handling of the entire hostage crisis (Brzezinski, 1983: 486; Vance, 1983: 405-406; Sick, 1985: 269-270; Carter, 1982: 499).

As frustrating as all of this was, Vance still continued to believe that the administration had little choice but to continue with the negotiations. For him, the commission's fate in Tehran in early March was nothing more than additional confirmation that Khomeini "intended to hold the hostages until all the main institutions of the Islamic state were in place" (Vance, 1983: 404). Always the patient and persistent negotiator with the *Pueblo* experience in mind, he saw no other real choice but to stay the course with the strategy of negotiations and pressure that the administration had pursued from the outset. He had been personally involved in every twist and turn of the negotiating process from the beginning and, despite his own assessment that the "prospects for the

revised plan were slim" (Vance, 1983: 406) and his ongoing concerns about the safety of the hostages, he continued to maintain his faith that the problem could be resolved peacefully once Khomeini had the institutions he wanted in place and the hostages were no longer needed. With the runoff elections for the Majlis postponed as a result of charges of fraud in the first round of voting, he accepted the inevitability of a longer and more drawn out process than anyone wanted.

While Vance's patience was generally shared by key subordinates like Christopher, Newsom and Saunders in the State Department, others were clearly getting impatient with the negotiating process and wanted to look at other options. This was particularly true of Brzezinski. Sceptical all along about the Bourguet-Villalon scenario, he had grown increasingly restless and now concluded that this channel was leading the administration into another cul-de-sac and that continuing along this path would be to "continue negotiating ad infinitum, even if the Iranians gave no indication of a willingness or ability to accommodate, or perhaps with the prospect of eventually accepting humiliating conditions" (Brzezinski, 1983: 486-490). Having exercised considerable restraint while the negotiations through these two intermediaries had run their course, he was now thoroughly frustrated and in the mood to look at new options and methods.

In terms of the dynamics that will be important for the development of the political process explanation for the president's decision to launch the rescue operation, it is important to note the degree to which the decision-making process had become compartmentalized. Indeed, the negotiations through the Bourguet-Villalon channel had become a highly compartmentalized activity conducted completely outside the formal NSC process and involving only a few people. Those not directly involved, had been left essentially out of the loop. The chief negotiators, Jordan and Saunders, reported directly to Vance and Carter. Even Turner, despite occasionally being asked to provide some intelligence support to the negotiators, was kept largely in the dark.²⁴ SCC meetings, which until the Bourguet-Villalon channel opened up had been held almost daily and had been used to keep senior decision makers abreast of developments in ongoing negotiations, were reduced to about two per week and Vance, the person most qualified to report on the progress of these negotiations, seldom attended (Sick, 1985: 252-253; Turner, 1991: 85-89 and 90-98). Thus, with the exception of Vance and the president, those who attended the key meeting of the NSC at Camp David on 22 March, which the president

had called to review the hostage crisis, had been left out of the negotiating process and some of them, namely Brzezinski, Brown, Turner and Jones, had focused their time and energies almost exclusively in an entirely different area, the equally compartmentalized activities of the military planning group.²⁵ Moreover, for the first time since the crisis began, Brzezinski had placed the product of the activities of this group, a rescue plan which he believed had a good chance of succeeding, on the agenda. Given his growing disaffection with the stalemate in the negotiations and his involvement in developing the rescue plan, it is certainly not surprising that he would do this. On the other hand, given Vance's total commitment to continued patience, restraint and negotiations, it is obvious that storm clouds were beginning to form on the administration's horizon. But before taking a close look at these clouds, it is important to examine the compartmentalized activities of the military planning group over the same period.

Military Planning: The Search for Options

At the same time that the negotiations and pressure strategy was being pursued, military planning steadily progressed. During the initial meetings of 5-6 November, where the overall direction of the administration's policy was set, various military options were discussed. These included a possible rescue mission and a number of punitive actions that could be taken in retaliation for further Iranian actions. Specific options such as the seizure of Kharg Island in the Persian Gulf and the destruction of oil facilities on the mainland were discussed but immediate difficulties with each of them were identified. It was obvious that no rescue option was within the immediate grasp of the US military and that it was not going to be easy to identify a retaliatory option which would not hurt the US or its allies as much as it hurt Iran or would result in a protracted and costly military involvement in Iran (Sick, 1985: 207-216; Turner, 1991: 26-36).

Although he was angry and indicated that he would like to be in a position to "blast the hell out of Iran" if the hostages were harmed (Sick, 1985: 214-215), it was clear from the outset that Carter wanted to solve the crisis through peaceful means. He opened the first full NSC meeting on the hostage crisis on 6 November with a statement that he did not wish to resort to the use of military force (Turner, 1991: 34). Nevertheless, he fully supported the initiative that Brzezinski had already taken to begin the contingency planning process for possible

military responses. Indeed, he directed that a workable rescue plan be developed and that a broad spectrum of military actions be examined in terms of their effects on Iran and implications for the US and its allies (Sick, 1985: 215-216).

After the first few weeks of the crisis, in sharp contrast to his intimate involvement in the diplomatic strategy, the president showed little interest in following the details of the military planning activities. Over the next few months, until he was fully briefed on the rescue option on March 22, he relied on Brzezinski to keep him generally informed about the progress that was being made, but he left the task of closely supervising the planning process completely in the hands of Brzezinski. This approach not only placed Brzezinski in charge of the development of military options, but also made him the primary link to the president. It also placed him firmly in charge of another highly closed and compartmentalized process, one charged with the very serious task of finding the best ways to use the capabilities of the US military to bring pressure to bear and to punish Iran as well as to rescue the hostages.

The military planning group immediately began to examine the complete range of options that the president might wish to consider. Within days, the membership of the group was set. In addition to Brzezinski, who chaired all meetings, its members included Secretary of Defense Harold Brown; Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General David Jones; Assistant to the Chairman, Lieutenant General John Pustay; Director of Central Intelligence, Stansfield Turner; and Brzezinski's Military Assistant, Colonel Bill Odom. Given the sensitive nature of the issues it was considering and the overriding importance placed on secrecy, the group operated completely outside the framework of the SCC and usually meeting discretely in Brzezinski's office. No minutes were taken, no record of decisions were kept and information about its activities was strictly limited on a "need to know" basis (Brzezinski, 1983: 477-478; Sick, 1985: 207, 216; Turner, Pustay, Odom interviews).

During the November-March period, this group oversaw all of the military planning activity within the JCS organization. At the Pentagon, Jones, assisted by Pustay, personally took charge of all aspects of this activity. Jones and Brzezinski were both extremely concerned about possible leaks and the number of people involved in the planning was kept to a bare minimum. In addition to the planning for a rescue attempt that began on 6 November, contingency planning for a wide variety of punitive options took place over the next few weeks, including air strikes against

high value targets such as the oil refinery at Abadan and the Iranian fleet of F-14s, the use of a small amphibious force to seize Kharg Island, a blockade of the entire southern coast of Iran by the US Navy and the mining of specific Iranian harbours such as Abadan, Bushehr and Bandar Abbas (Turner, 1991: 26-114; Brzezinski, Turner and Pustay interviews; NSAD 128).²⁶

During the early days of the crisis, it was clear to the members of the military planning group that, given the fluidity of the situation in Iran and the initial hopes for an early solution, any military action was likely to be counterproductive in terms of protecting the lives of the hostages and securing their release. Moreover, as Brzezinski notes in his memoirs, it was clear from the outset that "no immediate military response was possible" since the Pentagon had no clear options defined or ready for implementation (Brzezinski, 1983: 477-479). Despite this paucity of immediate options, Brzezinski recommended, at the SCC meeting on 6 November, that contingency planning begin. Although Vance was "notably cool to any serious consideration of military options" (Brzezinski, 1983: 482), Carter gave his authorization for this planning to proceed at a meeting of the NSC later that day (Sick, 1985: 209-216; Brzezinski interview).

Of all of the options considered during the early days of the hostage crisis, the Pentagon was the least prepared to implement a rescue operation. Once directed by the Carter to develop a rescue plan, Brown and Jones quickly assembled a team of experts in special operations who immediately began to try to solve the practical problems, the most important of which were that the hostages were being held in a hostile urban environment far away from any suitable launch point and that there was no reliable information on their precise location within the embassy compound or on how they were being guarded. At this point, both Brown and Jones knew that a rescue operation had very little chance of success (Sick, 1985: 214; Brzezinski, 1983: 488; Turner, 1991: 32). About a week later, Beckwith, who as the commander of Delta Force was already working hard to develop an assault plan, indicated that he considered the probability that a rescue operation could succeed to be "zero" (Beckwith, 1983: 199).²⁷ Over the following weeks, the development of the rescue option moved steadily forward as the planners, working virtually around the clock, addressed each of the practical problems one by one (Kyle, 1990).

Meanwhile, the military planning group continued to identify and develop other military options. Brzezinski's interest in developing a viable rescue operation clearly energized the rescue planning process, but he also pushed for the development of broader military options designed to place greater pressure on the Iranian government. At this juncture, he believed that a rescue mission, if one were launched, should be part of a broader retaliatory operation so that, if it failed, the impact of the failure would be mitigated by the success of other parts of the action (Brzezinski, 1983: 188 and 488-489; Turner, 1991: 67).

Although there were frequent discussions concerning military options throughout the first month of the crisis, in both the military planning group and the SCC, there was little enthusiasm for any of them. At the outset, most senior decision makers shared Carter's view that the Khomeini-student alliance had the administration "by the balls." Moreover, since the prevailing expectation was that the crisis would not last long, most of them believed that any serious military action would be precipitous in the sense of provoking the militant students and therefore increasing the danger to the hostages. Even the movement of the aircraft carrier *Midway* from the Indian Ocean to a position off the coast of Iran, which was discussed at one of the early meetings of the SCC, was considered to be too provocative, not "worth the risk of stirring up the hostage holders" (Turner, 1991: 32-35). Although planning for both a rescue operation and retaliatory action if the hostages were harmed or about to be harmed continued, there was virtually no support at senior levels in the early days of the crisis for taking the initiative with either military pressure or action.²⁸

The early study of military options helped to define the parameters for action at the 23 November meeting of the NSC at Camp David which followed closely Khomeini's threat to try the hostages and at which, despite the objections of Mondale and Vance, the president authorized warnings to be sent to the Iranian government that if any US personnel in Iran were tried there would be an "interruption of Iranian commerce" and if any of the hostages were harmed there would be "direct retaliatory action" (Sick, 1985: 235). Although Vance counselled against these measures, Carter authorized the deployment of a second carrier task force, the *Kitty Hawk*, to join the *Midway* in the Arabian Sea and a few days later authorized the deployment of AWACS aircraft to the area. At the 23 November NSC meeting, there was still a general expectation that the crisis might be resolved in the near future through the UN and thus little

support for taking any initiative in terms of military action. At the same time, Carter made it clear that he had made up his mind on the issue of how the US would respond to Iranian actions against the hostages. If any of the hostages went on trial he would direct the mining of some or all Iranian ports and if even one of them was harmed he would order the bombing of the oil refinery at Abadan. The bottom line to the meeting was summed up succinctly by Turner: "we would use military force if the hostages were placed on trial or harmed, but the real hope for release was to find acceptable terms for a negotiated deal" (Sick, 233-235; Turner, 1991: 56-58).²⁹

In light of the perceived progress in the negotiations and his fear that a leak might jeopardize the negotiations, Carter placed the rescue planning process briefly on hold in late November. At a separate meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff at Camp David on 22 November, focused mainly on budget issues, Carter got a direct appreciation of the enormous difficulties facing the military planners and the tremendous energy being devoted to the task. Believing that an agreement with the Iranian government was close and that the risks of exposure outweighed the benefits of contingency planning at this point, he ordered all rescue planning activity to stop (Turner, 1991: 67). As a result of this intervention by the president, Brzezinski did not call any meetings of military planning group for a short while, but he had not taken any other action by the time that the negotiations collapsed a few days later and so the intervention had no practical impact on the rescue planning effort (Turner, 1991: 67; Kyle, 1990: 63-90). In any case, with the announcement of Ghotbzadeh, shortly after he was appointed as foreign minister on 28 November, that "there was no room for negotiation at present" and the subsequent suspension of the UN-sponsored negotiations, the president again allowed the planning to proceed.

The president's mood became more militant immediately after the collapse of this first negotiating effort and he asked for comments from the SCC on a number of possible courses of action, including the mining of some Iranian ports and making some visible military preparations. The SCC meeting that followed was a highly contentious one in which Vance and Brzezinski took fundamentally different positions on the issue of mining. Vance argued that mining would make the situation worse and set off a powerful reaction in the region and Brzezinski, supported by Brown, argued that the threat of mining could be used to pressure other nations to act more forcefully. The US, he said, should not allow itself to get locked

into a "litigation strategy" (Sick, 1985: 235-237; Turner, 1991: 74-76). With no consensus on mining and no negotiated solution to the hostage crisis in sight, the 4 December NSC meeting, which took place precisely a month after the seizure of the embassy, set the administration on a new diplomatic course. Stating forcefully that the administration could not permit the status quo to become permanent, the president launched a major effort by the administration to try to put in place a regime of effective UN sanctions against Iran (Sick, 1985: 240).

The discussion of military options at the 4 December NSC meeting was limited, but this period also marked the beginning of a more serious mood about the use of military force by Brzezinski and Brown. At the meeting, Brown reviewed the status of military preparations for punitive action, assuring the president that with two carrier task forces now in the area and the AWACS aircraft about to arrive in Egypt, the military would be in a position to act if the hostages were put on trial or harmed. Brzezinski, who was still conducting his interagency review of US military strategy in the Persian Gulf, stressed the need for an increased presence, on a more permanent basis, in the region. He also took advantage of the opportunity provided by this meeting to point out that his review had already concluded that there was a need for US support facilities in the region, identifying Egypt, Oman, Somalia and Kenya as the most logical locations. He further argued that the administration should move quickly to approach each of these countries in order to determine whether such arrangements could be negotiated and the infrastructure required to make specific sites usable. Carter directed that a suitable team be dispatched as quickly as possible to do this (Sick, 1985: 241 and 282).

During most of December, the mood of most senior decision makers remained militant, especially those of Brzezinski and Brown. On 1 December, Brown forwarded a memorandum to the president, through Brzezinski, in which he argued that "the time had come to consider more seriously some military options." Meanwhile, Brzezinski attempted to infuse a sense of urgency in the decision-making process. In mid-December, he warned the president about what he considered to be bureaucratic inertia, arguing that "the departments were becoming sluggish in the application of pressure on Iran," and he took full advantage of his position as chairman of the SCC to push the other members to find ways to accelerate the pressure on Iran. Moreover, in early December, he suggested, at a meeting with the president, Mondale, Vance and Brown, that the administration explore ways, in cooperation with key allies, to

undermine Khomeini by providing advice and financial support to moderate opposition elements in Iran. Although he received virtually no support for his suggestions, throughout December Brzezinski pushed for the administration to examine covert ways to overthrow Khomeini as well as ways to apply pressure through the use of military force.¹⁰ Later in the month, he even tried to integrate these two thrusts by raising the issue in the military planning group of how covert activities might be integrated with military options. The trend throughout December, as Brzezinski notes in his memoirs, "was towards more and more serious consideration of military action," (Brzezinski, 1983: 484-485; Turner: 76-81).

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan near the end of December was a watershed event that reversed this trend. For Brzezinski and Brown, the invasion not only fundamentally altered the strategic situation in the Persian Gulf region, it also provided evidence that the vital security interests of Iran and the US were still inextricably tied to each other. Prior to this invasion, their instincts led them to want to apply military pressure or even to take military action in order to force the new regime in Iran to act in more cooperative ways. Following the invasion, however, these same instincts led them in the direction of military restraint. Always the consummate anti-Soviet geopolitician, Brzezinski's primary concern immediately shifted to "the regional containment of Soviet ambitions" and the need to avoid actions which might undermine Islamic resistance to Soviet expansionism. While he continued to chair meetings of the military planning group, given this turn of events, he stopped pushing the issue of military options. Having energized the entire process of trying to define military options during November and December, he shifted gears rather dramatically following the invasion. The energy he devoted to the military planning effort was now channelled almost exclusively into the development of a credible rescue option. He was clearly not happy with the slow pace of the negotiations, but the invasion essentially forced him to remain in the background while the new round of negotiations were conducted through the Bourguet-Villalon channel (Sick, 1985: 253 and 282; Brzezinski, 1983: 484-485; Jones and Odom interviews).¹¹

Once the negotiations ran into severe difficulties with the departure of the UN-sponsored commission from Tehran on 11 March, Brzezinski did once again raise the issue of other military options at meetings of the military planning group and SCC, but at this point he was obviously much more cautious in his approach. He simply asked "whether at

some point" further consideration should be given to blockading Iranian ports or to seizing Kharg Island and holding it until the Iranians were willing to exchange that facility for the hostages "if our economic sanctions did not work" (Brzezinski, 1983: 486). Although he believed such actions were limited enough that they would not necessarily create openings that the Soviet Union could take advantage of, he was clearly concerned about this possibility and, in contrast to the approach he had taken earlier, his comments were muted, tentative and far more exploratory in nature.

Over the next ten days or so, a new round of discussions of military options took place, including mining, but there was again little enthusiasm for any punitive military action. Simply put, a new consensus, which included Brzezinski and Brown, had emerged that, given the possible reactions by Iran, other Islamic nations, major allies of the US and, most importantly, the Soviet Union, such actions might very well prove to be strategically damaging as well as increasing the risk to the hostages. Having taken another fresh look at military options during this period, Brzezinski himself concluded that any large punitive action represented "the worst option of all" since it would likely provoke the Iranians into doing "something murderous or brutal to the hostages" and "tip the strategic situation in this vital region in favour of the Soviet Union." The choice, he concluded, had now become one between "endless negotiations" and the "more surgical solution" represented by the rescue option. "It was in this context," Brzezinski notes in his memoirs, "that the rescue mission started to look more attractive to me, especially as the negotiating track gradually came to prove fruitless" (Brzezinski, 1983: 486-490; Sick, 1985: 282-285; Turner, 1991: 101).

In short, by channelling considerable amounts of his time and creative talents into the efforts of the military planning group, Brzezinski was the driving force behind the development of military options. Before the invasion of Afghanistan, he pushed the group hard to find ways to apply more intense pressure on Iran by using military force or threatening to use it and, after the invasion, pushed the group to develop the rescue option. Turner, who was frustrated at the inability of the administration to find better options, also channelled considerable time and energy into helping to focus the resources of the CIA to support the development of military options. Brown and Jones, whose logical task was to develop military options, energized the Special Operations Division of the JCS organization to develop specific plans while ensuring that

contacts with other people or agencies were kept to an absolute minimum. Indeed, the security imposed was so tight that even the development of options within this division were highly compartmentalized with, for example, those responsible for developing contingency plans to conduct punitive air strikes isolated from those developing the rescue plan (Kyle, 1990: 63-69). The result was compartmentalization at the military-operational level as well as within the overall decision-making process. Meanwhile, within one of these compartmentalized areas of activity, a rescue plan was steadily being developed and practiced.

Military Planning: The Rescue Option Develops

One of the first tasks that Brzezinski assigned the military planning group was to supervise the planning for a rescue mission. Having been in Israel at the time of the Entebbe operation, he immediately thought of the possibility of a small, surgical operation to rescue the hostages (Brzezinski interview). With the president's agreement, he instructed Brown and Jones to develop a rescue plan as quickly as possible and within days was already familiarizing himself with the operational realities and energizing the process by taking a great interest (Turner, 1991: 67; Beckwith, 1983: 188). If the Pueblo incident was Vance's natural reference point, Entebbe was Brzezinski's.³²

Although no capability existed to conduct a rescue operation of this nature at the time of the first NSC meeting, Jones had already identified a helicopter assault as the preferred way to get an assault force into the Tehran area, but there appeared to be no way to get the helicopters into position to launch an assault without compromising the secrecy and surprise essential for success. Jones and Brown were therefore both extremely pessimistic about the prospects for any rescue operation succeeding in the near term. Despite the obvious obstacles that needed to be overcome, once the president directed them "to develop a workable plan," which he did at this first NSC meeting, the detailed planning process began (Sick, 1985: 207-216). Within a few days, a team of experts in special operations was assembled in the planning area of the Special Operations Division in the JCS organization. With the recent declaration that Delta Force was ready for deployment as a counterterrorist hostage rescue unit, there was an obvious capability to conduct an assault against the embassy, but there was no easy way to get this unit into a position to conduct such an assault or to get the unit and the hostages out of Iran once the assault was complete. Moreover, lack of information about the

precise location of the hostages within the embassy compound and about the specific ways in which they were being held and guarded by the militant students made even the assault phase of any rescue operation extremely problematic.

In light of the enormous difficulties confronting the operational planners, the members of the military planning group knew that an early rescue mission was, at best, a "last-resort action" (Brzezinski, 1983: 488; interviews with Brzezinski, Jones, Turner, Pustay and Odom). Driven by the requirement to have a rescue option available for implementation as early as possible, however, the planners began to tackle the practical problems one-by-one with a sense of urgency. Over the next four and a half months, leading up to the 22 March meeting of the NSC when the full rescue plan was briefed to the president for the first time, steady and relentless progress was made in solving the problems and in developing a credible rescue option. By that time, through hard work and innovation, the plan had progressed to the point where those who had been intimately involved in developing it felt that "the operation was feasible, provided the Iranians had no advance warning" (Brzezinski, 1983: 491).

Throughout the entire period, the military planning group provided high-level supervision of the rescue planning activity. After tasking the group to develop a workable plan, the president took an arms-length approach to the planning activity, leaving daily supervision of it completely in Brzezinski's hands (Brzezinski interview). Whenever he felt it appropriate, Brzezinski took personal responsibility for keeping the president informed about the status of this activity and, as he did in the case of all military options, he essentially acted as a gateway to the president, with Jones and Brown reporting to him rather than directly to the president. In the case of the rescue planning, however, Brzezinski's control was even tighter since other military options were usually discussed in the SCC and sometimes at NSC meetings whenever the negotiations and pressure strategy ran into difficulties. Until 22 March, the rescue planning was not discussed at these meetings.

One of the paramount concerns that the military planning group had from the outset was guarding the secrecy of the rescue planning activity. Given the poor record of the administration in keeping its major activities out of the media, the group was very concerned about the possibility of leaks, since exposure of the rescue planning effort would not only compromise any chance it might have of success, but might also increase the risk to the hostages or, at the very least, result in their

dispersal to other locations. The group was also concerned about the vulnerability of the US military to foreign intelligence efforts, particularly by the Soviet Union. Indeed, "the spectre that haunted me," Brzezinski writes in his memoirs, "was that at the critical juncture the Iranians would be forewarned, probably by the Soviets, and the mission would be destroyed" (Brzezinski, 1983: 479; NSAD 2 and 87).

Knowing that secrecy and surprise were essential to the success of a mission of this nature, the group limited access to information about the rescue planning effort on a strict "need to know" basis. Conspicuously absent from the group was any representative from the State Department. Further, at an early meeting of the Joint Task Force (JTF) which was formed to plan and prepare to implement a rescue operation, Jones made it clear to everyone present that they were not to discuss the rescue plan with State Department personnel or with foreign hostage rescue units such as the British SAS or the German GSG-9 (Kyle, 1990: 33-34; Kyle, Jones and Pustay interviews).³³ This unusual level of secrecy resulted in extreme compartmentalization at the military-operational level and the problems that it created will be examined in due course. It was an extraordinary precaution, but one that Jones felt was necessary in light of the overriding need to keep the planning effort from being discovered and the extreme level of secrecy and compartmentalization with which the rescue option was being handled at the political level (interviews with Jones and Pustay).³⁴

At the Pentagon, Jones personally directed the planning effort, closely assisted by Lieutenant-General John Pustay, one of his assistants. He quickly assembled a team of experts in special operations, including Major-General James Vaught, Colonel James Kyle and Colonel Charlie Beckwith. Vaught, a Ranger with a strong background in leading special operations, was brought back from Europe to Command the JTF; Kyle, an Air Force pilot with impressive experience in planning special operations, was brought in from New Mexico to put together the insertion and extraction plans; and Beckwith, the decorated combat veteran who had brought Delta Force from inception to its current state of readiness, was immediately assigned the task of planning an assault on the embassy compound where most of the hostages were being held. Since no existing organization had the capabilities to mount a rescue operation of the nature required, Jones decided to set up an ad hoc JTF reporting directly to him. Within a week, the new JTF was set up and had taken over full responsibility for developing the rescue plan. Vaught reported directly to Jones, an

arrangement that demonstrated the extremely tight personal control that Jones wanted to exercise over the rescue effort (Turner, 1991: 68; Gast interview). Shortly thereafter, Lieutenant-General Philip Gast, an Air Force fighter pilot who had returned from his duties in Iran only two weeks before the hostages were seized, was assigned to the JTF as an expert on Iran. He was eventually appointed as the Deputy Commander of the JTF for the actual operation (Gast interview).³⁵

At the CIA, Turner personally supervised the intelligence-gathering effort. Following the turmoil in Iran related to Khomeini's return and the fall of the Bakhtiar regime in February, the CIA had withdrawn all of its officers from Iran and therefore had no immediate capability to respond to the requirements of the rescue planners for information on a wide variety of issues. Although those intimately involved in developing the rescue capability were extremely frustrated by what they considered to be a lack of adequate intelligence (Beckwith, 1982: 196; Kyle, 1990: 37 and 89; Kyle and Gast interviews), the CIA worked in a measured but energetic fashion to reestablish its human intelligence capabilities in Iran. In December, it sent its first officer back into Tehran to collect information about the situation at the embassy and other sites needed for the rescue plan to work.³⁶ From that point on, the CIA steadily built up its capabilities and contacts in Iran, and the usefulness of the information it provided to the rescue planners improved very rapidly.

Brzezinski's extremely tight control over the rescue planning process created some early problems for Turner. During the first few days of the crisis, Turner was not even invited to the meetings of the military planning group since the immediate focus was on retaliatory options and Brzezinski had concluded that the Defense Intelligence Agency could provide the needed intelligence directly to the group. It was only after an angry confrontation in which Turner forcefully defended his prerogatives as the Director of Central Intelligence, responsible for the coordination and integration of all intelligence products including those of the Defence Intelligence Agency, that Turner was placed on the group (Turner, 1991: 38-39). Similarly, a week after the crisis began, Brzezinski tried to take charge of discussions with Ross Perot, who had offered to meet with members of the administration to brief them on the details of the successful rescue of two of his employees from prison in Iran in February and to discuss the possible use of his contacts in Iran to collect information. In this case, Turner was able to take charge of the discussions after he carefully laid out the logic of why the CIA

should be engaged as the action agency for any discussions of this nature, not the NSC staff (Turner, 1991: 39-42 and 58-59; Shenkman, 1980). Later in the month, just as Turner was about to authorize "some high risk" entries into Iran to support the rescue planning effort, Turner found out that, almost a week earlier, Carter had put the rescue planning on hold but that Brzezinski had decided not to inform the other members of the group (Turner, 1991: 67).³⁷

Despite these early difficulties caused by Brzezinski's efforts to keep the tightest possible grip on all activities related to the rescue planning, the military planning group soon began to function as a tightly-knit group and an effective vehicle for discussing the major issues facing the rescue planners, such as the requirements for specific types of intelligence, identification of the relative merits of possible staging and deployment areas in Iran, and timing considerations, as well as for assessing the state of readiness of the overall plan. Perhaps even more significantly, the regular meetings of the group appear to have energized the process by demonstrating that there was significant White House interest in developing a workable plan while the president focused his attention on the implementation of the negotiations and pressure strategy which was clearly his preferred method of dealing with the hostage crisis.

By the end of November, the JTF had already put together the basic elements of a plan involving the use of helicopters in a two-night operation. The first night, under cover of darkness, the helicopters would be launched from an aircraft carrier in the Arabian Sea with the Delta Force assault troops on board. After a journey of nearly 1000 miles, they would drop the assault troops at a hideout near Tehran and proceed to their own hide site a short distance away. In order to fly this distance, the helicopters would have to be refuelled, using air-dropped fuel bladders, at a location along the planned route in the Dasht-e-Kavir Desert. On the second night, the assault force would move secretly into Tehran, storm the two locations where the hostages were being held, the embassy and the Foreign Ministry, use deadly force to overpower whatever resistance it encountered and rescue the hostages. At this point, the helicopters would arrive and evacuate the assault force and the hostages to a nearby airfield which would be secured by a force of US Army Rangers flown in on C-130 transport aircraft from an airfield in Egypt. From there, the entire force would be flown out on the transport aircraft, leaving behind the helicopters (Kyle, 1990: 45-53; NSAD 39, 100 and 124). Although the JTF realized from the outset that the helicopter

element of this plan would be the most difficult to implement, there appeared to be no other conceivable way to get the hostages from the embassy compound to a location where they could be evacuated without the use of helicopters (Turner, 1991: 68-69).³⁸

At this stage, the plan was nowhere near ready for implementation since the refuelling location, the extraction airfield and the hideouts had not been chosen; the way in which the assault force would get to the two locations where the hostages were being held had not been worked out; and, even more importantly, the planners had very little information about the location of the hostages and the defences that had been set up by the students at the embassy compound. At this point, the clear consensus of the key individuals responsible for developing a plan was that any attempt to rescue the hostages would be "suicidal" (Beckwith, 1983: 198; Kyle, 1990: 21). Nevertheless, by the end of November, only four weeks after the embassy had been seized, a basic approach had been established which became the foundation upon which the rescue planning effort over the next few months was built (NSAD 39 and 100).³⁹

The most straightforward elements of the operational plan to prepare for were the assaults on the embassy and foreign ministry. A week after the seizure of the embassy, Beckwith moved his unit from Fort Bragg to another secret location in North Carolina to train for an assault on the embassy compound.⁴⁰ Working from a large-scale model of the embassy compound and surrounding area, his unit slowly developed a detailed assault plan. Given that the compound included 14 separate buildings, some of them quite large and complicated to assault, spread out over 27 acres, the main problem during November and December was that better intelligence was needed to narrow the scope of the operation down to a more manageable size. Each time that more information was obtained, from the television coverage of activities around the embassy, from satellite photographs and from people who had recently served at the embassy, including the 13 that were released in November, the assault plan was refined further. Despite this, by early December it was still apparent that Delta Force did not have sufficiently detailed intelligence "to weld together a viable, deliberate assault plan" and Beckwith considered that "its chances for success were very slender indeed" (Beckwith, 1983: 187-220).⁴¹

This situation began to improve quite dramatically in late December when the first CIA officer reinserted into Iran began to obtain answers to some of the basic questions of the assault force planners. Using this

information, combined with the growing body of information from other sources, the planners were able, for the first time, "to frame a detailed assault plan" using ninety members of Delta and focussing on less than half of the buildings at the site.⁴² Delta practiced for most of December at Yuma, Arizona with other units that were part of the plan, including the helicopter crews. It returned to its special location at Fort Bragg just before Christmas where, for the next three months, it conducted daily practices of the assault plan at a mock-up of the embassy wall and compound. The plan was continually refined during this period, and four members of the unit were trained to enter Iran and work with CIA officers and agents to do a final check on the arrangements. At regular intervals, Delta travelled to other locations to practice rehearsals of the complete plan with the rest of the JTF. By late February, it was clearly ready and eager to conduct the assault and, with the long hours of darkness as cover and the colder temperatures which forced the students holding the hostages to remain in heated areas at night, the late February to early March period would have been an ideal time for an assault (Beckwith, 1982: 222-246; Beckwith interview).

By late February, the team that had been assigned to rescue the three hostages from the Foreign Ministry was equally ready. Since the entire Delta organization was required for the embassy assault, 13 members of another special forces unit were formed into a special team to take on the Foreign Ministry assignment. This team, also under Beckwith's command, trained mostly in Germany where it frequently rehearsed its assault plan on the third floor of a building that was similar to the Foreign Ministry building in Tehran. Given the precise location where the three hostages were being held on the third floor was known, the outside of the building could be readily scaled at night, a forceable entry could easily be made at the appropriate location and the hostages were not heavily guarded, by late February this second assault team was as ready as Delta to implement its portion of the plan (Beckwith, 1983: 253-261; Beckwith, Gast and Pustay interviews; NSAD 125).

Although the insertion and extraction plans were confronted with enormous difficulties at the outset, they steadily improved during this time as well. The main problem was that there were no convenient forward staging bases from which to launch the transport aircraft required for the operation. Neighbouring countries that the planning staff considered as logical staging points, such as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Yemen, Pakistan, Turkey and Israel, were ruled

out "for either political or security reasons" (Kyle, 1990: 35; NSAD 2).⁴³ The island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean and several locations in Egypt, where the US had already established facilities and operated regularly, were therefore the only two staging areas seriously looked at and Wadi Kena, Egypt was selected as the best choice of staging bases in the initial plan. In order not to risk detection by flying a more direct route through the airspace of any other country, the plan called for the transport aircraft departing from Egypt to fly around the entire Arabian peninsula during the first night of operation. The route for the evacuation during the second night would be directly through Saudi airspace. The distances for the first night were enormous, requiring about 24 hours and at least two in-flight refuellings for the C-130 transport aircraft to make the round trip. For those planning for the operation, "the restrictions were," as Kyle points out, "overwhelming" (Kyle, 1990: 40).⁴⁴ At several points during the first few weeks, the planners therefore attempted to push the case for staging areas closer to Iran, such as in Turkey, but their efforts were "persistently rebuffed" by Jones (Kyle, 1990: 45). The plan to stage most of the operation out of Egypt and to fly around the Arabian peninsula on the first night did not change during the entire November to March period. As will be discussed in subsequent chapters, it did change once the implementation of the rescue option began to receive more serious consideration following the briefing to the president at Camp David on 22 March.

Due to the distances involved, a different solution had to be found with respect to a launch point for the helicopters. Given that a carrier task force was now in the area, that it could provide better security for the operation than any base on foreign soil and that, in any case, there were no real alternatives, the planners recommended, and Jones approved, the plan to launch the helicopters from a carrier. A Navy helicopter, the RH-53D Sea Stallion, which was normally used for mine clearing operations and therefore would attract the least attention, had the greatest lift capacity of those available for deployment and could be stored below the flight deck of the carrier for lengthy periods of time. was the obvious choice of helicopters. Six of these helicopters were deployed to Diego Garcia in late November and placed aboard the aircraft carrier *Kitty Hawk* as it moved towards the Arabian Sea (Kyle, 1990: 46-48 and 80-81).⁴⁵

Leading up to the first major exercise at Yuma, Arizona during the first week of December, the units tasked to participate in the operation began their individual training programs: the embassy and Foreign Ministry

assault teams, the helicopter crews, the aircraft to be used for air-to-air refuelling and the airdrop of the fuel bladders, and the Army Rangers and aircraft that would conduct a night assault on the extraction airfield. Towards the end of the month, AC-130 gunships were tasked to provide close air support for the operations at the embassy and the extraction airfield and to ensure that the Iranian F-4s at the Tehran airport would not take off. Meanwhile, the JTF brought in more expertise in several key areas, such as logistics and meteorology, and air defence and intelligence experts plotted precise locations where the Iranian coastal air defence system could be penetrated. Before long, search and rescue plans for the mission were developed and US activity at Wadi Kena was increased to establish the kind of pattern of aircraft deployments that the rescue effort would fit comfortably into (Kyle, 1990: 58, 70-90, 119 and 128).

The first exercise in Yuma demonstrated that a great deal more training would be required before any credible rescue option existed.⁴⁶ There were major problems with the air drop of the fuel bladders, the blacked out landings of the C-130 aircraft assigned to assault the airfield on the second night and, most seriously, the performance of the helicopter pilots. With some adjustments in equipment and technique, the first two problems were corrected over the following two weeks, but Vaught and Gast concluded that the only solution to the helicopter pilot problem was to replace almost the entire initial cadre of Navy pilots with a new group of Marine pilots with experience and skills more relevant to flying long distances at low level over tough terrain at night. The new pilots were brought in immediately and participated in a five-day exercise in California in late December, but it was clear that they would need considerably more training before they were up to the task (Kyle, 1990: 91-118; Beckwith, 1983: 224-230). Some of these new arrivals were again replaced, with other Marine pilots, following the California exercise.⁴⁷ At this point, as the end of December rapidly approached, it was clear that the helicopter portion of the plan was still the most problematic and the greatest challenge would be to get the helicopter force ready.

As more information was received from intelligence sources, two missing parts of the plan were put in place: the airfield to be used for the evacuation on night two of the operation and the hideout sites where the rescue force would rest between nights one and two. In late December, Manzariyeh, a seldom-used airfield about fifty miles south of Tehran, was chosen as the location for the extraction phase of the operation (Kyle,

1990: 127-128). In January, two separate hideout sites were chosen near Garmsar in the southern foothills of the Elburz Mountains about fifty miles southeast of Tehran. The first was near a road where the assault teams would be dropped off so that they could easily be loaded into the vehicles that the CIA had purchased and hidden in a nearby warehouse. The second was at a more remote location in rugged terrain where the helicopters could be hidden during daylight hours (Beckwith, 1983: 235; Turner, 1991: 71 and 117; Kyle, 1990: 141-142).

In January, in light of ongoing concerns about the air drop of fuel bladders for the refuelling of the helicopters on night one, a major adjustment was made to the plan.⁴⁰ The new plan called for the seizure of a remote, seldom-used Iranian Air Force airfield near Nain, about two hundred miles south of Tehran on the edge of the Dasht-e-Kavir Desert. A force of Rangers would go in and capture the airfield, followed by two C-130 aircraft carrying the assault forces and three C-130 tankers to refuel the helicopters on the ground. From there, the assault forces would be transferred to the helicopters and continue forward to the hideout area. The Rangers and any Iranians they captured when they took the airfield would be evacuated to Egypt once the helicopters departed, so the secrecy of the operation would be preserved. Although this new concept for the insertion phase of the operation entailed more risks in terms of having the rescue mission compromised, it would permit a faster and more certain refuelling operation and allow the assault forces to travel most of the distance on night one in greater comfort and thus to be more rested for their task on night two. Beginning with the first major exercise in early January, the JTF abandoned its efforts to make the bladder option work and began to practice for the seizure of Nain (Beckwith, 1983: 235; Kyle, 1990: 124-139; Turner, 1991: 69 and 88; NSAD 22; Odom interview).

Given the risks involved with the Nain option, the search for an alternative way to conduct the refuelling of the helicopters continued. Turner, who appears to have been the one most concerned with the risks, challenged his covert operations people to come up with ideas. By late January, using satellite photography, they had identified an area in the Dasht-e-Kavir Desert, about 300 miles southwest of Tehran and near an unpaved road connecting the small towns of Yazd and Tabis, where it might be possible to land heavy aircraft. This location was immediately named Desert One. The key question was whether the desert floor would be firm enough to support the weight of the C-130 aircraft, one which could be answered only by flying a reconnaissance flight to the location to

determine its suitability. On 23 January, after Turner had explained the need for the reconnaissance flight to Vance, Brzezinski approached Carter to request permission to conduct it. Given that the negotiations through the Bourguet-Villalon channel were now moving ahead rapidly and he did not wish to take the risk of damaging them if the flight was detected, the president refused to authorize it (Kyle, 1990: 133-145; Turner, 1991: 88-89; Beckwith, 1983: 235-236; NSAD 101; Pustay interview).⁴⁹

During January and February, the performance of the helicopters in exercises steadily improved. As the overall plan matured, the JTF set the number of helicopters needed for the operation at eight, with a minimum of six required to go on to the hideout area from the refuelling stop on night one. Two additional helicopters were therefore placed aboard the aircraft carrier *Nimitz* in preparation for its scheduled move to replace the *Kitty Hawk* in the Arabian Sea, and the six helicopters already on the *Kitty Hawk* were transferred to the *Nimitz* as soon as it arrived in late January. In early February, the JTF sent its own team to visit the *Nimitz*, which identified problems with the maintenance of these helicopters and resulted in a vigorous campaign over the following weeks by Vaught and other senior members of the JTF to force the Navy to give the highest possible priority to keeping the aircraft in a high state of mission readiness (Kyle, 1990: 131-145, 155, 167 and 177; NSAD 125).⁵⁰ The decision to assign only eight helicopters to the mission at this point was an important one which became a significant factor contributing to the failure of the mission. This aspect of the planning will be examined in considerable detail later in this study.

Two significant changes were made to the extraction plan during this period. The first was needed when satellite photographs revealed that the students holding the hostages had erected metal posts at the athletic field in the compound, making it inaccessible for the helicopters. Unless the assault force could remove these posts very quickly, in which case two of the helicopters would land at the athletic field to pick up the hostages, all of the helicopters would have to land at the soccer stadium immediately across the street from the compound. Plans were therefore made to take the hostages to the soccer stadium where they would be loaded on the helicopters and flown to Manzariyeh. The second change was that, with the numbers of personnel to be evacuated now totalling about 350, including Rangers, helicopter crews, those involved in the embassy and Foreign Ministry operations and the 53 hostages, two C-141 transport aircraft, one set up in a medical evacuation configuration to look after

any wounded, were worked into the plan. The Rangers who would conduct the assault at Manzariyeh would continue to use slower but more versatile C-130 aircraft (Kyle, 1990: 128-134 and 181-184; Turner, 1991: 71; NSAD 125).

The pace of improvement in the rescue plan began to accelerate in February. Following an early February exercise in which the insertion and extraction phases went as well as the assault phases, Vaught, for the first time since the rescue planning began three months earlier, expressed his confidence to Jones that "we have a workable plan." By the end of the month, training exercises were starting to go quite smoothly. The JTF had tackled some very difficult problems and, in most areas, had worked through them. Where personnel had proven themselves to be incapable of meeting the challenge, such as the first cadre of helicopter pilots, they had been replaced; where improvements to equipment appeared to provide answers, as in the case of better night vision goggles for the pilots, new inertial navigation systems for the helicopters and satellite communications for command and control of the entire operation, the JTF had moved quickly to acquire this equipment; where dedication and perseverance were required, the members of the JTF had worked hard to find alternative ways of doing things that were less risky or more effective. Given the nature of the problem, there were still weak points and uncertainties; the most serious of these, including general criticisms of the way in which the whole effort was organized as well as specific criticisms on issues such as the number of helicopters assigned to the mission, will be highlighted later in this study as the explanation for the failure of the operation is developed. What is important to note here is that, having started with a seemingly insoluble problem, the JTF had pushed to the limits of people, tactics and equipment to develop a credible plan and, by late February, the results were beginning to show in its daily training program and major exercises (Kyle, 1990: 136; Odom interview; NSAD 102).

At this point, just when the JTF was beginning to believe that it had finally put together the kind of "workable plan" that the president had tasked DoD to develop at the 6 November NSC meeting, negotiations through the Bourguet-Villalon channel started to look promising. To this point, the military planning group had met regularly since its inception during the first days of the crisis, monitoring and energizing the rescue planning effort. However, in light of the rapid progress in the negotiations in late January and early February and the apparent agreement

by Khomeini and the Revolutionary Council to the scenario worked out with the two intermediaries in Bern on 9-10 February, meetings of the military planning group were held less frequently beginning in late January. Having worked hard to reach this point, Vaught was genuinely disappointed when he informed Jones that, in his judgment, the plan was now workable, only to realize that the military planning group had placed the rescue option on the back burner for time being (Brzezinski, 1983: 486; Kyle, 1990: 136-137). Nevertheless, the JTF continued its work to improve the plan.

Near the end of February, despite difficult weather conditions, another major exercise in the Yuma area went extremely well, prompting Vaught to declare that "this task force is ready to go to Iran" (Kyle, 1990: 140). In light of its success in putting together the complex elements of the entire rescue plan over the past two major exercises, members of the military planning group were beginning to share this view as well. With the JTF continuing to train hard and to look for better ways to do things, Vaught scheduled another full rehearsal for late in March (Kyle, 1990: 137-140; Brzezinski, 1983: 486; Kyle interview; NSAD 52).

In mid-February, Turner again raised the issue of a reconnaissance flight to Desert One at a breakfast meeting with the president, Brzezinski, Vance, Brown and Jones, asking for authorization to conduct the flight during the next full moon on 1 March. In addition to Turner, however, only Jones, who was pressed constantly by Vaught, believed that the flight should go ahead; with the first steps of the Bourguet-Villalon scenario being put in motion and the prospects for success looking good, even Brzezinski and Brown agreed with Carter and Vance that the flight should not go ahead for the moment (Turner, 1991: 98; Kyle 1990, 146). The dramatic change in the situation that came with Khomeini's announcement that the Majlis would decide that fate of the hostages brought the issue back onto the front burner for Brzezinski. Among other things, he again asked the president to approve the reconnaissance flight, but again the president refused "out of concern that such a mission might fail and thereby jeopardize the ongoing negotiating process." On 7 March, having obtained Vance's agreement that the reconnaissance flight could go ahead, Brzezinski once again tried to get the president to agree by presenting it for the first time as a joint recommendation, but again the president's refused to allow it "on the grounds that negotiations still

might succeed and the reconnoitring would provide a needless provocation in the event that something went wrong" (Brzezinski, 1983: 489).

Aside from the reconnaissance issue, the planning was progressing smoothly and Brzezinski called meetings of the military planning group less frequently. However, with the complete collapse of the scenario and the departure of the UN commission from Tehran on 11 March, Brzezinski immediately called the members of the military planning group to his office (Sick, 1985: 283). Increasingly frustrated at getting "diddled to death" by the Iranians and made to look impotent on the global stage and impatient with the administration's inability to find effective ways to increase the pressure on Iran, his mind again turned to military options (Brzezinski interview). At this point, however, it was clear that not much had changed with respect to other military options in terms of their implications for the negotiations, relations with other states in the region and with key allies, Soviet influence in the region and the safety of the hostages. What had changed over the course of the previous few weeks, however, was that the JTF now felt it was ready to attempt a rescue operation. Following a comprehensive review of the rescue plan with Jones and Brown, Brzezinski concluded that "the rescue mission had a reasonably good chance of success" (Brzezinski, 1983: 282-284; 489-490). It was thus becoming increasingly clear to the key members of the military planning group, Brzezinski, Brown, Jones and Turner, that the rescue option was not only becoming increasingly feasible, but was also the only military option available (Jones interview).

During the first three weeks of March, the JTF continued to train with an increasing sense of urgency, driven by the renewed interest shown by the military planning group and other high-level decision makers. The JTF redoubled its efforts to refine the plan through additional intelligence, adjustments to tactics and efforts to improve equipment wherever possible. At this stage, some contingency planning was done for the use of Desert One, should it become available. Sensing that interest was rapidly shifting in their direction, the planners began to press again for the use of a better forward staging bases and identified the remote Omani airfield on Masirah Island as an ideal choice since it would dramatically reduce the transit flying times for the night one operation. Contingency planning for the use of Masirah also began. A "murder board" was established to examine all aspects of the plan; however, given the highly-secretive nature of the rescue planning, this board was chaired by Gast and staffed by other members of the JTF, so there was no outside

review of the plan (Kyle, 1990: 142).⁵¹ Meanwhile, in preparation for the next major rehearsal scheduled for late March, individual units continued their training programs (Kyle, 1990: 140-161; Beckwith, 1983: 241-246). As the date for that exercise approached, in the area of the Special Operations Division where the rescue planning had taken place over the last four and a half months, there was a growing expectation that the rescue plan might soon be implemented and "the atmosphere was charged with electricity" (Kyle, 1990: 160). Watching events unfold in Iran, with the commission's departure and no imminent breakthrough in sight, the JTF began to realize that its own increasing level of confidence in the rescue plan was corresponding to a downturn in the optimism of senior decision makers that other options could bring the hostages home soon.⁵² Some bureaucratic momentum behind the rescue option was, in other words, beginning to build up within the Department of Defense. Having started with virtually no capability and having worked so hard to come so far, the JTF was now ready and eager to conduct the mission.

In sum, as Brzezinski, Vance, Jones and Turner left for Camp David for the special NSC meeting on the hostage crisis on 22 March, Jones carried with him the details of a rescue plan that, through the single-minded determination of the military and intelligence communities and under the keen supervision of the military planning group, had been developed to the point where, based on the results of realistic training exercises and the assessments of competent commanders, it could justifiably be characterized as having "a reasonably good chance of success." At the same time, over the course of the previous four and a half months, the plan had been shaped by some important limitations and realities and, as the planners knew all too well, it was not as good as it could have been.

The early decision to limit the list of possible staging areas to Egypt and Diego Garcia had forced the planners, in order to preserve the secrecy of the mission, to come up with a plan to fly the C-130 refuelling tankers and transport aircraft with the assault troops on board around the Arabian peninsula on night one. Once the JTF felt it was ready to go to Iran, the planners began to press once again for the use of Masirah, Oman. Compared to Wadi Kena, the use of Masirah would reduce the one-way flying times for the C-130 aircraft involved in night one from twelve hours to four (Kyle, 1990: 152). Among other things, this would mean that the assault troops who would seize Nain would be fresher for the task and, even more significantly, that those who would continue on to the hideout

sites would have a much shorter night one. There was some discussion of this issue in the military planning group during the early days of the crisis but, each time that the issue arose, the consensus was that the planners should not count on the use of any points closer to Iran as forward staging areas and Jones directed his planners not to use them (Turner, 1991: 43; Kyle, 1990: 35-45 and 146-159).

The most important effect of this restriction was that it meant that the kind of rescue operation that had been attempted in 1970 at the Sontay prisoner of war camp near Hanoi, during which the helicopters flew to their destinations behind C-130 tankers, taking fuel as necessary, was not possible. While Vance's natural point of reference was *Pueblo* and Brzezinski's was *Entebbe*, that of the military planners was, from the beginning, the Sontay raid. The problem was that the Air Force and Marine C-130 tankers, which were capable of refuelling RH-53D helicopters in flight, were not themselves capable of being refuelled in flight and therefore did not have the range to make the round trip from Egypt to the area inside Iranian airspace where the refuelling of the helicopters would have to take place. Having identified air-to-air refuelling as the preferred option at the outset, the planners were forced to search for other solutions, which led them immediately to the fuel bladder option and later to options of seizing Nain or using Desert One (Kyle, 1991: 31 and 39; Kyle interview).⁵³

Meanwhile, as part of the its effort to develop a new strategic framework for the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf following the fall of the shah and developments on the Horn of Africa, the administration had begun to hold preliminary discussions in late 1979 with a number of countries in the area about the possible future use of facilities by US military forces. In early December, on the recommendation of Brzezinski, a joint State-Defense team was sent to Kenya, Somalia and Oman to begin negotiations for limited access agreements. Thus, when the JTF planners once again raised the issue of Masirah in mid-March and argued that it would improve the prospects of success, there had already been some initial movement towards an agreement with Oman, and the administration was therefore in a position to move quite quickly. However, the issue needed to be taken beyond the military planning group since the State Department had the lead in negotiations with Oman (Sick, 1983: 68-73; Brzezinski, 1983: 445-447; Newsom interview).⁵⁴

Another extremely important limitation that had shaped the plan to this point was the president's steadfast opposition to the reconnaissance

flight to Desert One. Four times in the January-March period the president had been approached for authorization to proceed with the flight, but each time he refused to give it out of fear that the flight might be discovered and have a negative impact on the negotiations. Even when Brzezinski successfully obtained the support of Vance in early March, Carter would not change his position.⁵⁵ The JTF was therefore forced to maintain the seizure of Nain as an element of its plan and to train accordingly. Although every member of the military planning group wanted the flight to go ahead, the president simply vetoed their consensus.

The initial direction given to the planners helped to shape the plan in another less obvious way. During the first week of the crisis, as the effort to develop a rescue option was being launched, the conceptual driving force was the need to have some sort of last-resort action plan in the event that the hostages were being killed or about to be killed (Brzezinski, 1983: 487-488). Since there was no way of knowing when this might happen, there was a clear sense of urgency among those involved to put together a credible contingency plan as soon as possible. Indeed, the initial pressure on the JTF was enormous since they knew that, should the situation in Tehran suddenly become more tense, they might have to deploy with whatever capability they had developed (Gast and Pustay interviews).

This overriding sense of urgency to get ready as quickly as possible forced both senior decision makers and the JTF to reject some options that would have taken fairly long to develop. Thus, for example, Turner rejected the notion of modifying a civilian supertanker to carry helicopters, in a Trojan-horse like way, right up into the northern part of the Persian Gulf where they would be close enough to Tehran to be launched without the need to be refuelled en route. He did so based on the need to have a rescue option as soon as possible and his feeling that, in any case, the hostage situation would probably be resolved long before the tankers could be modified and moved to the Persian Gulf (Turner, 1991: 69).⁵⁶ Similarly, when told that they could use no suitable forward staging base for the Air Force and Marine C-130 tankers, the JTF initially ruled out the entire possibility of air-to-air refuelling because a plan that could work as soon as possible was needed. It was only in March, after Vaught had declared the task force "ready to go to Iran," that the planners found enough breathing space to examine more fully and critically their initial reactions. Once they did this, solutions were identified which would have allowed them to develop an air-to-air refuelling scenario within months, with the tankers flying out of Egypt, by converting C-130

aircraft already capable of being in-flight refuelled into tanker aircraft capable of refuelling the helicopters in flight (Kyle, 1990: 143-160).⁵⁷ Thus, in both cases, the sense of urgency, which had been so pervasive during the entire November to March period, had a profound effect on the shape of the plan that Jones took with him to the NSC meeting at Camp David on 22 March.

Overarching all of this was a timing consideration that weighed heavily on the minds of all of the members of the military planning group. In order to ensure that the insertion phase took place under cover of darkness, a minimum of nine and a half hours of darkness was required. With the days rapidly growing longer in Iran, the last day with nine and a half hours of darkness before November would be 1 May. Moreover, the nights in Iran were also rapidly getting warmer, and the capability of the minimum number of helicopters, if it came to that, to carry the required number of personnel and equipment on to the Tehran area would be pushed to its upper limits on about the same date (Kyle, 1990: 139; Turner, 1991: 102; Brzezinski, 1983: 489; Sick, 1985: 287).⁵⁸ Thus, as they boarded the helicopter for the Camp David meeting on the morning of 22 March, Brzezinski, Brown, Jones and Turner were not only convinced that the rescue plan had now reached a point where it had "a reasonable chance of success," but also felt a sense of urgency because of the rapidly closing window of opportunity. In their view, the president had to come to terms with this option quickly and make a decision about whether to use it during the next few weeks. In this very real sense, military-operational considerations were about to have an impact on decision making at the political level.

The Camp David meeting was thus crucial because it marked the beginning of serious consideration of the rescue option at the political level. To this point, Vance's unwavering commitment to continuation of the strategy of negotiations and pressure had never been seriously questioned, largely because of a paucity of other viable options. Now, at least in the minds of the members of the military planning group, there was another possible option and, based on this, Brzezinski placed the briefing of the rescue plan on the agenda. He was not yet ready to advocate implementation of the plan, but he obviously believed that it was time to raise the profile of this particular option. The president had not given much thought to the possibility of a rescue operation as a way out of the crisis, but this briefing would bring him up to date on the rescue planning effort and ensure that he factored this information into

his thinking from this point on. The die was now cast in terms of giving more serious consideration to the rescue option and in terms of the potential collision course between Vance and the members of the military planning group that it represented.

This examination of at the way in which the strategy of negotiations and pressure was pursued, military options were studied and the rescue plan was developed during the first twenty weeks of the hostage crisis thus shows how the decision-making process was a highly compartmentalized one with two active tracks. The negotiating track, which now involved only the president and a handful of others, most notably Vance, Jordan and Saunders, was still the main event, but it was not producing results. At the same time, the other track, which beyond the JTF involved only Brzezinski and a handful of others, most notably Brown, Jones and Turner, had now produced a plan for a rescue operation which Brzezinski, supported by other members of the military planning group, believed was good enough to be presented to the president. Brzezinski knew that a presentation at the level of the NSC was now essential since, if the relative merits of the rescue option were to be seriously considered, the only person with the authority to implement it, the president, would have to take part in the discussion. To complete this examination of the decision-making process leading up to the crucial NSC meeting of 22 March, which will complete the first step in the application of the political process model, it is therefore essential to take a look at the entire period, from the first days of the crisis until 22 March, from the unique perspective of the president and his inner circle of political advisers.

The View from the Top: Problem Solving Activity without Results

Early on the morning on 4 November 1979, Brzezinski called the president to inform him that the US embassy in Tehran had been seized. Although concerned, given the way that the 14 February incident had been handled and the pledge of the Bazargan regime to protect US personnel and property, Carter was reasonably confident that the situation would be resolved quickly and peacefully. On 5 November, the first SCC meeting on the crisis was held, and Carter received a full report of the discussions, but was asked only to authorize sending a special presidential emissary to Iran. By the morning of 6 November, however, with no quick solution in sight, Carter called Vance, Newsom, Brown, Brzezinski, Jordan and Powell to a meeting in the Oval Office prior to the SCC meeting scheduled for that morning. The meeting was short and touched only briefly on issues,

such as the efforts to establish contact with the Revolutionary Council, possible public statements, the status of the shah, the safety of other Americans in Iran and military options, but it set the tone for the SCC and NSC meetings held later that day. Carter was clearly frustrated and wanted an examination of all possible actions, including military ones, that the administration could take against Iran. While Carter was the only participant at this early morning meeting who did not go directly to the SCC meeting that followed, he did spend the rest of the day thinking about the hostage problem, meeting with the two emissaries and attending the full NSC meeting in the late afternoon (Carter, 1982: 457-458; Sick, 1985: 209-210).⁵⁹

Given that he was intimately engaged in the full range of discussions on 6 November, the basic elements of the approach the administration was to pursue over the coming months reflected the president's personal views and priorities. His clear preference was for a diplomatic solution, one which he hoped could be achieved through parallel efforts to negotiate and to bring political and economic pressure to bear on Iran, but he also wanted military planning for both a rescue operation and possible punitive action to proceed as quickly as possible. At the NSC meeting that afternoon, he made it clear that "the honour and integrity of the country" would force him to select a military option that would "blast the hell out of Iran" if the hostages were killed (Sick, 1985: 213-215). He was aware that the contingency planning for possible military action would be pursued in a highly-secretive way by a small group of advisers acting outside the normal decision-making process. Seeing himself as the "policy premier" standing at the centre of the decision-making process, he was comfortable with the way in which the various components of the overall approach would be pursued in a compartmentalized fashion, with Vance responsible to him for getting the parallel negotiations and diplomatic initiatives started and Brzezinski for energizing and supervising the Pentagon's efforts to identify and develop military options.

Following the discussions of 6 November, which set the administration's initial approach, Carter was intimately engaged in every twist and turn of the hostage crisis. Having never really come to terms with the Iranian revolution and the serious problems in US-Iran relations over the previous year, the president now put the search for solutions to the hostage problem at the top of his agenda where it would remain for the entire period leading up to the rescue decision. The crisis immediately

appealed to his sense of responsibility to act as trustee of the public and national interest; and his early and visceral reaction was to become deeply involved in every aspect of the decision-making process. The immediate result was that he brought his issue-oriented, problem-solving approach to bear on the hostage issue with intense energy and personal commitment. By his own account, from the very first days of the crisis, the safety of the hostages was never very far from his thoughts, regardless of where he was or what he was doing and frequently, early in the morning or late at night, he would work hard at trying to think of better ways to secure their release (Carter, 1982: 459). The issue therefore consumed a vast amount of his time and intellectual energy.⁶⁰ As Turner observed only ten days into the crisis, "It's clear that the President of the United States has taken on the role of number one action officer on Iran" (Turner, 1991: 51).

Probably more than any other issue that he faced during his four years in office, Carter personalized the hostage issue. During the first week of the crisis, in what he would later characterize as "the beginning of a close relationship," he attended a meeting held for families of the hostages who lived in the Washington area. During the first week of December, at a special gathering in the State Department, he spoke with the families of all 53 hostages. Having allowed the shah into the US, like Vance, Carter felt a personal sense of responsibility for the situation and these meetings were moving experiences for him. In early December, as a symbolic gesture of support to these families, he ordered the lights of the national Christmas tree be left off until the hostages returned and, later in the month, he declared a "National Unity Day" and asked that concern for the hostages be shown by flying the US flag. In short, as Sick points out, in a very human and sincere way, "Carter identified himself closely with the fate of the imprisoned hostages." Given this personal investment, it was inevitable that, as the crisis dragged on, he would become increasingly burdened by it. Carter himself calls the entire hostage ordeal "the most difficult period of my life" (Carter, 1982: 459-460 and 470; Turner, 1991: 81-84; Brzezinski, 1983: 481; Sick, 1985: 221-223; JCLD 10, 15-17 and 42).

From the first days of the crisis, the hostage issue played out in full public view. The students holding the hostages and the media in the US became locked into a pattern of mutually reinforcing actions: having quickly recognized that the publicity generated by the media coverage gave them unexpected leverage in the continuing power struggle in Iran, the

militant students made every effort to sustain it; and, realizing that this coverage had an unusual ability to grip readers, viewers and listeners, the media made every effort to cover the hostage drama in the most sensational and detailed way possible. This was especially true of the major television networks which brought images of the turmoil around the embassy and the hostility to the US in the streets of Tehran into the living rooms of millions of Americans on a daily basis. During the first week of the crisis, ABC began to air a daily program devoted exclusively to it, entitled "The Iran Crisis: America Held Hostage" and in January, in a way that seemed to capture the frustration of the entire nation, CBS anchorman Walter Cronkite began to conclude each of his nightly broadcasts with a solemn declaration about the number of days that the hostages had been held captive (Hilsman, 1993: 109-110; Turner: 1991: 83-84; Sick, 1985: 221). The inevitable result of this media coverage was that it fuelled the broadly-based sense of public outrage.

Editorial comment in the early weeks of the crisis tended to be balanced and sympathetic to the administration. Indeed, typical of much of the media coverage during this period, in early December, the Washington Post asserted that Carter had "never seemed so presidential as he has in these last terrible 30 days." Later that month, Time issued a report entitled "Carter's Rousing Revival" which stated that Carter was now "leading the U.S. in a way that, until the Iranian crisis erupted in November, the former Governor of Georgia had not managed in his three years in the White House." While some coverage was more critical of the administration's handling of the crisis, the overall thrust of the commentary in the media was more sympathetic to the administration, particularly with respect to Carter's leadership, than it had been for many months (Rozell, 1989: 113-150).

Given the immediate media interest in the hostage crisis and the way in which the militant students took advantage of it, it is doubtful that the issue could ever have been played down. Later, as the hostage situation dragged on and it became clear that the administration had little leverage to influence events in Iran and that the publicity was playing to the decided advantage of the students, criticism mounted that the administration should have downplayed the importance of the situation (Weisman, 1981: 116). In the early days, however, there was, as Sick points out, "no significant voice inside or outside the government arguing for such a policy" (Sick, 1985: 207; Donovan, 1985: 171; Turner and Powell interviews). Even if there had been, it is doubtful, given the

sensationalism of the media coverage and Carter's early involvement as the "number one action officer," that the profile of the issue could have been lowered very significantly. For a president whose immediate reaction to the seizure of the hostages was outrage and anger and whose approach to top priority issues was deep engagement in a problem-solving way, the exercise of a more restrained, hands-off approach was probably not in the range of the possible.

Whatever the wisdom of his hands-on approach, the early reaction of the American public to the president's handling of the crisis was extremely supportive. During the first three months of the crisis, Carter's approval rating, which had hovered around an average of only 31% during the previous six-month period, climbed dramatically upwards, reaching 58% at the end of January. Indeed, the increase in his approval rating during the first month of the crisis, from 32% to 51%, was an unprecedented upwards change for a one-month period in the entire history of polling since War II (Edwards, 1990: 12-90).

It was thus in a context of a strong personal commitment to the issue, intense media scrutiny and rising public approval that Carter turned his attention to solving the hostage problem in the November-December period. Consistent with his previous leadership style on other major issues such as the Panama Canal treaties and the Camp David Accords, he plunged into the effort to find solutions with enthusiasm and determination. With the parameters of the initial approach set on 6 November, the practical task was to find ways to apply pressure to Iran, to establish effective channels of communication and to develop military options that could be implemented if the situation deteriorated any further.

From the outset, Carter pushed his key advisers hard to find ways "to apply maximum political and economic pressure on the Iranian leaders to bring them to their senses" (Carter, 1982: 464). On the morning of 6 November, he was already suggesting specific ways the administration might do this, such as cutting off military spares, expelling Iranian students and expropriating Iranian holdings in the US. That afternoon, at the NSC meeting, he asked for an examination of a possible embargo of Iranian assets and a search for other ways to apply economic pressure. He also expressed interest in the idea of an economic blockade of Iran, in cooperation with other countries (Sick, 1985: 210-215). Over the following weeks, he remained deeply involved in the search for ways to increase the pressure on Iran, quickly implemented whatever measures

seemed to make sense and pushed everyone around him hard to come up with additional ideas and plans. Once it was determined that the effects caused by the cessation of Iranian oil supplies would be manageable, he pre-empted the Iranians by issuing a proclamation terminating all oil imports from Iran; when it looked like Iran was about to withdraw all Iranian assets from US banks, he signed an order which froze all such assets; he quickly suspended the military supply relationship; and he pushed his legal advisers to overcome the legal barriers to a ban on pro-Khomeini demonstrations and the deportation of Iranian students from the US.⁶¹ Several times during the first few weeks of the crisis, he also expressed his desire to break off relations with Iran and only very reluctantly deferred to Vance's judgment that this would close off potentially useful channels of communication or fuel anti-American sentiment in Iran, thereby increasing the danger to the hostages. On 12 December, however, against the advice of Vance, he reduced the number of Iranian diplomats in the US from 218 to 35 (Carter, 1982: 460-466; Sick, 1985: 209-233; Vance, 1983: 377-378; Turner, 1991: 54-55 and 75).

For the entire month of November, Carter continued to push aggressively for more action. On 20 November, frustrated by the decreasing pace of progress, he called a meeting of the NSC and, according to Turner, "berated us and read us a list, of his own devising, of detailed actions he wanted us to take." The list included breaking relations with Iran, getting allies to set up a schedule for breaking relations and implementing an embargo. The president then indicated his desire to hold a special NSC meeting at Camp David on 23 November, to discuss the recent threat by Khomeini to try the hostages and to reevaluate the overall approach taken to this point. Three SCC meetings were held leading up to the Camp David meeting during which Carter's new proposals were discussed in depth. There was little enthusiasm for any of them (Turner, 1991: 54-55).⁶²

At the 23 November NSC meeting, in light of recent progress in the negotiations with representatives of Bani-Sadr in New York, Carter accepted Vance's general counsel of caution and restraint, with the exception of the warning he issued to Iran later that day, which Vance opposed, about putting the hostages on trial or harming them. However, just four days later, Carter again pushed for new courses of action by sending a note to the SCC asking for comment on more possible actions, including condemnation of Iran by other governments and by the UN Security Council, early departure of the shah from the US, a total embargo of all

goods, formal UN sanctions and steps to limit Iranian access to international credit and commerce. His sense of urgency was heightened the following day when Bani-Sadr was dismissed as foreign minister and the negotiations in New York broke down. A week later, on 4 December, after the SCC had thoroughly examined the items on his latest list, Carter called another meeting of the NSC. Now convinced that the objective had to be "to hurt Khomeini economically," Carter focused the discussion on how economic pressure could be brought to bear as quickly as possible. Since nobody present thought that a unilateral economic embargo could be effective, the president set a new direction which involved high-level efforts to put in place an effective regime of UN sanctions against Iran and to persuade European allies and others to join the US in imposing sanctions, even if the Soviet Union blocked the effort in the Security Council. During these efforts, which culminated in the 13 January vote in the Security Council, the president was personally engaged in every major development. Among other things, he personally helped frame the approach incorporated into Security Council Resolution 461; sent letters to several heads of state, including Brezhnev, requesting their support for sanctions; and, in early January, he met with Waldheim following his disastrous trip to Tehran (Carter, 1982: 467; Sick, 1985: 233-248; Turner, 1991: 55-57 and 74-76; Saunders, 1985: 97-102).

In contrast to his aggressive and prodding inputs on the issue of applying diplomatic pressure to Iran, Carter was not very involved in the attempts to establish channels of communication to negotiate the release of the hostages. Once Khomeini rebuffed his personal emissaries and it became clear that only indirect lines of communication to Khomeini and the rest of the revolutionary leadership would be possible, Carter left the task of establishing negotiating channels to Vance. His only other personal intervention in this area was to solicit the assistance of Pope John Paul II, who sent an emissary during the first week of the crisis, but no useful avenue of communication resulted from this.

The substance of the administration's negotiating positions was an entirely different matter. Once diplomatic channels opened and negotiations began, as they did in mid-November through the UN, Carter followed very closely the State Department's work in framing the US positions at each stage, discussing them regularly with Vance. He made it clear from the outset that he would not allow the US even to consider some of the early demands coming from Iran: that the shah be returned to stand trial, that the shah's assets be handed over to Iran and that the US

apologize for previous wrongdoing against the people of Iran. For Carter, to have given in to such demands "would have besmirched our nation's honour" (Carter, 1982: 467).⁶³ With respect to the shah's departure from the US, on the other hand, he saw no such problem. Although he was initially inclined not to encourage the shah to leave, after considerable lobbying by Vance and Mondale, the president announced, at the 23 November NSC meeting, that he wanted the shah to leave as soon as possible and therefore asked that ways to encourage his departure be found. The shah, who was recovering from his operation and wanted to cooperate, made plans to return to Mexico on 2 December. However, on 29 November, despite its earlier assurances to the contrary, the Mexican government announced that the shah was no longer welcome in Mexico. With the shah waiting at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas, the State Department frantically looked for a new home for him. When Panama was identified as the most suitable location, Carter dispatched Jordan on a secret flight to Panama to secure an appropriate invitation and then to Lackland to work out the final arrangements with the shah. The shah left for Panama on 16 December (Carter, 1982: 467-470; Sick, 1985: 242-243; Turner: 1991: 35, 55 and 61; Vance, 1983: 382; Brzezinski, 1983: 480-482).⁶⁴

With respect to military options, Carter made it clear during the initial meetings on 6 November that he preferred not to use military force on Iran. He considered the destruction of Iran's oil-production facilities, which Brown raised as one retaliatory strike option, to be "an unbelievably bad precedent" and realized, following a briefing from Jones, that mounting a successful rescue operation in the near future was not feasible (Turner, 1991: 34; Sick, 1985: 210 and 214; Carter, 1982: 459). Nevertheless, during the first month of the crisis, while remaining far less involved in the detailed military planning that was taking place than in the implementation of the negotiations and pressure strategy, the president frequently raised the issue of various military options, probing his advisers for their conclusions and advice.

The way in which Carter conceptualized the hostage issue set some clear limits to possible military action. For Carter, the lives of the hostages were the paramount concern, and the objective was "to gain their freedom without sacrificing the honour and security of our nation" (Carter, 1982: 459). This way of conceptualizing the issue was quite different from that of Brzezinski who 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" and that "at

some point perhaps a choice between the two might even have to be made" (Brzezinski, 1983: 484).⁶⁵

Given this fundamental starting point, the parameters for military planning that Carter laid out on 6 November were the only ones possible. The rescue planning effort was completely consistent with his concern for the safety of the hostages, since he considered it a last-resort action to be taken only if the hostages were being harmed or were likely to be harmed. He knew that the final decision to undertake such an operation, should it become feasible, would rest entirely with him and it was a decision that he could make following a careful assessment of risks to the hostages, with and without a rescue operation. If Brzezinski's approach to the hostage problem was coloured by visions of an Entebbe-like rescue and Vance's by visions of a Pueblo-like negotiated release, Carter's was neither. He was neither particularly attracted to the notion of a rescue operation nor reluctant to consider it. For Carter, the problem solver, it boiled down to the simple practical matter of what course of action would save the lives of the hostages without compromising the basic long-term interests of the US. Given the obvious danger to the lives of the hostages and the difficulties in establishing contact with the real power centres in Iran, it seemed entirely logical to him that plans should be developed for a rescue attempt; indeed, after noting that the rescue possibility "did not look promising" at the first NSC meeting on 6 November, he directed Jones to "develop a workable plan" (Sick, 1985: 214).

Seeing the rescue option in this practical way and having accepted that a rescue mission was, at the very least, not an early possibility, Carter took the option off his list for the moment and left Brzezinski and the military planning group which he chaired to supervise the planning effort. Although members of the group, especially Brzezinski, clearly believed that the president should have a viable option as quickly as possible, Carter did not explicitly pressure the pace of the planning activity. While Brzezinski gave him periodic updates on the progress that was being made, given the pessimistic initial prognosis of Jones, Carter essentially ruled out the possibility of launching any kind of rescue operation in anything but an utterly desperate situation (Carter, 1982: 459-460; Brzezinski interview). On the other hand, he was extremely concerned about the possibility that a leak might expose the fact that rescue planning was taking place, thereby undermining the negotiations. This concern, combined with the pessimistic assessment of the Joint Chiefs

on 22 November, prompted him to order suspension of the rescue planning process for a brief period in late November (Turner, 1991: 67).⁶⁶ A few days later, when Bani-Sadr was dismissed as the Iranian foreign minister and the negotiations through the UN in broke down, he again allowed the planning to continue.

The president's overriding concern for the hostages deterred him from any thought of a "preemptive military strike" (Carter, 1982: 459).⁶⁷ However, contingency planning for punitive strikes was entirely consistent with his concern about the safety of the hostages since, if only some were killed, the US might be able to punish Iran in a way that would deter any further killings and, if all of them were killed, the US would be able to inflict a price on Iran that would send a strong message to Iran and the rest of the world that the US would not allow its citizens to be killed without taking action. The final decision to launch any punitive strikes would be his, so Carter knew he would be able to make it based on his own cost-benefit analysis. Therefore, despite his strong preference for a diplomatic solution, he was completely comfortable with the contingency planning process going ahead; indeed, at various points during the first month of the crisis, he actually energized the planning process by pushing for answers and additional options.

After his brief temptation to "blast the hell out of Iran," Carter quickly developed an appreciation that punitive military actions would almost certainly result in the needless bloodshed of innocent people, the destruction of facilities valuable to allies of the US or a protracted military involvement in Iran. To come to terms with the issue, he made a focused effort during the first few weeks of the crisis to master the details of the various punitive military options being considered by the military planning group by meeting with his key advisers and asking tough, pointed questions (Turner, 1991: 49-51; Sick, 1985: 215).⁶⁸ At the NSC meeting at Camp David on 23 November, following Khomeini's threat to place the hostages on trial, he personally, in his own words, "studied the detailed maps and charts of the coastal waters" and "pored over aerial photographs of oil refineries and many other targets of strategic importance" to confirm his decision that US retaliation would take the form of the mining of Iranian ports if the hostages were put on trial and an air strike on the oil refinery at Abadan if any of the hostages were harmed. At the same meeting he also emphasized that he wanted the search for other punitive options to continue (Carter, 1982: 466; Sick, 1985: 234; Turner, 1991: 56).

Carter forced a broader discussion of the possibilities for mining Iranian harbours with his 27 November note to the SCC. In addition to the diplomatic courses of action, the note asked for comments on military actions including other options for punitive strikes and backing up sanctions by mining of Iranian ports. Having looked at the problem in detail, Carter had concluded that mining represented a better solution than a naval blockade because the blockade could involve confrontations with ships of other nations (Carter, 1982: 466).⁶⁹ After a lively discussion in the SCC, a consensus emerged that mining at this juncture action would increase the danger to the hostages. In light of this consensus, at the NSC meeting on 4 December, the president shifted the focus of the administration's efforts for the next several weeks to building international support for an effective regime of UN sanctions. At the same time, he placed the issue of military options on the back burner again. Given this push towards an economic embargo, the option of enforcement through mining, of course, was never completely rejected and contingency planning for this possibility continued. The president, however, having looked at the options, including military options, and having decided to launch a sanctions initiative, now began to take a far more arms-length approach to the activities of the military planning group, leaving the supervision of the development of all military options in Brzezinski's hands (Sick, 1985: 235-237; NSAD 128).⁷⁰

In short, the November-December period was vintage Carter. Having decided at the outset that this was going to be his issue, he immediately became a fully engaged "policy premier," making lists, prodding his advisers to develop better options, and mastering the technical details of everything from the legal obstacles to banning demonstrations to the vulnerability of specific facilities in Iran to air strikes. Seeing himself at the centre of the process receiving "separate streams of advice," he was comfortable with the compartmentalized approach that was being taken below him. The process worked the way he wanted it to, with all major decisions referred to him, either in Brzezinski's summaries of the SCC meetings, which Carter frequently used to ask questions and issue instructions, in NSC meetings or in ad hoc meetings with key advisers. Indeed, his impression during this period was that the decision-making process "maintained a remarkable degree of harmony and confidentiality between the disparate groups" (Carter, 1982: 462-463; Turner, 1991: 59).

One indication of how comfortable the president really was with the compartmentalized decision-making process around him came at a private

meeting with Turner in early December. On this occasion, Turner complained directly about "the danger of compartmentalized groups," and suggested that the president was "not benefiting from the full expertise of his advisers, let alone their staffs." Having made the argument, however, Turner could see that it did not sway the president (Turner, 1991: 79-80). Indeed, it would have been inconsistent with his decision-making style if he had been swayed, since receiving "separate streams of advice" from his advisers was compatible with his desire to act as "policy premier" on this issue. The result of this conscious preference, however, was that the compartmentalized approach continued throughout the whole period and the president never really questioned it until just before the NSC meeting on 22 March (Turner, 100-102).⁷¹

Throughout this period, most of Carter's policy decisions were in line with Vance's advice. He was fully aware of Brzezinski's impatience with the negotiating process and of his more hawkish views on military options, and these frequently played to the president's desire to keep the process highly energized. However, when policy decisions had to be made, the combination of his own preference for finding a peaceful way to solve the problem, the paucity of attractive military options and the vulnerability of the hostages if military action were taken usually led him to the same conclusions as Vance. He thus eventually deferred to Vance's judgment on a host of specific issues such as continuing to negotiate in the face of unacceptable Iranian demands, encouraging the shah to leave the country and breaking relations with Iran. The result was that, despite Carter's frustration at the pace of events, the overall thrust of the administration's approach during this period was one that, for the most part, was consistent with Vance's style of patience and persistent diplomacy.

That said, there were times when the president pushed Vance towards quicker action or made policy decisions over the objections of Vance. He frequently used Brzezinski to press the SCC to find more immediate and effective ways to apply pressure on Iran. There were also occasions when he personally pressed Vance. Thus, for example, the list of possible new actions that he passed to the SCC on 27 November placed the issue of UN economic sanctions on Vance's immediate agenda at a time when Vance was not ready to take this step, since he did not want to push other countries until "all other diplomatic recourse had been exhausted" (Brzezinski, 1983: 479; Sick, 1985: 237). Carter also took some decisions which Vance opposed such as the 23 November warning to Iran, the deployment of the

second carrier task force to the Arabian Sea and the deployment of AWACS aircraft to Egypt (Sick, 1985: 234-238). In short, even in the November-December period, although he was willing to endorse the general thrust of Vance's cautious but steady diplomatic approach, Carter was already demonstrating greater impatience than Vance and an inclination, which Vance did not share, to proceed with preparations for possible military action.

One obvious consequence of the way that Carter invested heavily in personally managing many aspects of the hostage crisis was that he had to make significant sacrifices in other areas. During the November-December period, there were other major issues which made demands on him, for example, the continuing battle against inflation and high interest rates, the effort to build congressional support for SALT II and the organization of his bid for reelection in 1980, which he announced on 4 December.⁷² The hostage crisis nevertheless remained his number one issue, frequently at the expense of these other issues (JCLD 28).⁷³ His travel plans also suffered. During the first few days of the crisis, he postponed a trip to Canada, cancelled scheduled pre-campaign trips to Pennsylvania and Florida and put his plans for a vacation in Georgia on hold in order to remain in the Washington area to deal with the hostage crisis, establishing a precedent which he was to follow for several months (Carter, 1982: xi and 463).

Despite this priority commitment to the hostage crisis, another foreign policy issue suddenly forced its way onto Carter's agenda at the end of December. On Christmas Day, Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan, precipitating a new period of tension in Soviet-American relations. The following day, Brzezinski called a meeting of the SCC and gave Afghanistan the same status as Iran as a regular agenda item for subsequent meetings. On 28 December, Carter returned early from his Christmas trip to Camp David to chair a meeting of the NSC (Brzezinski, 1983: 427-429). For the next several months, as the administration framed its response to the invasion, the "twin crises" of Afghanistan and Iran dominated the agenda of both SCC and NSC meetings, and together placed extremely heavy demands on the president's time and energy. Other issues continued to pull at him during the January-March period, especially the efforts to get inflation under control and his campaign for renomination which started with the Iowa caucuses in late January, but these continued to take a back seat to the Iran and Afghanistan crises whenever there was a conflict (Carter, 1982: xi and 524-530).

Carter was clearly surprised, shaken and angry about the Soviet move into Afghanistan.⁷⁴ To this point, he had retained his belief that the Soviet Union was opportunistic, but not expansionistic in its intentions. Despite the growing involvement of the Soviet Union in Africa, its continuing arms build-ups in Eastern Europe and along the Chinese border, and Brzezinski's growing pessimism and increasingly forceful admonitions about expanding Soviet influence in an "arc of crisis" extending from the Indian subcontinent into Africa, Carter remained essentially optimistic about the prospects for a stable and peaceful relationship with the Soviet Union. Following the invasion of Afghanistan, he was no longer able to sustain this optimism and his immediate reaction was one that took the administration towards a full collision course with the Soviet Union (Rosati, 1984: 165-174 and 1994: 35-52).⁷⁵

On 27 December, Carter called Brezhnev on the hot line to tell him that the invasion was "a clear threat to peace" and "could mark a fundamental and long-lasting turning point in our relations" (Carter, 1982: 472). On 31 December, in an interview with ABC, he called Brezhnev "a liar" for his claim that the Soviet Union had been invited in by the Amin government in Afghanistan, and stated that "the action of the Soviets has made a more dramatic change in my opinion of what the Soviets' ultimate goals are than anything they've done in the previous time I've been in office." A few weeks later, after characterizing the invasion as one which "could pose the most serious threat to world peace since the Second World War," he declared his determination that the "Soviet Union must pay a concrete price for their aggression" (Smith, 1986: 223-224 and 229).

Over the next few months, Carter held a firm personal grip over the management of the US response to the invasion. This response included asking the Senate to suspend consideration of SALT II; imposing a wide array of sanctions, the most important of which were an embargo on new sales of US grain to the Soviet Union and cancellation of US participation in the Olympic Games scheduled for Moscow that summer; diplomatic efforts to get other nations to take similar actions, most notably to join the US in a boycott of the games; and more emphasis on defence capabilities and increased defence spending to counter the growing military capabilities of the Soviet Union (Smith, 1986: 224-228).⁷⁶ In late January, demonstrating his full conversion to containment strategy and the application of it to the Persian Gulf region, the president announced the "Carter Doctrine" in his State of the Union address: "an attempt by any outside force to gain

control of the Persian Gulf will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States" and "will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force" (Smith, 1986: 228-231). Moreover, in that same address, he linked the twin crises confronting his administration: "these two acts - one of international terrorism and one of military aggression - present a serious challenge to the United States of America and indeed to all the nations of the world" (Rosati, 1984: 172 and 1987: 82).

Carter's strong reaction to the invasion of Afghanistan was significant not only for the way it placed US foreign policy back on a Cold War footing and defined the Persian Gulf as an area of vital interest, but also for the way it shifted the centre of gravity in the decision-making process another step away from the State Department and towards the White House. Indeed, more than any other single foreign policy event, the invasion was a watershed in this regard. Brzezinski, who had been using the broad range of process tools at his disposal to build support for his own policy preferences for quite some time, now took full advantage of this event to press his view of the global threat posed by the Soviet Union on the president and other senior decision makers (Brzezinski, 1983: 426-454; Smith, 1986: 222). Throughout 1979, Brzezinski had urged the administration to send strong warnings to the Soviet Union about its "creeping intervention" in Afghanistan and, at various points, had lobbied Mondale, Brown and Turner, as well as the president, to treat the situation more seriously. In addition, in September, he had warned the president that a direct Soviet intervention of Afghanistan was likely and had the NSC staff prepare contingency plans for a US response should such an intervention take place. In mid-December, as information that a major military move against Afghanistan was imminent, Brzezinski again pressed the president with advice about how the US should make its position clear and warn Islamic nations about recent Soviet activities. The invasion therefore came as no surprise to Brzezinski; indeed, as he notes in his memoirs, "it was a vindication of my concern that the Soviets would be emboldened by our lack of response over Ethiopia" (Brzezinski, 1983: 427-429; Smith, 1986: 221-222).

In contrast to this, the State Department had taken a more relaxed view of developments in Afghanistan. Although at several points, especially in November and December, the State Department had warned the Soviet government about the dangers of military intervention, Vance did not believe that vital US interests were at stake in Afghanistan and his

primary concern was to prevent any further deterioration in Soviet-American relations. Moreover, like the president, he was preoccupied with the hostage crisis. Even as late as mid-December, the State Department was still trying to soften the administration's responses to Soviet activities in order not to antagonize the Soviet Union (Vance, 1983: 386-387; Smith, 1986: 221). The invasion, as Vance acknowledges in his memoirs, "was unquestionably a severe setback to the policy I advocated." Indeed, in an only slightly veiled reference to his battle with Brzezinski over the previous three years, he goes on to say that "the tenuous balance between visceral anti-Sovietism and an attempt to regulate dangerous competition could no longer be maintained. The scales tipped toward those favouring confrontation" (Vance, 1983: 394).

The invasion of Afghanistan thus increased Brzezinski's influence with the president at the expense of Vance. As the president personally took charge of the management of the US response to the invasion, Brzezinski was ready with comprehensive proposals for a new regional security framework which were the product of his year-long effort to develop a plan to improve the US military position and influence in the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf region. The Carter Doctrine, which the president formally presented during his State of the Union speech, was the fruition of this work. For Brzezinski, "it was a particularly gratifying moment because for more than a year I had been seeking within the U.S. government the adoption of such a policy" (Brzezinski, 1983: 443). Vance, on the other hand, became increasingly discouraged and withdrawn as the White House took firm control over the Afghanistan issue. Although he generally supported both the measures taken to make the invasion as costly as possible to the Soviet Union and the increased emphasis on regional security measures, he was clearly frustrated and began to disengage himself more and more from the decision-making process, ceding ground to Brzezinski and others. The decisive shift in Carter's thinking caused by the invasion of Afghanistan was devastating for Vance in that it ran completely counter to the assumptions and goals upon which he believed US foreign policy should be built. The return to a completely confrontational approach to US-Soviet relations, the linkage of SALT II to Soviet behaviour and the new willingness of Carter to consider military cooperation with the Chinese were particularly difficult for Vance. Given Carter's sudden volte-face, Vance's ability to influence the administration's Soviet policy had suffered a severe blow and he knew it. Nevertheless, retaining some hope that a less than totally confrontational

approach might be salvaged, he tried, over the next few months, to get the administration to reestablish a dialogue with the Soviet Union, but Carter flatly denied his requests. Meanwhile, with the president's approval, Brzezinski began to assume an active role on the diplomatic front, talking to a host of other governments and, on several occasions, meeting with Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin to probe for flexibility on the Soviet side. Thus, with Carter's sudden conversion to Brzezinski's beliefs about Soviet intentions, the centre of gravity shifted decisively to the White House in the area of foreign policy most vitally important to the security interests of the US (Vance, 1983: 386-395; Brzezinski, 1983: 430-443; Sick, 1985: 290-292).⁷⁷

While dealing with Afghanistan, Carter remained fully engaged in the hostage crisis. As he notes in his memoirs, referring to his schedule during the most intense period of activity in dealing with the invasion of Afghanistan, "the meetings between me and my advisers about the hostages had continued without slackening. In spite of many other responsibilities, the hostages were always on my mind" (Carter, 1982: 480). However, with the path towards UN sanctions against Iran blocked by the Soviet veto in the Security Council on 13 January and with European allies urging the administration to exercise restraint in order to give the political situation in Iran more time to stabilize, he had few options. Despite the administration's immediate declaration that the US would impose sanctions unilaterally, no action was taken over the next few days as the Bourguet-Villalon channel, which was just opening up at the time of the sanctions vote, was explored. Shortly after Jordan and Saunders returned with an optimistic assessment from their first meeting with the two intermediaries in London, Carter decided, on 24 January, to defer further sanctions while a scenario for the release of the hostages was worked out through this new channel (Vance, 1983: 402). The State Department, which to this point was still pursuing discussions through several other channels, quickly narrowed its focus to this one (Saunders, 1985: 107; Turner, 1991: 85-87).

With the president's decision to defer sanctions, the State Department's focus on a single channel and Brzezinski's post-Afghanistan mood of restraint concerning military action, the administrations activities related to the hostage crisis were now limited to two areas: negotiations through the Bourguet-Villalon channel and rescue planning. Moreover, with Jordan now taking the lead in the negotiations and reporting directly to the president and Brzezinski keeping a tight hold

over the rescue planning effort, the White House involvement in both of these areas was high-level and direct. While Vance, Saunders and Precht continued to be engaged, the intimate involvement of Carter's Chief of Staff in the day-to-day process of negotiations clearly shifted the responsibility for tactics as well as major policy decisions closer to the president.⁷⁸ In light of his overriding desire to negotiate an end to the crisis and the paucity of other viable channels of communication through which to do this, the president concluded that there was no alternative to the complex and politically risky "long shot" that the Bourguet-Villalon channel represented (Sick, 1985: 250-279). While it was a sacrifice to allow his most trusted political strategist to make negotiations his first priority as the primary season was beginning, Carter instructed Jordan to "pursue this thing aggressively and we'll see where it leads. Nothing is more important" (Jordan, 1982: 126).

During the six-week period in which the release scenario was negotiated through the Bourguet-Villalon channel and the UN commission travelled to Iran, Carter kept an extremely close watch over every twist and turn in the negotiations (Carter, 1982: 484-499; Jordan, 1982: 101-193). One of his most important decisions took place at the outset when, on Jordan's recommendation, he approved a key change in the administration's negotiating terms. This change, which became a key element in the negotiated plan, allowed the commission to conduct its investigation into the shah and the US-shah relationship before the release of the hostages, provided that the results were published only after release.⁷⁹ Carter subsequently approved all negotiating positions, met with Bourguet in the White House, reviewed various versions of the scenario, gave Jordan written instructions for his meeting with Ghotbzadeh and, more generally, remained in firm control of the administration's input into the negotiations. Jordan kept the president fully up to date on all developments on a daily basis, even when he was in Europe. Indeed, during key points in the process, he was in virtually constant touch with the president. On 23 February, for example, which was the day the commission arrived in Tehran and Khomeini announced that the Majlis would determine the fate of the hostages, Jordan was in touch with the president "a dozen times during the course of the day" (Jordan, 1982: 180).

During this same period, Carter kept at arms length from the rescue planning effort. Brzezinski kept him generally aware of developments but, in stark contrast to his intimate involvement in the negotiations, the president left the task of supervising the work on the rescue option

entirely in the hands of the military planning group. As the scenario was worked out and the commission formed, the president was clearly placing his hopes for an end to the stalemate on the Bourguet-Villalon negotiating channel. At this point, it is clear that the possibility of launching a rescue mission in anything but desperate circumstances was simply not on his agenda. Any doubts about his priorities along the way were removed when, during each of the four times that he was approached on the issue of the reconnaissance flight during this six-week period (on 14 February by Turner and on 23 January, 28 February and 7 March by Brzezinski), he refused to authorize it because he feared that the flight might be discovered, thus exposing the US effort to develop a rescue plan and driving the Iranians away from the negotiations.

The late January to early March period was thus marked by two separate tracks of activity: one in which the president was intimately engaged and upon which he rested his hopes for a solution to the crisis and another which he left to the supervision of Brzezinski and which was not on his agenda. Both tracks were managed outside the formal decision-making process by separate ad hoc groups, with Carter, Jordan, Saunders and Vance as the key players in one track and the members of the military planning group as the key players in the other. Both activities were managed in a highly secretive and compartmentalized way, with virtually no flow of information between the two groups.⁸⁰ In this context, only the president, who stood at the centre of the entire process, had immediate access to developments in both areas and his focus was almost entirely on one of them, the negotiating track.

The hostage crisis increasingly became a domestic political issue during this same period. Although the relationship between the crisis and Carter's political standing was never explicitly discussed at NSC or SCC meetings (Brzezinski, 1983: 490; Turner, 1991: 82), 1980 was an election year and presidential politics were an inextricable part of the reality that confronted the president. During the very first week of the crisis in early November, Senator Edward Kennedy announced that he would seek the nomination of the Democratic Party for president, serving notice that the president would even have to fight for the nomination of his own party. As the crisis dragged on, the administration's handling of it became more and more politicized. By late November, for example, Ronald Reagan, who had emerged as the early front runner for the Republican nomination, was already attacking Carter's entire Iran policy as one of "vacillation and weakness" (Turner, 1991: 84). As 1980 began and it still appeared that no

solution was within reach, the administration became increasingly vulnerable to attacks from other candidates and their supporters. By the time the primary season began with the Iowa caucuses in late January, the administration's performance in handling the hostage crisis was the subject of growing criticism from individuals and groups representing a broad spectrum of interests, including Senator Kennedy and other Democratic senators and congressmen, as well as Republican candidates and their supporters. In short, as time passed, the political pressure to find a solution to the crisis steadily mounted.

One area which was the focus of frequent political criticism was the "Rose Garden strategy" which Carter adopted to handle both the hostage crisis and his reelection campaign. Consistent with the precedent he had set early in the hostage crisis, he decided, following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, not to travel to the locations of the various primaries and caucuses (Carter, 1982: 463-464). This decision to remain in Washington rather than continue with a normal schedule of presidential and campaign activity resulted in some extremely harsh criticism from political opponents and the media. In Iowa, for example, Kennedy accused the president of attempting to isolate himself "as the high priest of patriotism" rather than entering the fray where the "actions and passions of the time" could be debated and shaped (Gillon, 1992: 273-274). By January, criticism of the president's "Rose Garden strategy" had also become a common theme in the media (Rozell, 1989: 176-178). Despite the frequent appeals of his closest political advisers, especially from Mondale who had to stand in for him on the campaign trail, Carter held firm in his decision not to travel during the entire November to March period (Gillon, 1992: 271-280).

Although the president had a commanding lead over Kennedy by late March, the primary campaign was a bitter one in which no holds were barred. After winning the Iowa and Maine caucuses handily, Carter took the key New Hampshire primary on 26 February. Kennedy then won the Massachusetts primary on 4 March, but in the twelve-day period of 11-22 March, Carter won five primaries, including massive victories in Florida and Illinois, and seven caucuses, taking such a commanding lead in committed delegate support that his renomination was virtually assured. However, in light of his differences with the president and the bitterness engendered during the campaign, Kennedy decided to continue, ensuring that divisions within the Democratic Party would continue through to the party convention in August (Gillon, 1992: 274-280; Rozell, 1989: 177-178).

Throughout this period, the media's treatment of the way in which the administration was handling the hostage crisis grew less and less sympathetic. Coverage of the administration's immediate response to the Afghanistan crisis and the president's State of the Union address in late January was, on balance, quite supportive but, as the primary campaign moved into full swing, it became increasingly critical. By February, a political theme that were to become a dominant one throughout 1980 was beginning to crystallize: that the president's actions "were motivated by his single-minded desire to be reelected" and that he was using "the powers of the presidency for electoral gain" (Rozell, 1989: 157 and 177).⁸¹ In terms of the hostage crisis, the specific criticism that emerged was that the president was manipulating the emotions of the public to improve his prospects for reelection. Moreover, by mid-March, the "failing presidency" theme was once again becoming a common one in the media, with Carter's "Rose Garden strategy" and inability to find a solution to the hostage crisis being used to support a portrayal of a presidency that was isolated, inconsistent and incompetent (Rozell, 1989: 157-178; JCLD 29). These criticisms, combined with the continued sensational coverage of the hostage crisis, especially on television, clearly added to pressures on the administration to find a solution.⁸²

Beginning in January, public approval of the way the president was handling his job began to erode, demonstrating, among other things, growing impatience with his handling of the hostage crisis (JCLD 38). Having climbed from pre-hostage crisis steady state of about 32 percent to a high of 58 percent in late January, the president's approval rating began to fall at about the same rapid rate that it had climbed. By late March, it had reached 39 percent (Edwards, 1990: 75-86 and 143-152). For a president in the middle of a tough primary campaign, this fall of about 20 percent in his approval rating was clearly a source of concern.

One major incident during this period that contributed to the growing image of inconsistency, incompetence and disarray in the administration's foreign policy decision-making process was a voting problem that occurred in the UN Security Council. On 1 March, the US Ambassador to the UN, Donald McHenry, cast the US vote in favour of a resolution which condemned Israel's policy of establishing settlements on the West Bank. The problem was that the resolution specifically mentioned Jerusalem, despite the fact that Carter had reached an understanding with Begin at Camp David that the ultimate status of the city would be determined by future negotiations and that the US would either abstain

from voting or veto any new resolutions on the issue. As a result of discussions immediately prior to the vote, Carter, Vance and Christopher all believed that the references to Jerusalem had been removed from the resolution. On 3 March, following the vote, the administration issued a statement which disavowed it as an error caused by a "breakdown in communications" between the State Department and the US delegation at the UN. The immediate result of this reversal was severe criticism by the media (Time, for example, characterized it as a "remarkable example of official incompetence") and revitalization of the Kennedy campaign, particularly with the large and powerful Jewish community in New York. The incident was, as Carter notes in his memoirs, "a serious political blow to me." It also placed Vance in an even more difficult position, particularly since he believed that the overall thrust of the administration's anti-settlement policy was fundamentally sound. He had to be pressured by the White House into the public disavowal and he was deeply disappointed and humiliated (Carter, 1982: 492-494; Rozell, 1989: 167-169; Brzezinski, 1983: 441-443).⁸³

The breakdown of the scenario negotiated through the Bourguet-Villalon channel and the departure of the commission from Tehran in an atmosphere of failure was an enormous disappointment for Carter. Although he allowed Jordan and Saunders to travel to Bern to meet with Bourguet and Villalon again on 12-13 March, he clearly held out little hope that the scenario could be revived. On the contrary, in a move that signalled his conviction that this round of negotiations had finished, Carter met with a group of congressional leaders from both parties on 10 March and briefed them on the details of both the secret scenario negotiated through the two intermediaries and the failed attempt to implement it.⁸⁴ The president, who just a hours earlier was still placing such great hopes on the success of the scenario, now feared "that we had now lost our last chance to set the Americans free." A few days later, when Brzezinski mentioned in one of his written reports that polls were showing that the American public considered the administration's Iran policy a failure, Carter showed the depth of his frustration by simply noting in the margin that "The polls are accurate" (Carter, 1983: 499; Sick, 1985: 269). For a president who had worked so hard to find a solution to this problem, this was also a moment of intense personal stress. In his account of his meeting with the president on 12 March, Turner states that he "had never seen him show such signs of stress" (Turner, 1991: 99).

One of the reasons for Carter's bitter disappointment and pessimism at this point was that, with the collapse of the scenario, the limits to what was possible in terms of negotiations were clearly exposed. He still believed that Bani-Sadr and Ghotbzadeh wanted to end the hostage crisis but, in light of their obvious inability to take custody of the hostages, he now concluded that these two leaders were weak and lacked the authority necessary to implement the scenario at their end. "There's no way to trust the Iranian government officials," he wrote in his diary on 10 March, "because they can't speak with any authority" (Carter, 1982: 497-499).⁶⁵ It was now clear that not only was Khomeini himself unwilling to negotiate, but that nobody else had the authority to do so. Khomeini's endorsement of any proposed solution was needed and he appeared completely unwilling to cooperate with even the most senior members of the Iranian government. The hostage crisis was proving to be valuable to him in moving Iranian society in directions consistent with his vision of the future (JCLD 27; Bani-Sadr, 1991: 1-13). Simply put, for Carter, the negotiating path had turned into a cul-de-sac.

At the same time, the president was not yet ready to give up on the other side of the negotiations and pressure strategy. Indeed, his first impulse was to once again try to impose economic sanctions and to find ways to place greater financial pressure on Iran (Carter, 1982: 498). Given the experience of the November to mid-January period, it was clear to him that the path to an effective regime of sanctions would be a difficult one and he accepted the realities that there was little more that the US could do unilaterally and that the State Department would need some time to once again mount a diplomatic effort aimed at persuading other countries to join in an international regime of sanctions. Although extremely pessimistic about the chances that Bani-Sadr would be able to deliver on his pledge to transfer the hostages to the control of the government within two weeks of the Majlis elections scheduled for 15 March, he therefore set the end of March as the new deadline for sanctions (Sick, 1985: 270). At an NSC meeting on 18 March, he emphasized his growing impatience with the status quo, his belief that the US had not been loud enough or aggressive enough in taking the kind of direct action that would result in circumstances favourable to a negotiated solution, his desire to find new ways to increase the pressure on Iran and his feeling that the administration had not pulled together well enough as a team. He also announced his intention to hold a special NSC meeting at Camp David on 22 March to take a more fundamental look at the entire

situation. On 21 March, at the regular Friday foreign policy breakfast, he indicated his desire to give the Iranians a firm and early deadline for taking custody of the hostages (Jordan, 1982: 197; Carter, 1983: 501; Vance, 1983: 405; Brzezinski, 1983: 486; Turner, 1991: 100).

This return to an emphasis on the pressure element of the negotiations and pressure strategy was evidence that, at this point, the president still held the view that, if enough pressure were applied, the cost of holding the hostages would become prohibitive, even to Khomeini. Despite the manifest willingness and ability of Khomeini to ignore external economic and political pressures in pursuit of his own political aims, the president still believed that it was not the strategy that was to blame, but rather that the application of it had been too soft. He still believed, in other words, that the US could find the leverage necessary to accelerate the negotiating process (Sick, 1985: 206 and 218; Moses: 1989: 660-665).⁸⁶

Given this continuing determination to find a way to make the negotiations and pressure strategy succeed, the president's immediate agenda still did not include military options. He was bitterly disappointed and determined to act, but this did not translate into an immediate desire to revisit the various military options. On the contrary, his mind was clearly focused on the need to increase the economic pressure on Iran, not the military pressure. He was, of course, aware of the limited discussions about the naval blockade and mining options that had taken place in the SCC in the days following the collapse of the scenario (Sick, 1985: 283-284), but he did not pick up on these possibilities during the period leading up to the 22 March meeting. The possibility of a rescue mission was, at this point, still far from his mind.

At this juncture, Carter's closest political advisers were also growing frustrated and impatient. As a key political strategist for the president, Jordan considered the hostage crisis to be primarily a political issue right from the start. Believing that it was important for Carter to be seen to take every possible action, he convinced the president, during the first week of the crisis, to remain in Washington. Before becoming personally involved in the negotiations through the Bourguet-Villalon channel, he also argued for tough and visible measures against Iran and for tough negotiating positions. Once he became involved in the negotiations, the time he was able to devote to his duties as Chief of Staff and to the campaign suffered enormously. However, his basic

perspective never changed: the hostage problem had to be given the highest possible priority because Carter's reelection campaign demanded it. For Jordan, the hostage problem and the election became inextricably woven together. In his memoirs, referring to the late January period when he was heavily involved in the negotiations at the same time that the primary season was beginning, he writes that "when I wasn't thinking about Kennedy, I was thinking about Khomeini, and when I wasn't thinking about Khomeini, I was thinking about Kennedy" (Jordan, 1982: 127). Simply put, he wanted the hostage problem resolved as quickly as possible so that the president would no longer be burdened by it and, despite his recognition that it was a tough and complex problem and some concern that he was getting in over his head, he plunged into the negotiating process with energy and optimism. Catching the spirit, he was instrumental in getting the president to accept a key change in the administration's negotiating position by dropping the demand that the hostages be released prior to the commission investigating Iranian grievances (Jordan, 1982: 60-127).

In the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the scenario, Jordan was so involved in trying to revive the negotiations, to follow the latest developments in the campaign and to prepare for an important appearance before a special prosecutor that he had virtually no time to reassess the basic strategy and to consider other options such as increasing the pressure on Iran.⁸⁷ Indeed, he appears to have been so engaged and invested in the negotiations that he developed an unrealistic degree of optimism about reviving the scenario and, when the president challenged his optimism following his trip to Bern to meet with Bourguet and Villalon, he decided he would have to "keep working on him [Carter] to give the plan a chance" (Jordan, 1982: 197).⁸⁸ Jordan was far too pressed during this period to get involved in substantive discussions about military options and was not aware of the details of how the rescue planning was evolving. Moreover, shortly after his four-day trip to Bern to meet with Bourguet and Villalon, he was again given the task of trying to manage the peregrinations of the shah, who now needed his spleen removed and was planning to leave Panama for Egypt. On 20 March, just two days before the crucial NSC meeting that was scheduled for Camp David, Jordan departed for Panama to try to convince the shah to remain there. In short, Jordan was so busy and so invested in the negotiations at this point that he had little advice to offer the president about how to deal with the latest developments (Jordan, 1982: 193-229).⁸⁹

Although less involved in seeking solutions to the crisis, Mondale saw the hostage crisis through an equally political prism. At the outset, he advocated a high public profile for the president and an early departure for the shah and, during the first two months, he was very involved in discussions in both the NSC and SCC. He was also an early proponent of the negotiations and pressure strategy, but was cautious about issuing any direct warnings to Iran and about the use of military force in all but the most desperate of circumstances. Once the primary season began in January, Mondale had to stand in for the president on the campaign trail. During the January-March period, he travelled to twenty different states and was on the campaign trail more often than he was in Washington. With the key primaries in Florida on 11 March and Illinois on 18 March, he was extremely preoccupied with the campaign during the period leading up to the 22 March meeting at Camp David. Although his high-profile campaign role forced him to keep abreast of major developments, he did not have the time to keep up on the details of either the negotiations or the rescue planning effort. His main concern at this stage was that the president's absence from the primary fray was exacting a heavy political price. He had wanted Carter to join the campaign right from the start of the primary season (Gillon, 1992: 273-279; Jordan, 1982: 68-69 and 122-125; Brzezinski, 1983: 480). By late March he was getting increasingly impatient with the "Rose Garden strategy" and was arguing forcefully that the president needed "to end his self-imposed isolation and assume the leadership role needed to convince the nation he was in control" (Gillon, 1992: 277).

For Powell, who had attended NSC meetings, SCC meetings and foreign policy breakfasts during the November-March period, the hostage crisis was a media event with potentially explosive political implications. As press secretary, his primary focus was necessarily on the way in which the crisis could be managed to create the most favourable media coverage possible. Like Jordan, he favoured a tough approach at the outset. As long as public opinion was supportive of the administration's handling of the crisis and media coverage was fairly balanced, as it was during the November-January period, Powell was content to let the negotiations and pressure strategy run its course. Once the primary campaign moved into full swing, public support declined and media coverage became increasingly unsympathetic, Powell had obvious reasons for concern. By late March, in light of the growing criticism that the president was exploiting the hostage crisis for his own political purposes, Powell's main objective was

to reestablish a better relationship with the press. Like Mondale, he was not involved in the negotiating track and therefore not in a position to give advice to the president. Similarly, although he knew that military planning was taking place, he did not know any specific details of what was being planned (Powell, 1984: 209 and 225-227; Brzezinski, 1983: 479-483; Powell interview).

In short, the three political advisers who were normally in the best positions to give the president advice had not kept abreast of the work of the military planning group over the previous months. Jordan and Powell had not attended any detailed discussions about military options since late November and Mondale was so occupied with the campaign that it was impossible for him to stay in touch (Turner, 1991: 72-76; Gillon, 1992: 273-280). Once the scenario collapsed in mid-March, Brzezinski did make an effort to provide Jordan and Powell with a general update on the contingency planning that had taken place and he discussed it in somewhat greater detail with Mondale, but none of the three were yet thinking of a rescue mission in terms of a way out of the crisis. The only one of the three advocating a position was Jordan and he wanted the president to give the revised scenario a chance to work. All three were feeling increasingly frustrated and were fully aware of the increasing public pressures for more direct action (Brzezinski, 1983: 490), but they were certainly not placing any pressure on the president to take military action.⁹⁰

On the eve of the 22 March meeting, the president himself was certainly not leaning towards any military action. Simply put, at least to this point, he was not prepared to accept Brzezinski's conceptualization of the choice as one between "endless negotiations" and a "surgical solution." On the contrary, he was thinking primarily in terms of applying greater economic pressure on Iran. At the same time, he was extremely frustrated by the lack of progress, despite the enormous investment he had made in terms of his time and energy. The hostage crisis had been his highest priority issue for over four and a half months and he had applied his problem solving style of leadership to it with the kind of focus and determination that had led to his previous foreign policy successes, such as the Panama Canal treaties and the Camp David Accords, but he had nothing tangible to show for it. He was a problem solver still looking for a solution. Moreover, he was now looking for this solution in a context of growing criticism of his handling of the crisis from his political opponents and the media, declining public

support and a political calendar that included a rapidly approaching convention and presidential election. Even a trustee president who was firmly committed to both protecting the lives of the hostages and promoting the longer-term national interests of the US was not immune to these realities. At the very least, they reinforced his determination to find a new formula to end the crisis and bring the hostages home.

At the NSC meeting on 18 March, for the first time since the crisis began, the president questioned the highly compartmentalized approach into which his administration had settled. Criticizing those present for not "working together as a team" or "exchanging enough different views and opinions," he said that he felt a more comprehensive discussion of the complete spectrum of options was needed and asked his senior advisers to come to the 22 March meeting prepared for a thorough discussion of ways to break the stalemate. He wanted each of them to take time before the meeting to think the problem through on their own and to think of possible new solutions (Turner, 1991: 100-102; Odom interview). With the negotiating track experiencing seemingly insurmountable difficulties, with no obvious ways to increase the pressure on Iran, and with the rescue plan now developed to the point where the military planning group now believed that it had a reasonable chance of success, the moment was right for Brzezinski, Brown, Jones and Turner to take advantage of the Camp David meeting to update the president on the status of their work on the rescue option and to seek again his approval for the reconnaissance mission to Desert One. The stage was set for the first discussion of the rescue option in the NSC since the early days of the crisis.

This detailed examination of the decision-making process thus highlights the 22 March meeting of the NSC as a watershed event in the evolution towards the rescue decision. The central dynamics within the decision-making process at this point were that the president had seized hold of the hostage issue as his top priority but, after four and a half months of frustration, he was still a problem solver in search of a solution; that he was still thinking more in terms of increasing the pressure on Iran to force the negotiations than in terms of military action; that he stood at the centre of a process which had evolved into two compartmentalized activities, negotiations and rescue planning; that Vance, with the *Pueblo* experience as his point of reference and supported by his inner circle at the State Department, was still very much committed to a policy of patience, restraint and negotiations; that, in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the centre of gravity of

the decision-making process had taken another quantum shift in the direction of the White House; that Brzezinski, while not yet an advocate of the rescue option, was becoming increasingly frustrated at being "diddled to death" by the Iranians and, with the Israeli experience at Entebbe as his point of reference and supported by the other members of the military planning group, had put the rescue option on the agenda of the president; that the JTF, despite some significant limitations and restrictions, had developed and practiced the rescue plan to the point where it felt it was "ready to go to Iran" if the decision were taken within a few weeks; that the consensus within the administration about how best to respond to the crisis, which had held together reasonably well to this point because of a lack of alternative approaches, was on the verge of collapse if the stalemate continued much longer; and that growing criticism of the president's handling of the crisis was, in itself, becoming a political problem for the administration with the primary season now in full swing and the election rapidly approaching.

Having looked at the administration's handling of the hostage crisis for the first twenty weeks, it is now time to examine the final decision-making process which began with the 22 March meeting and culminated in the decision to launch the rescue mission and the implementation of that decision on the night of 24-25 April. This will be done in the next chapter which will, in much the same manner as this chapter did for the early period of the crisis, provide an historical account of the way in which the decision was taken and the way in which the actual operation unfolded until the failure at Desert One. The result will again be a narrative which will attempt to open up the black box of the decision-making process as widely as possible in order to highlight themes which will be important to the political process explanations for the decision and outcome presented in Chapter 7.

ENDNOTES - CHAPTER FIVE

1. The SCC's role here was entirely consistent with the committee structure that the administration had put in place in 1977. The hostage problem was an issue that required crisis management and one that cut across boundaries between departments, requiring legal, financial and other types of expertise. As such, it merited the special kind of handling which was the responsibility of the SCC. Vance fully supported the SCC as the proper forum in which to manage issues such as the hostage crisis, but he disagreed with the process whereby the summaries were sent directly to the president without his review, since he sometimes found serious errors and discrepancies in them (Vance, 1983: 36-37). Turner also had difficulties with this procedure since, in his view, "so much depended on the skill, objectivity, and personal agenda of the scribe" and he was "never confident that views contrary to his [Brzezinski's] were adequately presented to the president" (Turner, 1991: 28).
2. The other incident which appears to have been important to Vance was "the Angus Ward incident" which involved the seizure of the US consular staff in Manchuria at the end of World War II. Shortly after the seizure of the hostages in November 1979, Vance sent the president a copy of a memorandum from the Joint Chiefs of Staff to President Truman which had recommended against direct military action in Manchuria (Vance, 1983: 408-409 and 498-500).
3. It is not clear whose idea this was. Brzezinski notes that, prior to the first SCC meeting on the morning of November 5, he had spoken with the president and had "suggested to him that we consider sending a private emissary to Khomeini" (Brzezinski, 1983: 478). On the other hand, Turner, who attended the meeting, "sensed that it was more Cy's idea" (Turner, 1991:29). Regardless of who first raised the idea of an emissary, it is clear that, throughout the Bazargan period, Brzezinski had been more sceptical than the State Department that Khomeini would exercise his influence in a limited way from the background (in Sullivan's words, in a "Ghandi-like" way) and allow the secular leadership to run the government (Brzezinski, 1983: 368 and 470).
4. During the first few days of the hostage crisis, Brzezinski indicated to some members of his staff that it bothered him "that the one to speak up for American honour was a naturalized American." In order not to lose sight of what he considered to be a vital American interest, he concluded that he could not afford to be swayed by the same empathy for the hostages that he knew both Carter and Vance felt. He therefore decided to avoid the kinds of contacts with the families of the hostages that Carter and Vance began to develop (Brzezinski, 1983: 480-481).
5. Vance, who believed that the shah's presence in the US was a major obstacle to beginning discussions with the revolutionary leadership in Iran, actually convinced Carter on 14 November that the shah should leave as soon as possible. However, shortly thereafter, the issue was complicated by the decisions of Mexican President Lopez Portillo to force the shah to renew his visa and, near the end of November, to deny entry to the shah. This forced the administration to help find another place for the shah. After a two-week stop at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas, the shah moved on to Contadora Island, Panama. Jordan and Cutler were instrumental in making the arrangements with General Omar Torrijos of Panama and the shah. The shah left for Panama on 16 December where he stayed for more than three months. On 23 March he departed for Egypt, where he died on 27 July (Brzezinski, 1983: 480-482; Vance, 1983: 382-383; Sick, 1985: 242-244, 270-271; Turner, 1991: 31, 149; Carter, 1982: 467-470, 501).
6. Clark and Miller were already on their way to Iran by this time but never got beyond Istanbul. Clark, "a former attorney general with good contacts among the religious leaders" (he had even met with Khomeini in Paris in January) and Miller, a "an ex-Foreign Service Officer who had served in Tehran and spoke Farsi" (and chief counsel for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence at this time) had both been outspoken critics of the shah and generally had good reputations in Iran (Vance, 1983: 376; Saunders, 1985: 74-75; Turner, 1991: 29-30). According to Sick, their visit was intended to be "a symbolic gesture that would provide the Iranian leaders with an opportunity

to state their views and grievances directly to the president through the offices of two distinguished Americans who were known to be good friends of the Iranian people and who had publicly opposed the shah's rule" (Sick, 1985: 208). Although, as Vance notes in his memoirs, one cannot say with any degree of certainty that Khomeini's decision not to allow the Clark-Miller mission into Iran would have been different if this initiative could have been kept out of the media, the story did complicate matters and made the administration more cautious about access to information from that point on (Vance, 1983: 376; Sick, 1985: 214).

7. This initiative was undertaken in the hope that Carter could somehow make an appeal to Khomeini "as a man of religion." Clark had suggested this might be useful before he left on his ill-fated attempt to go to Iran and Carter later wrote Pope John Paul II asking for his assistance (JCLD 32). When the Pope's emissary arrived in Qom on 10 November, Khomeini used the occasion to chastise Carter and the US (Carter, 1982: 459; Sick, 1985: 215 and 224).

8. According to Sick, the PLO's objective was to act as an intermediary on behalf of the hostages by using its contacts with the revolutionary leadership "to build up its credit and respectability in the United States," but it "significantly overestimated its influence with Iranian leaders and had to expend far more political capital than intended, even for this limited result" (Sick, 1985: 209, 225). Moreover, the extent to which it actually influenced the course of events is not entirely clear. Vance, for example, says the "PLO was helpful in persuading Khomeini on November 17 to order the release of thirteen female and black hostages" while Brzezinski claims "their influence was not significant" (Vance, 1983: 378; Brzezinski, 1983: 479). One of the other factors which appears to have contributed to the decision to release these female and black hostages is that at least some of the militant students naively believed that it might polarize public opinion in the US (Sick, 1985: 224-225; Turner, 1991: 32).

9. Both the oil import ban and the asset freeze were preemptive in nature. With respect to oil, the US was importing 700,000 barrels of oil daily but, within days of the seizure, the Department of Energy had concluded that the US could manage without importing from Iran through a combination of conservation measures and reallocation from other suppliers. The 12 November announcement by the administration immediately denied Iran the possibility of attempting to use oil as a lever or way of embarrassing the US. Iran's subsequent announcement that it would terminate oil exports to the US was an extremely hollow one. With respect to the freeze, the US move was precipitated by indications that Iran was about to launch an effort to withdraw all Iranian assets from US banks. This preemptive action was an important one which played prominently in the negotiations which eventually led to the release of the hostages in January 1981. The freeze involved approximately \$11 billion in assets owned and controlled by the Iranian government (Sick, 1985: 226-230; Saunders, 1985: 93-95).

10. Some key allies, of course, had significant economic interests at stake, particularly Japan, West Germany, France and Spain which were all importing a large volume of crude oil and petrochemical products from Iran. In addition, Iran was a significant export market for West Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom, France and Italy (Encyclopedia Britannica Yearbook, 1977 to 1981). In any case, the reluctance of the Europeans to support an international regime of sanctions against Iran contributed enormously to the frustrations of key decision makers in the administration throughout the November to April period. It is quite possible that international cooperation in this area may have been effective in bringing pressure to bear on Iran and that the rescue attempt would therefore never have been launched. Vance certainly thinks so. During an interview conducted for this study, he expressed his belief that the hostage crisis might have been resolved earlier had the international community provided the Carter administration with the kind of cooperation on sanctions it provided the Bush administration during the 1990-91 crisis in the Persian Gulf (Vance interview).

11. Turner's account of the escape of "the Canadian six" is the most comprehensive in providing details of the planning and execution of this

operation by the CIA (Turner, 1991: 47-48, 63-64, 90-94; Carter, 1982: 483-484; Sick, 1985: 259-260).

12. Turner's account of the various initiatives that were considered during the early days of the crisis and the inevitable difficulties that were found with each of them is quite good. As he notes in the concluding comments to his chapter on the search for a strategy, "we activists could not think of pressures that might be effective other than punitive military actions, and those could put the lives of the hostages at risk." As a result, he goes on, the administration was "almost forced" to accept Vance's "strategy of less obtrusive diplomatic pressures combined with patient negotiations" (Turner, 1991: 60). Reilly's account of the legal and ethical difficulties with the way that the administration handled Iranian students in the US during this period is excellent and shows how difficult some of these issues were (Reilly, 1994: 211-220).

13. The hostages were, for example, being forced to remain silent and many of them had been bound for the entire period. Moreover, energetic attempts were made to break them psychologically through intimidation and brainwashing techniques (Sick, 1985: 231-232; Wells, 1985; McFadden *et al.*, 1981).

14. In addition, the US Ambassador to Afghanistan had been killed earlier that year. Although these events were all serious, Sick argues that Vance's action, while understandable in human terms, was an overreaction that was "vigorously opposed by most Foreign Service officers in the field." In an interview conducted for this dissertation, Newsom dismissed Sick's assessment as a typical one from a White House official who did not have to answer to Congress or to the American people for the safety of Americans abroad (Newsom interview).

15. The summary provided here of the two main stages in the negotiations conducted in the five and a half months between the seizure of the embassy and the rescue attempt is brief and is intended only to set essential background for the period in late March and early April when the rescue decision was taken. The best overall account of the complex details of the negotiations is still the major contribution written by those who participated in them (Christopher *et al.*, 1985). Jordan's account of his involvement in the later part of this period is also important (Jordan, 1982). Salinger's early, more journalistic account is also quite valuable (Salinger, 1981); and Moses' 700-page dissertation on the whole process from November 1979 until the hostages were released in January 1981 is extremely comprehensive (Moses, 1989).

16. On 12 November, Bani-Sadr repeated the demand that had previously been made by the Iranian students who seized the embassy that the shah be returned to Iran to stand trial, but he subsequently dropped it. The position taken by the administration on 17 November was, in part, a response to Bani-Sadr's remarks during an interview in Tehran on 16 November (Saunders, 1985: 81-84). One obvious asymmetry in the two positions was that the Revolutionary Council wanted some recognition of injustices in the past while the administration was only willing to provide assurances of justice in the future.

17. The day after he took over as foreign minister, for example, Ghotbzadeh informed Richard Cottam of the University of Pittsburgh (who knew Ghotbzadeh well and began to serve as one channel of communication with him) that "the Revolutionary Council was frightened and anxious to find a way out of the dilemma" (Sick, 1985: 239).

18. There was a last-minute delay when, on 11 January, just as the resolution on sanctions was being prepared, Waldheim received word that Iran wanted a commission established to help improve the climate for negotiations. The US agreed to a brief delay while this Iranian initiative was examined. When it became clear that this proposal was not linked to any plan for the release of the hostages, the administration pressed ahead with its case for sanctions in the Security Council. The final vote was 10-2 in favour of sanctions, but the Soviet Union's vote against the resolution nullified its legal force (Vance, 1983: 399-400; Saunders, 1985: 110; Sick, 1985: 247-248). As Turner points out, this veto was exercised by the Soviet Union "apparently in retaliation for our having voted a few days earlier to condemn it for having invaded Afghanistan" (Turner, 1991: 85). In the early days of the crisis, the

Brezhnev regime had publicly called for Iranian compliance with "the norms and principles of international law," had offered the administration private assurances that it "did not support the continued detention of the hostages" and was concerned about a possible US intervention in Iran which, in light of its own move into Afghanistan, would have resulted in a direct US-Soviet confrontation along the Afghanistan-Iran border (Moses, 1989: 196-197 and 202). It is therefore likely that the Soviet Union would have either supported sanctions or abstained on 13 January had it not been for the dramatic rupture in US-Soviet relations following the invasion of Afghanistan.

19. The idea of an international commission as the main instrument to resolve the hostage crisis took root in late December. The fundamental difference between the two initial positions was that the administration saw release of the hostages as the first step in the process while Iran saw it as the last. Over time, the administration's thinking about the role and timing of a commission evolved to the point where it was seen as a mechanism that might help create a more favourable atmosphere for the release of the hostages. By late December, the administration was willing to consider a commission whose mandate was broader in scope (to hear "the airing of Iran's grievances") and was more flexible in terms of timing (the arrangements for the commission could be worked out "in advance of a release"). Saunders, who was intimately involved in the efforts to establish an effective channel of communication with Iran throughout this period, provides a credible explanation of how the administration's thinking on the use of a commission evolved during the late December-early January period (Saunders, 1985: 102-111; Vance, 1983: 399; Moses, 1989: 108-130).

20. As Sick points out, Torrijos chose to make the approach to Jordan because the two of them "had developed relations of deep mutual friendship and trust" during the battle to ratify the Panama Canal treaties. Jordan quickly teamed up with Harold Saunders, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, who provided the essential expertise in diplomacy and negotiations (Sick, 1985: 251-253). Bourguet and Villalon had been in Panama to examine the legal possibilities of extraditing the shah. They had good connections to the secular leadership on the Revolutionary Council, especially to Bani-Sadr and Ghotbzadeh who, as the negotiations progressed, provided written assurances that Bourguet and Villalon were authorized to represent them. According to Saunders, who came to know the two lawyers well during the long hours spent developing this scenario, there were several reasons for their involvement. First, they had developed close connections with the community of exiled Iranians in Paris and now had a profitable legal business with Iran. Their efforts to help Ghotbzadeh achieve his objectives, including the extradition of the shah from Panama, should be seen as part of the effort to assure continuation of their "big stakes legal and financial accounts" with the Iranian government. In addition, they both had genuine sympathies with the "more high-minded aspirations of the Iranian revolution" and considered the hostage crisis an obstacle to international acceptance. Moreover, once they became intimately involved and invested in the process, it would have been difficult to let go. As Saunders points out, success would undoubtedly have enhanced their reputations and "would have provided that combination of internal gratifications that success gives any human being - some noble and some ego centred" (Saunders, 1985: 115-118).

21. On 11 February, for example, Khomeini issued a statement that indicated his willingness to establish "very ordinary relations with America just as with other countries." In the same statement, however, he issued a call to "topple from the position of power anyone in a position who is inclined to compromise with the East or West." One factor that undoubtedly contributed to both his low profile and the mixed nature of his signals during this period was that he was hospitalized and being treated for very serious heart and prostrate diseases (Sick, 1985: 261-262).

22. A key question from the beginning was whether Khomeini had actually agreed to the plan. At the Bern meeting on 9-10 February, the two lawyers assured Jordan and Saunders that the plan had been endorsed by Khomeini as well as the Revolutionary Council and on 19 February Bani-Sadr publicly announced that this was the case (Vance, 1983: 403-404).

23. One of the reasons for these difficulties was that Ghotbzadeh was in Europe. Once the message was corrected, the members appointed to the commission were Ambassador Andres Aguilar of Venezuela, Ambassador Mohammed Bedjaoui of Algeria, Presidential Assistant Adib Daoudy of Syria, Harry Jayewardene of Sri Lanka and Louis-Edmond Petitti of France (Vance, 1983: 403-404).

24. Turner was somewhat more involved than the other members of the military planning group because the CIA provided the negotiators with special updates on the situation in Iran and information about the two intermediaries (the report characterized Bourguet as "a political activist" and "left-wing" and Villalon as "an opportunist"). It also provided Jordan material to disguise his identity as he travelled to meet them. However, one of the central themes that emerges from Turner's whole account of this period is his sense that "the severely restricted access to information was hurting our combined effort" (Turner, 1991: 86). He felt, for example, that the CIA's efforts to provide an appropriate level of support to the negotiating team were impaired by the highly compartmentalized approach that was taken (Turner interview, Turner, 1991: 79-87 and 95-100; Jordan, 1982: 130-131). Turner readily admits that, in the case of the late January rescue of the six Americans who had been hidden at the Canadian Embassy, his approach was also one of compartmentalization (Turner interview; Turner, 1991: 48).

25. In addition to Carter, Vance and these four members of the military planning group, the 22 March meeting was attended by Powell and David Aaron, Brzezinski's deputy (Sick, 1985: 284-285). Jordan was in Panama at the time (Jordan, 1982: 212-223).

26. At the time, 65% of Iranian imports were arriving at the port facilities in Bandar Abbas and 90% of its oil exports were going through Kharg Island (NSAD 128). Consideration of possible military action to preserve the integrity of the key oil installations in southwestern Iran in the event of total political anarchy also took place during the first few days of the crisis (Sick, 1985: 207; Brzezinski, 1983: 478-482), but little came of this since Carter made it clear that he wished to avoid any situation in which US military forces might "find themselves bogged down in Iran" (Sick, 1985: 216). In any case, with the ban on oil imports from Iran that the administration announced on 12 November, it would have been extremely difficult to justify any military intervention to protect oil fields that were no longer a source of US supply.

27. Delta Force was authorized as a unit in the US Army in 1977. It was trained secretly as a counterterrorist unit over the following two years and passed its final evaluation and was certified "combat ready" the day before the hostages were seized at the US embassy in Tehran (Beckwith, 1983: 156-162). The unit's primary task was to maintain the capabilities necessary to rescue American hostages held at known locations in foreign countries. It had developed skills comparable to other elite hostage rescue units such as the German GSG-9 which, in 1977, had rescued 86 hostages from a Lufthansa flight hijacked to Mogadishu. It was therefore the logical choice of units to conduct any ground assault to rescue the hostages at the embassy.

28. One of the factors which influenced the decision not to deploy the *Midway* to the area was the *Constellation* experience that the administration had in late 1978 (Turner, 1991: 34). At that point, with the shah's regime in crisis, a secret order to move the *Constellation* from the Pacific to the Indian Ocean and prepare to move to the Arabian Sea was leaked to the press, resulting in considerable political criticism and exacerbating the problems of the shah (Sick, 1985: 127-128).

29. According to Sick, by the 4 December meeting of the NSC, Vance had convinced Carter that "interruption of commerce" did not necessarily mean that Iranian ports would have to be mined. Alternatively, he argued, it could mean comprehensive sanctions implemented by the UN or by the US and its allies (Sick, 1985: 238). Nevertheless, given that no such sanctions regime could be easily implemented, the only quick option that would have been available to follow through on the threat if the hostages had been put on trial would have been to mine Iranian ports or use the US Navy to impose a blockade.

30. Brzezinski launched his initiative in the area of covert actions at an unusual meeting restricted to the "statutory members" of the NSC (Carter, Mondale, Vance and Brown) as well as himself. When Turner learned, two days later, that covert actions had been discussed, he was "dumbfounded." In his memoirs, he argues that Brzezinski "was trying to shift control of this action to the NSC staff, turning the advisory staff into an action agency, something we would see in spades in the Iran-Contra affair." Nevertheless, despite the obvious turf issues that it raised for Turner, Brzezinski followed up his initial attempt to raise interest in covert activities by setting up a steering group and having his staff develop a list of possible actions for consideration. However, according to Turner, the whole initiative "floundered about" thereafter, with the CIA considering the proposals as unrealistic and having little chance of affecting the power struggle in Iran (Turner, 1991: 80-81).

31. For the military planners, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was not as significant an event. As Jones put it in an interview for this study, "it was a consideration, but not a major one in my judgment." Similarly, Pustay observed that "I don't recall it having that great an impact" (Jones and Pustay interviews).

32. Brzezinski's instincts were, however, not dependent on the Entebbe experience. During an interview conducted for this study, Brzezinski said that, at a dinner with Labour Party leader Shimon Peres and the Israeli Defence Force Chief of Staff the night of the Entebbe operation, he was asked what action he would recommend. When he told them that he "would put a bunch of paratroopers in long-range transport aircraft and fly to Entebbe" he could tell that he had "blown their minds." At this point, he knew that a rescue operation was being planned. "I was impressed by the fact that Entebbe succeeded," he went on, "even though by any military logic it should have failed because, in the case of Entebbe, failure could have been assured by one alert Ugandan soldier shooting at the tires of the plane, and it just struck me that sometimes you have to take risks ..." (Brzezinski interview).

33. Some of those who were trying to solve the practical problems of the rescue problem were frustrated by these prohibitions (Kyle, 1990: 33). Kyle, for example, thought that some State Department personnel who had served in Iran might be able to help and Beckwith believed that some of his foreign contacts, particularly the Germans, might be useful in placing people in Tehran to gather intelligence (Kyle interview; Beckwith, 1983: 223). According to Turner, Christopher attended the meeting of the military planning group on 12 November (Turner, 1991: 42). He was not, however, a member of the group, and this was likely the only meeting that he attended (Brzezinski, Turner, Jones, Pustay and Odom interviews).

34. Given the highly secretive nature of the rescue planning, nobody in Congress was told in advance that a rescue operation would take place. While the political process model recognizes the influence of Congress in many areas, it also recognizes the unique power of the president in the areas of foreign affairs and defence (Hilsman, 1993: 136-137 and 180-204). In the case of the hostage rescue attempt, Congress was a factor only to the extent that it contributed to the political pressures on the president at the time he made the decision to launch it. It is interesting to note that, in this particular instance, as Smist notes in his recent essay entitled "The Iran Rescue Mission: A Case Study in Executive Distrust of Congress", there was considerable sympathy and support in both houses for the president's decision not to inform Congress of the rescue operation in advance (Smist, 1994: 221-230).

35. Gast stayed with the JTF in Washington until mid-February at which point he was promoted to Lieutenant-General and sent to Langley Air Force Base as the Deputy Commander of Tactical Air Command. He was called back to Washington in mid-March and appointed as Vaught's deputy for the operation (Gast interview).

36. A top CIA officer who knew Tehran well was brought back from retirement specifically for this task (Turner, 1991: 66).

37. Carter's concern at this point was that a leak would undermine the negotiations that appeared to be going well in New York (Turner, 1990: 67). Jones presumably knew of the hold that Carter had placed on the rescue planning because the president had done this following a discussion with the Joint Chiefs of Staff at Camp David on 22 November. Despite this, at a practical level, the hold appears to have had little effect on the activities of the planners (Kyle, 1990: 63-90). Although Turner fully appreciated that he was "sticking his neck out" and that his actions probably posed a greater risk to the negotiations than the planning for a rescue operation, he allowed the plan to send CIA operatives into Tehran to go ahead (Turner, 1991: 67).

38. Although the assault troops could have been brought into Tehran quietly by other methods, once the embassy was assaulted and the shooting started, a quick and effective method of evacuating the hostages was needed. Without helicopters, a far more complicated and lengthy escape operation through the streets of Tehran would obviously have to be implemented. Despite the difficulties in getting them there, helicopters seemed to be the only reasonable way to accomplish an extraction with minimum loss of life on all sides (Kyle, 1990: 27-53; NSAD 2).

39. Initially many other concepts were considered, including a direct helicopter assault at the embassy and foreign ministry, using a parachute drop or transport aircraft to insert a larger force into the vicinity which would essentially fight its way to the locations where the hostages were being held, and the use of vehicles to bring the assault force quietly into Tehran from nearby countries (Beckwith, 1983: 195-206; NSAD 2 and 39). Although such earlier concepts were occasionally revisited (Kyle, 1990: 89 and 145; Beckwith, 1983: 214-215), the basic plan, which was formulated by the end of November and involved a two-night operation and the use of helicopters, remained the foundation upon which the actual rescue plan was built.

40. Delta Force was an obvious choice for the operation because it had just achieved operational readiness as the hostage rescue unit responsible to respond to hostage-taking situations involving US citizens abroad. Like other countries in the aftermath of the 1972 Olympic Games at Munich, the US had developed this capability to deal with international terrorism. As such, Delta Force worked closely with the hostage rescue units of other Western countries, such as the German GSG-9 and the French GIGN, and its capabilities were comparable to these other units. The feasibility of rescue operations had been proven during the previous few years, including the Israeli rescue of 103 Air France passengers and crew being held by German and Palestinian terrorists at Entebbe in 1976, the German rescue of 91 passengers and crew held by Baader-Meinhof and Palestinian terrorists at Mogadishu in 1977 and the Dutch rescue of 72 hostages being held by South Moluccan terrorists at a government building in Assen in 1978. If the location of the hostages and the specific way in which they were being held and guarded could be determined, the JTF knew that an assault on the embassy compound would be involve risks comparable to these kinds of operations. Over the past twenty years, of course, many rescue operations have been attempted. While there have been many other spectacular successes, such as the British operation at Princess Gate in 1980, the French operation at New Caledonia in 1988 and, most recently, the dramatic rescue by the French hostage rescue unit, the GIGN, of the passengers and crew of an Air France flight being held by Algerian terrorists in Marseilles, there have also been some extremely bloody massacres such as the Egyptian attempt to storm an aircraft at Malta in 1985, which killed over 60 people, and the Pakistani attempt to storm one at Karachi, which killed 21 people and wounded over 100 others. As the author concluded after an exhaustive review of the hostage rescue experience up to 1992, "the risks during rescue operations are very real and the margins for error are small." More than anything else, what the experiences to date highlight is "the fundamental importance of maintaining the highest possible standards of training, equipment, tactical judgment and leadership" (Coulter, 1992: 12-13). In the final analysis, the quality of the equipment and personnel involved in Delta Force in 1979-80 was excellent; it had five and a half months of training for the assault on the embassy, arguably making it more prepared than any other hostage rescue unit had been for an assault of this nature; it knew the precise location of the hostages; and it is quite possible that it would have begun its assault in a situation in which the students holding the

hostages were surprised because they had clearly relaxed their state of vigilance. It is certainly reasonable to conclude that, with hindsight, a successful assault on the embassy in Tehran might have been possible.

41. Beckwith, the Delta Force Commander responsible for the assault summed up his frustration at this stage in a simple but telling way: "We needed three things: information, information, and information" (Beckwith, 1983: 195).

42. In early December, the number of assault troops had been set at 70, but once it was learned that many of the hostages were being held in the long, rectangular, ninety-room, three-story chancellery, the number increased to 90, meaning that a minimum of six helicopters would be needed to carry the assault force to its destination (Beckwith, 1983: 217-218, 222-223 and 227; Kyle, 1990: 60 and 88).

43. When extremists took over the US embassy and seized some other US hostages in February, the US Air Force had moved some helicopters into Turkey, but a Turkish government official had leaked the information and the effort to prepare for the possible rescue or evacuation of Americans from Iran was quickly abandoned (Kyle, 1990: 35).

44. Wadi Kena was chosen over Diego Garcia because it had more room to accommodate the JTF aircraft, had better facilities and, if Saudi airspace was used, was closer to Iran (Kyle, 1990: 38 and 130).

45. The cover story of improving the mine-clearing capability of the carrier task force proved to be an excellent one, especially since there were growing suspicions that the Strait of Hormuz was being seeded with mines. Indeed, it even appears to have worked well with the military personnel serving with the task force. Even the carrier task force commander, who had been briefed on the rescue possibility, believed that the more likely contingency which would require the use of the helicopters was a minesweeping operation. In addition, of all the helicopters considered, the RH-53D had the best combination of range and lift capacity to fly the planned route with the assault force on board. With folding rotor blades and tail boom, it could also be stored below the flight deck, giving it good protection from the both Soviet intelligence monitors and the elements (Kyle, 1990: 46-48 and 80-81).

46. Yuma, Arizona was an ideal location to conduct this exercise because of its remote location and desert-like topography. The routes flown were generally over desert areas in California, Nevada and Arizona (Kyle, 1990: 81-82).

47. The Navy pilots were originally selected primarily because the type of helicopter selected, the RH-53D, was a Navy helicopter which only Navy pilots flew (Kyle, 1990: 59). However, the Navy pilots had been trained to fly the mine countermeasures mission for which the RH-53D was designed and would clearly have required extensive training before they would have been capable of flying the profiles required for the rescue operation. While the Marine pilots had to make the adjustment to the RH-53D from the CH-53 which they currently flew, it proved easier for them to make that adjustment than for the Navy pilots to learn a whole new mission. The other choice would have been to use Air Force H-53 pilots who would have had an even greater adjustment to make to the RH-53D and carrier operations, but who would have brought the best training and experience to the low-level, difficult-terrain, night environment that had to be dealt with on the way to Tehran. Kyle argued the case for bringing in Air Force pilots in late December, but was overruled (Kyle, 1990: 119-123).

48. During the first major exercise in early December, most of the fuel bladders had burst on impact because they had been rigged incorrectly. This problem was rectified but, in subsequent air drops, there were still problems with the dispersion pattern of the bladders, resulting in time delays in the refuelling process. The early consensus was that, while the bladder plan was workable, every effort should be made to find a better way to refuel the helicopters (Kyle, 1990: 91-98).

49. The ideal conditions under which to conduct this CIA reconnaissance flight were clear weather and full moon light. Since a full moon would occur on 1 February, Brzezinski went to the president quickly after Turner briefed him on

the possibility of a desert landing site and the need to get a first-hand look at it (Turner, 1991: 88-89). Given the president's refusal to allow the flight, it is not clear whether other methods of obtaining at least some of the information, such as sending agents to the area by road to take the soil samples and install the remotely controlled lights for the landing area were ever considered. From an operational point of view, the reconnaissance flight clearly made the most sense, since it was simple and quick, would allow the CIA pilots to conduct a flight test of the approach and landing areas, would enable the JTF to send its own expert with them and would result in a valid test of the ability to penetrate the coastal radar system without detection.

50. The key factor in determining the minimum number of helicopters required to go forward from Desert One was the lift capacity of each. When the fuel loads required to complete the mission from that point and the weight of 120 fully-equipped personnel (Delta personnel, the Foreign Ministry assault team, drivers and translators) were taken into account, it was clear that a minimum of six aircraft were needed to do the lift. This was agreed by the key members of the JTF in January, including Vaught. In order to increase the probability that the number of helicopters able to go on from Desert One would not be less than six, the two spares were added to the *Nimitz*. The possibility of more than eight was discussed, but the final number was set at eight because the helicopter experts calculated that this number would provide a very high probability of success. Because of the lower fuel weights and the fact that some equipment could be left behind once the assault was completed, there would be somewhat greater flexibility on night two if more aircraft serviceability problems were encountered on start-up or during the night two operation (Beckwith, 1983: 231-233; Kyle, 1990: 133). With respect to the maintenance problems, the early February trip to the *Nimitz* by a senior advisor to the JTF on helicopter operations (Colonel Chuck Pitman) and his maintenance specialist revealed that the aircraft were not being flown very often due to a serious spare parts problem. During the February to April period, the situation gradually improved, although it took a constant struggle to get to the point that was achieved in late April where all eight of the aircraft were mission ready at the same time (Kyle, 1990: 138, 155, 167, 177, 217-218).

51. It is normal military practice to establish a "murder board" that is staffed with experts outside the organizations doing the planning and training for a specialized mission so that there is an independent review of the plan (NSAD 102). In this case, the decision to go with the "in-house review" was a deviation from normal practice and has therefore been the subject of considerable criticism in the years since the failed mission.

52. Kyle says that, throughout the whole period, the experience was a roller coaster-like one in which the interest of the military planning group in the progress of the JTF and the pressures placed on planners were directly related to day-to-day developments in the negotiations (Kyle interview). According to Beckwith, Delta Force "was alerted seven times" before the actual operation (Beckwith interview).

53. Air-to-air refuelling was used in a wide range of circumstances during the Vietnam war, including search and rescue operations. It was natural that the planners would want to develop a plan based on this scenario but, without closer bases, the range limitations of the tankers ruled this out. The Sontay raid in 1970 did not result in the rescue of American prisoners of war because they had been moved from the Sontay camp prior to the rescue attempt, but the operation had nevertheless been executed so well that it was still a reference point for the special operations experts who were brought to Washington in November 1979 to plan the operation in Tehran (Kyle, 1990: 31; Kyle interview; Vandenbroucke, 1993).

54. According to Newsom, the Sultan of Oman was quite sympathetic to US interests and concerns but, in light of the volatile strategic situation in the Persian Gulf area, was "reluctant to get drawn into military relationships." The US team was led by Reg Bartholomew, then the Director of Politico-Military Affairs (Newsom interview).

55. Given Vance's opposition to any form of military action, including a rescue operation, unless the hostages were actually being harmed, it is somewhat surprising that Brzezinski was able to get Vance to support his request for the reconnaissance flight. In an interview conducted for this study, referring to the reconnaissance mission, Vance simply stated "I felt it would do no harm to conduct a reconnaissance kind of operation. I felt, indeed, that it might keep people happy for awhile and get them off the idea of any kind of intervention" (Vance interview). Also, Vance was willing to support a rescue attempt if the danger to the lives of the hostages became "so great that it outweighed the risks of a military operation" (Vance, 1983: 409) and, since a turn for the worst could not be ruled out as long as the hostages were being held, he no doubt considered contingency planning as prudent, provided it did not have a negative effect on the negotiations.

56. This imaginative concept was proposed to Turner by an oil businessman from Oklahoma, Charles Rittenbury. Turner characterizes his own quick rejection of this possibility as a "bad judgment" (Turner, 1991: 69).

57. Once the task force challenged its original assumptions, it was able to come up with a technical solution quite quickly involving the installation of new plumbing for some of the MC-130 transport aircraft, which were already air refuelable, to allow them to act as refuelling tankers for the helicopters. However, at the point that this solution was identified in late March, it was estimated that "this work would take more than a month" to complete (Kyle, 1990: 160-161). This meant that, allowing some time to train the crews of the MC-130s and the helicopters together in exercise conditions (the helicopter pilots were already doing some limited air-to-air refuelling training), it would have taken at least a couple of months before the task force would have been able to move away from a ground-based refuelling option. Had this option been pursued at the outset, it probably would have been part of the plan by 22 March.

58. The rescue mission could, of course, be stretched to three nights: one night to get to the refuelling site, a second to move on to the hideout sites, and a third to conduct the assaults and evacuation. A three-night scenario would, however, have increased the risk that the operation would be compromised (Turner, 1991: 102; NSAD 120).

59. Sick, who attended the meeting as note taker, states that at this point "the president was persuaded that the effort to build a relationship with Iran was finished." In a comment that gives considerable insight into his mood of frustration with the entire issue of US-Iran relations, at one point during the meeting the president said he wanted to "get our people out of Iran and break relations. Fuck 'em" (Sick, 1985: 210).

60. Referring in his memoirs to the period near the end of his presidency, Carter himself writes that "The release of the American hostages had almost become an obsession with me" (Carter, 1982: 594).

61. Carter initially wanted a ban on all pro-Khomeini demonstrations, at least those held on federal property, on the grounds that they could result in violence and therefore place the hostages at greater risk. After a spirited effort, the administration was able to implement only a ban on pro- and anti-Khomeini demonstrations "in the immediate vicinity of the White House and the Capitol." With respect to the deportation of Iranian students in the US, legal analysis determined that, under current laws, even students whose visas had expired could easily delay any deportation action for many months or even years. Carter therefore limited his initial action to a formal check of the status of Iranian students in the US (Sick, 1985: 229-231).

62. According to Turner, "Except for Zbig, we were unanimous in rejecting every one" (Turner, 1991: 54).

63. During the NSC meeting on 23 November, Turner suggested a strategy of promising to cooperate and then reneging once the hostages had been released. In a reply which says a great deal about his basic instincts, Carter "immediately and peremptorily" retorted, "You know we can't do that, Stan" (Turner, 1991: 57).

64. In light of the action by the Mexican government, Sadat re-issued his longstanding invitation for the shah to return to Egypt. Although both Carter and Mondale were inclined to nudge the shah towards Egypt at first, Vance and Brzezinski made strong representations that such a move would be dangerous for Sadat and, in the end, Carter decided that the shah should settle elsewhere (Carter, 1982: 468-469; Brzezinski, 1983: 481-482). His decision to involve Jordan in the negotiations was a clear indication that, despite the shah's apparent cooperative approach, he feared the shah might outmanoeuvre or prove too difficult for the State Department.

65. Brzezinski's way of conceptualizing the problem became far more compatible with Carter's following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan which, for Brzezinski, dramatically changed the strategic context and made the appropriate approach to the hostage crisis to be one "of saving the hostages' lives and of promoting our national interest by exercising military restraint (Brzezinski, 1983: 485).

66. As mentioned previously, there is no evidence that the military planning was placed on hold within the Special Operations Division (Kyle, 1990: 54-90). Moreover, the CIA continued its activities in support of the rescue planning. The only action that appears to have been taken in the aftermath of the president's suspension edict was that meetings of the military planning group were not held for a few days. In any case, as Turner notes, "it wasn't long before Zbig apparently brought the president around" and these meetings resumed (Turner, 1991: 67).

67. On at least one occasion, Carter indicated that, even if the hostages were released, he might wish to punish Iran for its actions with some sort of military action (Sick, 1985: 234).

68. Turner recounts one meeting, during the second week of the crisis, in which he was called to the president's office for a meeting with the president and Brzezinski to discuss operational issues such as ways to destabilize the Iranian government; the specific vulnerabilities Iran might have to US military action, such as critical points in its electrical power system; and the residual operational capabilities of the Iranian armed forces, such as the status of its F-14 fighter aircraft (Turner, 1991: 49-51).

69. At the SCC meeting of 28 November, Vance argued that a naval blockade was preferable to mining because he believed it likely that there would be more international support for a blockade than for mining. Brown countered Vance's reasoning by asserting that the problem with a naval blockade was that it "would place the United States in the position of being forced to take the last action of sinking a ship headed for Iran." Mining, on the other hand, "was more passive and placed the burden on the ship that chose to enter waters known to be mined" (Sick, 1985: 237). Turner had made essentially the same argument to the president and Brzezinski earlier in the month during his discussion of Iran's vulnerabilities (Turner, 1991: 51). Obviously, Carter was more sympathetic to the arguments made by Brown and Turner.

70. Turner probably played a significant role in putting the issue of mining on the president's agenda. As a naval officer with expertise in mine warfare, he had immediately looked at the susceptibility of Iran's major harbours to mining and found that they were especially vulnerable because of their narrow and shallow entrances. Frustrated that the mining option had not been discussed during the first week of the crisis, he took advantage of his 12 November discussion with the president and Brzezinski on operational issues to raise it forcefully. He felt very strongly about the feasibility of mining. Indeed, when asked during an interview for this study whether, had he been president, he would have mined Iranian harbours during the hostage crisis, he responded, after careful reflection, that he would have. In any case, his enthusiasm probably had an effect on the president, a former classmate of his at the US Naval Academy (Turner, 1991: 51; Turner interview).

71. The main reason why Turner raised the issue with the president was that he had some difficult moments with Brzezinski during this early period, including differences over who should be responsible for intelligence support to the rescue operation (Brzezinski initially wanted to limit involvement to the Defence Intelligence Agency but Turner successfully insisted that, in his

capacity as Director of Central Intelligence, he had to coordinate this activity), the way to handle offers of assistance such as the one made by Ross Perot (Brzezinski wanted the NSC staff rather than the CIA to be the point of contact, but again Turner prevailed), the legality of wire-tapping the shah's telephone (Brzezinski tried to force Turner to comply with Mondale's request, which Carter supported, to do this wire-tap during the first weeks of the crisis to determine the shah's plans but, in the end, the tap proved unnecessary); and the feasibility of covert action (Brzezinski pushed for action focused on strengthening the opposition to Khomeini in Iran, but the CIA successfully vetoed all of the ideas that emerged from a steering group set up by Brzezinski to develop and oversee covert actions). Clearly, Brzezinski was being aggressive and pushing beyond the normal parameters of the NSC staff's functions, but in all cases the outcome was compatible with Turner's preferences (Turner, 1991: 38-41, 61-63, 77-81; Turner interview).

72. Although, in a close vote, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee voted in favour of the SALT II treaty in early November, it released a long list of suspicions about Soviet motivations, reservations about the treaty itself and recommendations for unilateral actions by the US to strengthen its defence programs. In December, the House Armed Services Committee issued a far harsher assessment which concluded that the treaty "is not in the national security interests of the United States." It was thus clear that, if the treaty was to be ratified, which would require a two-thirds majority in the Senate, an intense lobbying effort would be required. The inflation rate, fuelled by the skyrocketing price of oil, was running at 20% during the first quarter of 1980 (Carter, 1982: 526; Smith, 1986: 211-213).

73. In a memorandum written to the White House staff, Cabinet members and heads of agencies on 15 February, Jordan made it clear what the president's priorities were at this point. After explaining how the twin crises of Iran and Afghanistan were placing an "enormous number of demands" on the president's time, he made the following request: "During the next few weeks you are asked to be particularly restrained in recommending appointments or events involving time commitments for him" (JCLD 28).

74. While the president was clearly surprised, he should not have been. As the memoirs of both Vance and Brzezinski make clear, the invasion was preceded by a growing pattern of Soviet involvement in Afghanistan and the invasion should not have come as a complete surprise (Vance, 1983: 386-387; Brzezinski, 1983: 426-430). Moreover, as Epstein concludes from his review of the secret cable traffic which was captured by the students who seized the embassy shortly before the invasion, "Moscow purposely telegraphed its intentions to intervene to test US reaction" and the failure of the Carter to respond "was presumably taken by Moscow as a tacit green light for its coup." Carter's surprise, he concludes, is "unfathomable in light of this cable traffic" (Epstein, 1987: 39-40).

75. The way in which Carter's beliefs about the international system changed over the period of his presidency is the subject of Rosati's in-depth analysis (Rosati, 1984 and 1987). As Rosati shows, Carter had become somewhat more sceptical about both Soviet intentions and the prospects for establishing "a new world order based upon international peace and cooperation" by late 1979, but his quantum leap from a basic image of "a complex international system" and "quest for global community" to one of "an increasingly unstable and fragmented world" and "quest for global security" took place in early 1980, following the invasion of Afghanistan (Rosati, 1984: 165-174).

76. The sanctions also included restricting Soviet fishing in US waters, prohibiting the sale of high-technology equipment and cancellation of some scientific and cultural exchange programs. The embargo on grain exempted contracts already in existence under the 1975 agreement (8 million tons were sent while another 17 million tons were blocked). About sixty nations eventually joined the US in boycotting the Olympics. In January, the administration announced its plans to increase the defence budget by 5 percent real growth per year for the next five years. Other elements of the increased emphasis on military capabilities included accelerating the development of a rapid deployment force, reinstating registration for the draft and closer cooperation with allies, most notably Pakistan, which bordered on Afghanistan

and had previously been chastised by the administration for its human rights record and nuclear weapons program (Smith, 1986: 224-234; Vance, 1983: 389-391).

77. Vance and Brzezinski had fundamentally different beliefs about the reasons for the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. For Brzezinski, the invasion was primarily motivated by a simple geopolitical strategy aimed at taking advantage of the US weakness in the area and at eventual control of the Persian Gulf (Brzezinski, 1983: 426-430). For Vance, it was the result of the Soviet desire to protect political interests in Afghanistan (fear that the "Khomeini fever" would spread as well as geopolitical considerations), the "downward spiral in US-Soviet relations which had released the brakes on Soviet international behaviour" and fatal miscalculations about the reaction of Islamic nations, the world community and, most importantly, the US (Vance, 1983: 388-389). Seen in historical perspective, Vance's beliefs appear to have been far more accurate than Brzezinski's. Thus, from the vantage point of 15 years later, the administration's tough response, many aspects of which Vance opposed (Vance, 1983: 383-397), appears to have been an overreaction.

78. As Sick points out, Jordan's "direct and personal access to the president" was one of the most important reasons why the Panamanians had chosen to contact him on 11 January (Sick, 1985: 251; Jordan, 1982: 101-102; Carter, 1982: 484).

79. At a small meeting called by Carter on 23 January to discuss Jordan's advice, Mondale and Vance agreed with the president that the administration had little choice but to proceed in the way that Jordan was suggesting. Brzezinski, who was also present, was part of this consensus (Jordan, 1982: 125). The next day, at an SCC meeting, Turner opposed this concession on the grounds that it should not be made too early but, as he notes in his account of this period, "enthusiasm for negotiations was building, and no one shared my concern" (Turner, 1991: 87). In his memoirs, Carter states that he considered this change to be "insignificant," but Jordan's characterization of it as "a significant change in government policy" is the undoubtedly the more accurate one. Indeed, as Turner recalls in his account of the period just two months earlier in late November, virtually everyone, with the notable exception of Vance, "felt this instance of hostage taking was so heinous that it had to be solved before we could discuss Iran's perceived grievances." The change was also significant in the sense that without it the negotiations to produce a scenario would likely have never got off the ground (Carter, 1982: 487; Jordan, 1982: 120-125).

80. Vance was generally aware of the rescue planning effort, but not the specifics. In late January, for example, after Turner raised the issue of a reconnaissance flight at a luncheon with Vance, Brown and Brzezinski, Turner met with Vance and found that he had "only a sketchy idea of the rescue plan." Although Vance took part in another discussion about the reconnaissance flight with Carter, Brown, Brzezinski, Jones and Turner on 14 February and was again approached by Brzezinski in early March, he did not keep abreast of developments during this period (Turner, 1991: 89 and 98; Brzezinski, 1983: 489). Other than Vance and Christopher, nobody in the State Department knew that a specific rescue plan was being developed (Newsom interview). Similarly, until he was briefed by Pustay in late March, Jordan knew very little about the rescue planning (Jordan, 1982: 227-229). Of the members of the military planning group, only Brzezinski was well placed to follow the negotiations in any detail but he was "sceptical in the extreme" about the prospects that the approach could work and "made very little effort to follow all the twists and turns of the negotiations" (Sick, 1985: 253).

81. The impression that Carter was "above politics" eroded quickly once the campaign began. As Rozell points out, an important distinction must be drawn here. The earlier portrayals of an apolitical Carter were based on his failure to build public and congressional support during the policy making process; the later portrayals were of an astute politician who was willing to use the full resources of the presidency to his advantage in his campaign for reelection (Rozell, 1989: 157-158 and 176-178).

82. In a telling commentary following the failed rescue attempt, James Reston of the New York Times acknowledged the role that "my old buddy, the Ayatollah Walter Chronkite" had played in fuelling the pressures on the president to "do something" (Hilsman, 1993: 110).

83. Ironically, given the mistake that was made in casting the vote, Brzezinski's sympathies were with Vance. Brzezinski felt it was wrong for Mondale, Strauss and Jordan to pressure Vance into the public retraction. "The admission of error," he says in his memoirs, "made the Administration look silly and the President look weak." The fallout of the incident continued in the weeks leading up to the New York primary on 25 March. Vance was still extremely sensitive about the issue when the White House, led by Mondale, again tried to pressure him to indicate, at a 21 March appearance before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, that the 1 March vote had been an error which did not reflect administration thinking. Despite this pressure, Vance refused to disavow the basic thrust of the resolution. Instead, he used the occasion to stress that the basic US position had always been to oppose settlements because they were an obstacle to peace. When, a few days later, Kennedy won the New York and Connecticut primaries, several of Carter's senior political advisers, most notably Mondale, laid the blame directly on the vote mishap and Vance's testimony. In his memoirs, Carter himself notes that the vote mishap was "a direct cause" of these two primary losses (Brzezinski, 1983: 442-443; Carter, 1983: 493-494; Gillon, 1992: 278-279).

84. At this briefing, the unanimous view of these congressional leaders was that the administration should continue to exercise patience and restraint (Carter, 1982: 499). However, just a week and a half earlier, when Brzezinski had met with a group of about 40 congressmen, it was clear that legislators were getting increasingly impatient with the lack of progress in the negotiations (Brzezinski, 1983: 489).

85. In his account of this period, Bani-Sadr asserts that "my first priority was to solve the hostage problem" (1991: 22-23).

86. In his comprehensive analysis of the negotiations, Moses concludes that there was actually a "leverage stalemate" between the US and Iran during this period. Drawing heavily on Cottam's work on negotiations, Moses carefully assesses "levers" that both the administration and the Iranian government attempted to employ during the negotiations. He concludes that the administration did not have a relative advantage in leverage, primarily because "Khomeini was simply not responsive to the sorts of coercive measures the Carter administration was engaged in" (Moses, 1989: 60-69, 235-252 and 660-665).

87. In August 1979, the owners of a New York disco called Studio 54 filed allegations with the Justice Department that Jordan had used cocaine on their premises in April 1978. Although the two owners had been indicted a few months earlier by a federal grand jury for obstruction of justice, conspiracy and tax fraud and certain aspects of the allegations were demonstrably false, their lawyers were attempting to use these allegations to plea bargain on behalf of their clients. A month later, these lawyers produced similar allegations about a party that Jordan had attended in Los Angeles. Consistent with the provisions of the Ethics in Government Act, an FBI investigation was launched and a special prosecutor was appointed. Media coverage of developments over the next nine months was extensive. In November 1980, Jordan was cleared of all charges by a federal grand jury (Powell, 1984: 135-156).

88. Jordan and Saunders travelled to Bern and worked out a revised scenario with Bourguet and Villalon on 13-14 March, which was to be set in motion shortly after the 15 March Majlis elections. This revised scenario was based on the assumption that Bani-Sadr would receive a mandate in the elections. When only a few candidates, all from the Islamic Republican Party, received a clear majority in the first round and the second round was postponed indefinitely amid widespread accusations of irregularities and fraud, it was clear that, at best, it would be several weeks before the revised scenario could be pursued. The new scenario involved a statement by Carter that the US was willing to exercise a policy of restraint for a short time longer to allow

the UN commission to return to Tehran to complete its work. Once Bani-Sadr had given appropriate assurances that the commission could complete its work, including visiting the hostages, it would return to Tehran, but only after the Iranian government had taken custody of the hostages (Vance, 1983: 405-406; Sick, 1985: 271; Saunders, 1985: 132-133).

89. After the Panamanians blocked the shah's attempt to have his spleen removed at the US military hospital rather than a local one and objected to his wish to have a US surgeon head the operating team and in light of his ongoing concerns about his safety in and possible extradition from Panama, the shah decided to accept Sadat's longstanding invitation to move to Egypt. The administration felt that it would be dangerous for both Sadat and the hostages if the shah were to move to Egypt. Jordan's mission to Panama proved unsuccessful and the shah left Panama for Egypt on 23 March (Jordan, 1982: 201-227; Sick, 1985: 270-271).

90. Although they did not hold positions of authority in the administration, two other people whose influence on the president may have been important at certain points during the hostage crisis was his close friend and lawyer from Atlanta, Charles Kirbo, and his wife, Rosalynn. Kirbo was involved in at least some discussions about various options, including the possible blockade of Iran and the mining of Iranian ports, but he favoured peaceful means (Sick, 1985: 235-237) and, if he was aware at all of the rescue planning effort, it was likely only in a very general way. Like Mondale, Rosalynn was on the campaign trail for much of the January-March period. She did not find out about the rescue planning until 12 April, but clearly wanted her husband to "do something - anything" at several points during the November to March period (R. Carter, 1984: 320-324).

CHAPTER 6 - THE RESCUE DECISION AND OPERATION

The final decision-making process that led to the decision to launch Operation Eagle Claw began at the NSC meeting at Camp David on 22 March. To this point, for Carter, the effort to put together a workable plan had been simply contingency planning so that he would have a last-resort action plan available for consideration if the hostages were harmed or about to be harmed. During the detailed briefing which Jones gave at Camp David, Carter was brought fully up to date on the way in which the rescue plan had been developed over the previous four and a half months. Although Vance spoke out forcefully during the meeting against any military action at this point, including a rescue attempt, the president recognized that enormous progress had been made and that a rescue operation was now far more feasible than it had been in the early days of the crisis. He thus began to consider, for the first time, the rescue possibility as a potential solution to the hostage problem. He was not yet ready to take this step but, coming at a time when he was extremely frustrated and looking for new ways to approach the problem, the briefing placed the rescue option firmly on his agenda.

Over the next four weeks, the decision to implement the rescue plan crystallized steadily in the president's mind.¹ Within two weeks of the 22 March meeting, the negotiating track reached a total impasse, with Khomeini overruling Bani-Sadr's desire to transfer the hostages to the control of the government. On 7 April, the administration broke diplomatic relations with Iran, announced some additional unilateral economic sanctions and called for other nations to take similar actions. On 11 April, having concluded "that the time had come to act" (Brzezinski, 1983: 492; Carter, 1983: 506), the president called a meeting of the NSC and gave his tentative approval for the rescue mission to go ahead on 24 April. Another meeting to review this decision was held on 15 April at which Vance, who was on vacation in Florida for the 11 April meeting, forcefully argued against the rescue operation. Despite this intervention, the president let his decision stand. On 16 April, he met with a group of senior military planners and commanders to go over the rescue plan in detail.

During the period between the 22 March meeting at Camp David and mid-April, under the close supervision of the military planning group, the rescue plan was adjusted to include the use of Desert One and Oman as staging bases and final preparations to launch the operation, including

two more rehearsals, were made. Deployments of personnel and equipment in support of the operation began on 14 April and continued at a fairly constant pace over the course of the next ten days. By 24 April, in addition to the helicopters and fighters aboard the *Nimitz*, thirty-four special mission aircraft, twenty support aircraft and hundreds of US personnel dedicated to the mission were in place in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Diego Garcia. Late that afternoon, the final order to execute the mission was received and, shortly after sunset, eight RH-53D helicopters and six C-130 aircraft with the rescue force on board penetrated Iranian airspace.

Six hours later, at Desert One, the operation was cancelled when the number of mission-capable helicopters fell below the number that had been set as the minimum to go ahead with the next phase, the flight to the hideout near Tehran. Preparations to withdraw from Desert One commenced immediately but, as one of the helicopters was being repositioned to allow one of the C-130s to manoeuvre for departure, it struck the C-130, resulting in a fiery inferno that took the lives of three members of the helicopter crew and five members of the C-130 crew. An emergency evacuation was then carried out, leaving behind the helicopters and the remains of the eight Americans who had been killed. Early in the morning on 25 April, nine hours after the first US aircraft had penetrated Iranian airspace, the rescue force was back in international airspace on its way to Masirah.

This chapter will examine both the decision to attempt the rescue operation and the implementation of it by the US military. It will begin by focusing on the final decision-making process which began on 22 March and culminated in the decision by the president to launch the rescue mission, highlighting the way in which the political and military-operational decision-making moved together more closely during this period, with the president and his key foreign policy advisers reacting to information about the way in which the rescue plan was being developed and the rescue planners making their final preparations and adjustments based on political decisions. It will then focus on the attempt to implement the plan, highlighting the dynamics of the decision-making processes on the night of 24-25 April.

Consistent with the political process model and the way it has been adapted for this study, this chapter will, like the last one, consider the decision-making process as a group activity which included, at the political level, the most senior foreign policy decision makers in the

administration and, at the military-operational level, the senior commanders within the JTF. In examining the decision, the main focus will be at the political level; the sharpest one will be on the president himself, since he was the only person who could authorize the rescue operation and, ultimately, took the decision to do so. This analysis of the decision will highlight the manner in which the decision-making process played out at the level of the president throughout this crucial period, including the way in which he received key inputs from both his senior foreign policy and political advisers and his senior military commanders and the way in which the decision to launch the mission steadily crystallized in his mind. In examining the final preparations for the operation, the focus will be mainly at the military-operational level where some final adjustments and refinements to the plan were made. At the same time, this analysis will highlight some key decisions that were taken at the political level, resulting in the incorporation of Desert One and Oman into the plan as staging bases. Finally, in examining the actual operation on the night of 24-25 April, the focus will be very sharply on the military-operational level since, once the mission was launched, it was at this level where the key judgments and decisions were made, ultimately culminating in the failure of the mission at Desert One.

This chapter will thus complete the historical account begun in the previous chapter by examining the final decision-making process and the conduct of the actual operation. Like the previous chapter, it will again focus on the key decision makers and the pressures on them, on the policies and interests they represented, on the strategies they employed and on the evolving dynamics of the process as they tried to bring their ideas and influence to bear during the period between 22 March and 24-25 April. The result will be another narrative, one which will attempt to open up the black box of the decision-making process as widely as possible in order to highlight issues and themes relevant to the development of the political process explanations in the next chapter. In short, this chapter will take the final step in preparing the way for these explanations by applying the political process model to the events of this five-week period.

The Rescue Decision and Final Preparations

The Camp David meeting was attended by the president, Mondale, Vance, Brown, Brzezinski, Jones, Turner, Aaron and Powell. Jordan was still in Panama trying to encourage the shah to remain there rather than

move to Egypt.² Although the five-hour meeting included discussions about the Middle East, Afghanistan and Soviet-American relations, most of the discussion focused on the hostage crisis (Sick, 1985: 284-285; Turner, 1991: 100-102).

Following a discussion of additional economic and diplomatic pressures that might be brought to bear on Iran, which was essentially nothing more than a review of previous discussions, the meeting turned to a discussion of military options. The possibilities of a naval blockade and mining Iranian ports were again discussed, as well as some new proposals involving the use of non-lethal military capabilities, such as incapacitating Iranian power plants by dropping aluminum strips down their air intakes and demonstrating that the US was serious by flying aircraft at high altitude over Tehran. However, in light of fears that military action might push Iran into a closer relationship with the Soviet Union or, worse, provide an excuse for a Soviet move into Iran, there was no enthusiasm for any punitive or pressure-oriented military action. On the issue of mining, for example, Brown and Jones argued forcefully that Iran might turn to the Soviet Union for help in sweeping the mines and that, in any case, mining in the northern tip of the Persian Gulf would cut Iraq off from its main port of Basra (Turner, 1991: 101).³

The discussion then turned to the rescue option, with Jones, assisted by Brown and Brzezinski, giving a comprehensive briefing on the progress that the military planners had made over the previous four and a half months in developing a plan to deliver a rescue force to Tehran, conduct assaults on the embassy and the Foreign Ministry and evacuate the hostages and the rescue force out of Iran. If, as the most recent intelligence indicated, all of the hostages could be found inside the embassy walls and if, as the rescue planners expected, the students at the embassy could be taken totally by surprise, Jones was confident that a rescue operation could now succeed. At the same time, he emphasized that the operation would be a highly complex one and that his confidence in the individual elements of the plan, especially the assault on the embassy compound, was considerably higher than his confidence about the viability of such a complex plan as a whole. During the briefing, Brzezinski identified several points at which the operation might be detected and therefore fail. He stressed that the possibility that the rescue force would be discovered before it was ready to conduct the assaults was his greatest source of concern. Brown declared that he considered the risks of a rescue mission to be no greater than the risks associated with other

military actions being discussed, such as a naval blockade or mining (Sick, 1985: 285-287).

Jones also described the problem posed by the increasing hours of daylight in Iran, pointing out that after the end of April it would be necessary to extend the operation over three days, adding to the complexity of it and increasing the risks. Following his briefing, Jones asked for permission to send, in addition to the CIA operatives already working there, Army scouts into Tehran to do their own assessment of the situation and to confirm the adequacy of the preparations that had been made. The president authorized him to take these actions. Jones also raised the issue of sending a reconnaissance flight into Iran to determine the suitability of the Desert One site as a staging base. He proposed that the flight take place on 31 March, the night of the next full moon. Although obviously still nervous, the president gave his tentative authorization, although he made it clear that he might change his mind before then if circumstances changed. In light of the possible need for a rescue mission if the situation were to suddenly take a turn for the worse, Vance concurred with the recommendation for the flight (Turner, 1991: 101-102; Sick, 1985: 227; Carter, 1983: 501; Vance, 1983: 408).

At the same time, Vance made it clear during the meeting that he continued to oppose any military action, including a rescue operation, unless the hostages were in immediate danger or were actually being harmed. Military action should not be taken in any other circumstance, he argued, since it would increase the risk to the lives of the hostages, could undermine US interests in the Persian Gulf area by forcing Iran to turn to the Soviet Union for help or could play into the hands of those, like Khomeini, who wanted to unite the Islamic world against the West. Most of the others, including Brown and Jones, shared similar concerns in relation to other military options. There was, however, one important difference. While the others, especially Brzezinski and Brown, considered that the potential effects of a rescue operation might be more acceptable in terms of both risks to the hostages and US geopolitical interests, Vance considered all forms of military action to be essentially the same in this regard (Vance, 1983: 408; Brzezinski, 1983: 487-490; Turner, 1991: 101; Sick, 1985: 285-287).

Following the briefing on the rescue mission, Carter made it clear that he was certainly not ready to launch a rescue mission at this point; indeed, he indicated that he would prefer to wait several more months rather than authorize a rescue mission that might result in the deaths of

hostages. He directed Vance to prepare to take several additional actions against Iran, including the imposition of formal economic and trade sanctions and a break of diplomatic relations with Iran. He also wanted an all out effort made, including a warning that the alternative was military action, to persuade key allies to set a date for breaking their diplomatic relations with Iran and for joining the US in imposing sanctions. With respect to Iran, he still hoped that the threat of new sanctions might pressure the government into another round of serious negotiations, thus avoiding the need for further consideration of military actions (Carter, 1983: 501; Vance, 1983: 406; Sick, 1985: 287; Turner, 1991: 102). Simply put, he was still not ready to give up on the negotiations and pressure strategy that the administration had pursued over the previous four and a half months. Moreover, despite the president's continued desire to proceed with the planning and training for a rescue operation and his new willingness to authorize the reconnaissance flight and other preparatory steps in Tehran, no one, including Brzezinski, was yet prepared to make a recommendation to proceed with the rescue mission. Thus, according to Vance, "there was no indication that a decision on the use of military force was imminent" (Vance, 1983: 409; Vance interview).

Nevertheless, the 22 March meeting was a highly significant one in the evolution of the president's thinking about ways to solve the hostage problem since, for the first time since the early days of the crisis, the idea of using a rescue operation as a way to bring the hostages home rather than as a last-resort action to be undertaken only if hostages were being harmed was seriously discussed in the presence of Carter, Mondale, Powell and Vance. Now, for the first time, the president was fully aware of the far greater level of confidence that the members of the military planning group had in the rescue plan, the details of the progress had been made in developing the plan, the time constraints on the implementation of the two-day rescue scenario and the contribution to the plan that a reconnaissance flight to Desert One would make if the site proved to be suitable for refuelling operations. Moreover, he made two important decisions, namely to allow the reconnaissance flight to proceed and to allow Army scouts to slip into Tehran, decisions which helped to shape the plan over the next few weeks and increase the confidence that most senior decision makers eventually placed in it. The 22 March meeting was, as Brzezinski notes in his memoirs, a point at which "consideration of the rescue option became more serious" (Brzezinski, 1983: 490). For

the problem-solving president, in other words, the rescue option now became a potential solution. The more receptive mood of the president was evident, for example, when he instructed Jordan on 24 March, the day after his return from Panama, to get a briefing on the rescue mission (Jordan, 1982: 227-229).

In the days following the Camp David meeting, the president's attention was focused primarily on the issue of the transfer of the hostages from the custody of the students to the government. Since the revised scenario which Jordan and Saunders had worked out with Bourguet and Villalon in Bern depended on Bani-Sadr receiving a mandate in the Majlis and the runoff elections had been delayed indefinitely, nothing else was possible on the negotiating track. To reinforce Bani-Sadr's pledge to transfer the hostages to the custody of the government by 30 March, Carter sent a personal message to Bani-Sadr on 25 March indicating that, in the absence of such a transfer by 31 March, the administration would take "additional non-belligerent measures that we have withheld until now" (Vance, 1983: 406). That same day, he met with Bourguet in the White House and expressed some of his anger and frustration at the inability of the Bani-Sadr government to act decisively.⁴ Bourguet went directly to Tehran after the meeting. A few days later, Carter made public his intention to impose new sanctions on Iran (Carter, 1983: 502; Sick, 1985: 273-275).⁵ In the absence of new developments, he was thus publicly committed to taking further action against Iran by the end of March.

During the last few days of March, there was an intense flurry of activity on the diplomatic front as the State Department attempted to persuade key allies to prepare to join the US in taking more effective measures against Iran. Carter wrote to several heads of government, including Thatcher, Schmidt, Giscard d'Estaing, Ohira and Trudeau, to stress to them that the administration's patience was running out and that more serious confrontation between Iran and the US was inevitable unless Iran could be persuaded to release the hostages. The ambassadors of key allies were also called in by the State Department ask for their cooperation on sanctions and to discuss the importance of having Iran understand the seriousness of the situation. With the exception of Canada, which gave a strong positive response to the US initiative, the general response of other nations was to request continued restraint on the part of the US and to express strong reservations about any resort to the use of military force (Vance, 1983: 406-407; Carter, 1983: 501-502).

Meanwhile in Iran, a major problem arose shortly after Ghotbzadeh sent Khomeini a letter, which Ghotbzadeh claimed was from Carter to Khomeini. Although the core of the letter was based on a collage of earlier private messages sent by Jordan to Bani-Sadr and Ghotbzadeh, the letter itself was fabricated by Villalon. It was apologetic in tone, stating that Carter understood how seizing the embassy "could have been a natural reaction by Iranian youths" and begging Khomeini to help him solve the crisis "according to just and honourable principles" (Sick, 1985: 272; Powell, 1984: 210). Villalon's intent was ostensibly to create a better political atmosphere for the transfer of the hostages. However, the initiative backfired when Khomeini rejected the ploy and promptly released the letter to the press in an attempt to humiliate the US. When the White House denied the authenticity of the letter, in a bid to deflect criticisms, Bani-Sadr released the contents of previous correspondence from Carter which had urged the Revolutionary Council to take custody of the hostages, including the ultimatum of 25 March. The result of the Villalon-Ghotbzadeh initiative was thus to add to confusion in Tehran and to undermine further the efforts of Bani-Sadr and Ghotbzadeh to gain support for the transfer of the hostages (Sick, 1985: 271-273; Saunders, 1985: 134; Vance, 1983: 407; Powell, 1984: 213; JCLD 35).⁶

The incident also raised serious concerns in Washington about the future role of the two intermediaries. Although Villalon had been the author of the bogus letter, Bourguet had also reached the point where he was willing to do almost anything to keep the negotiations alive. From Panama, where he was working on the Iranian extradition case, Bourguet tried to use an offer by Torrijos to detain the shah if the hostages were transferred to the custody of the Iranian government to keep the shah from leaving Panama. On 21 March, just two days before the shah's departure for Egypt, he started to work this scenario with Ghotbzadeh in Tehran. When their efforts to use the imminent departure of the shah as a lever to force the transfer failed, they made a desperate last-minute effort to have the shah turned back from his refuelling stop at the US base in the Azores by telling Jordan, who was himself flying back to Washington from Panama, that the transfer would take place within an hour if the shah was stopped from fleeing to Egypt. For a brief time Jordan actually ordered the shah's aircraft to be held on the ground in the Azores, but it soon became clear that Bourguet and Ghotbzadeh would not be able to deliver on their part of the arrangement.⁷ The combination of this attempt by Bourguet to have the shah turned back to Panama and Villalon's attempt to

put a bogus letter from Carter into play in Tehran undermined whatever faith was left in Washington that the two intermediaries could continue to play a useful role. They were starting to become, as Sick notes in his memoirs, "loose cannons on a very cluttered and dangerous deck" (Sick, 1985: 270-273; Jordan, 1982: 219-227).

The transfer issue came to a head during the first week of April. Despite the difficulties caused in Iran by the public release of both the bogus and authentic letters from Carter and by protests over the shah's flight to Egypt, Bani-Sadr and Ghotbzadeh continued their attempt to transfer custody of the hostages to the government.⁸ On 31 March, just before the NSC was to meet to consider further sanctions, Bani-Sadr sent a message indicating that he had met with the students holding the hostages and that, during a scheduled speech the following day, he would announce, with the agreement of Khomeini, that the Revolutionary Council had given its approval for a transfer of the hostages to take place. Despite this development, in light of his personal and public commitment to the 31 March deadline, Carter was clearly in the mood to move forward with further sanctions at the NSC meeting. It was only when Vance forcefully argued the case for a twenty-four hour delay to hear what Bani-Sadr had to say that the president reluctantly agreed to defer his final decision on additional sanctions until after Bani-Sadr had made his speech (Sick, 1985: 274-275; Saunders, 1985: 134).⁹

During the early morning hours of 1 April, Vance, Brzezinski, Jordan, Powell and few others from the State Department and the NSC staff met with the president to assess Bani-Sadr's speech. Speaking in the name of the Revolutionary Council, Bani-Sadr quoted at length from the ultimatum sent by the administration on 25 March. He then announced that the Revolutionary Council would take control of the hostages, if the US provided assurances that "it will not, until the formation of the Majlis and its decision on the hostages, make propaganda claims, speak or instigate on the issue" (Sick, 1985: 276). Interpreting this as essentially meeting the demands in his ultimatum, Carter decided to forgo sanctions for the moment. Powell then released a statement which characterized Bani-Sadr's statement as a positive step and acknowledged the Iranian government's position that the hostage issue would be resolved once the Majlis convened. Shortly thereafter, Carter invited television cameras into the Oval Office to explain the US ultimatum, the significance of Bani-Sadr's announcement and the logic of his decision to defer additional measures against Iran if Bani-Sadr was successful in fulfilling

his commitment to transfer the hostages (Sick, 1985: 276-278; Carter, 1983: 503-504; JCLD 6 and 7).

After some vacillation, both Bani-Sadr and Ghotbzadeh stated that the US response satisfied their demands and launched a new round of efforts to implement the transfer. For several days, it looked like they might succeed. On 4 April, with no imminent transfer in sight, another message was sent to Bani-Sadr to reinforce the administration's position that unless there was significant movement on the Iranian side, the US would have "little alternative to taking decisive steps in the very near future and pressing other governments to take similar steps" (Sick, 1985: 288). The efforts of Bani-Sadr and Ghotbzadeh led to a crucial vote in the Revolutionary Council on a resolution to take custody of the hostages. When the resolution passed by a margin of 8 to 3, Bani-Sadr took the issue to Khomeini on 6 April. After asking whether the recommendation of the Revolutionary Council was unanimous and being told that it was not, Khomeini refused to approve a transfer, once again closing the door abruptly on the efforts of Bani-Sadr and Ghotbzadeh to take action to lower the profile of the hostage issue (Saunders, 1985: 135; Sick, 1985: 278; Carter, 1983: 504-505).¹⁰ On April 7, the morning after Khomeini's veto of the transfer, Carter convened a meeting of the NSC to discuss further action.

The period between the 22 March and 7 April NSC meetings was an important one for the JTF as Desert One and Masirah were incorporated into the rescue plan, intelligence gathering efforts were accelerated and other adjustments and preparations made. As scheduled, another major rehearsal took place in Arizona on 25-27 March. Although this exercise generally went well, it was still based on the Egypt-Nain scenario since the reconnaissance flight had not yet been flown and the use of Masirah as a staging base had not yet been approved (Kyle, 1990: 161).¹¹ Shortly after this exercise was completed, things moved very rapidly and the final adjustments to the plan were made.

The reconnaissance flight to Desert One took place on 31 March. That evening, a small twin-engine aircraft (Twin Otter) carrying two CIA agents and a member of the JTF took off from Oman, penetrated Iranian airspace, landed safely at Desert One and remained there for a little over an hour. After the reconnaissance party had checked out the surface conditions at the site, had planted some landing lights that could be remotely activated and had taken soil samples and photographs, the aircraft returned to Oman, still under cover of darkness and without being

detected. While on the ground, five vehicles passed by on the nearby road, but the CIA aircraft was not seen. The member of the JTF and the data were flown back to Washington immediately. Within days, the data was analyzed, the suitability of Desert One as a staging area was confirmed and the decision to shift the refuelling stop from Nain to Desert One was taken by Jones. Another rehearsal of the first night based on the Desert One scenario was scheduled for a desert area in California on 12 April. The plan was also adjusted to include a roadblock team at Desert One to stop any vehicle traffic that arrived during the operation and to hold the people in these vehicles until the operation was completed on the second night (Turner, 1991: 103-105; Kyle, 1990: 172-174; Beckwith, 1983: 247; NSAD 102).¹²

The breakthrough on the Masirah issue came at about the same time. On 2 April, the JTF was finally given permission for the first time to plan C-130 operations out of Masirah. Negotiations with the Omanis about the use of military facilities in Oman by the US military had been under way for quite some time. From the evidence available, it is clear that the process of concluding an agreement was accelerated by the combination of the JTF once again pressing the issue in mid-March and the quantum rise in interest in the rescue option following the collapse of the Bourguet-Villalon scenario. The case for using Oman was probably made to the president at the 22 March briefing since the government of Oman would not be informed about the operation in advance and only the president could approve the use of Oman under such circumstances. Given the way that the agreement was concluded so quickly thereafter, it is likely that the negotiations had already reached the stage where the terms of an agreement were within the grasp of the State Department. In any case, on 2 April, Jones felt confident enough about how far things had progressed to allow the JTF to integrate the use of Masirah into the rescue plan, which meant that the distances flown by the C-130s on night one would be much shorter. Shortly thereafter, on 9 April, a formal agreement was signed with Oman which gave the US access to the facilities at Masirah. For those who had been working for five months on the development of the rescue plan, this was a major step forward which increased their confidence that it could succeed (Kyle, 1991: 171-172; Sick, 1983: 74-75; Newsom, Kyle, Odom and Pustay interviews).¹³

Intelligence efforts were also increased during this period. Through the efforts of the CIA, the number of buildings in the embassy compound where the hostages might be located was narrowed down to four and

the precise locations of the guards and their patterns of behaviour were determined. Everything looked ready and plans were made to send an advance party into Tehran a few days before the rescue force arrived to do a final check on the hideouts, the warehouse where the vehicles were being stored, the vehicles, the routes around and into the city and the situation at the embassy and Foreign Ministry building where the hostages were being held (Kyle, 1991: 169; Turner, 1990: 114; Beckwith, 1983: 238-240).

A number of other adjustments and preparations were made. Heavy C-141 transport aircraft were integrated into the rescue force for the first time during the rehearsal on 25-27 March. Following the rehearsal, Jones met with JTF commanders once they returned to Fort Bragg and asked Vaught to return to Washington as soon as possible to brief the Joint Chiefs. Shortly thereafter, Vaught sent Kyle to Langley to bring Gast up to date on the latest developments and the command structure for the mission, including the appointment of Gast as Deputy Commander of the JTF and Kyle as the on-scene commander at Desert One, was finalized. Other preparations during this period included sending one of the senior helicopter pilots to the Nimitz to check on the readiness of the helicopters and moving some equipment forward to Egypt. Although the situation had improved with the mission readiness rates of the eight helicopters improving, the Navy was still encountering some problems in its efforts to supply a sufficient quantity of spare parts to the Nimitz to keep all of the helicopters flying and the average duration of the missions being flown was only about half the duration that the JTF wanted. Vaught therefore sent another strong signal to the Navy to ensure that all of the helicopters were kept fully mission ready and the JTF instructed the Navy crews to fly these helicopters on longer flight profiles. Beginning in the last week of March, the JTF began to move some equipment that would not attract too much attention, such as rations, ground support equipment and ammunition, forward to Egypt (Kyle, 1991: 160-177; Beckwith, 1983: 248-249).

The 6 April decision by Khomeini not to allow the transfer of the hostages to go ahead marked a decisive turning point for the administration as it rapidly turned its attention back to the search for ways to increase the costs to Iran of holding the hostages and to more serious consideration of military options. There was now a pervasive feeling among almost all of the senior decision makers, with the notable exception of Vance, that the negotiating track had run its full course and

that the hostages were not going to be released through the efforts of the elected leadership in Iran.

At an NSC meeting called on 7 April to deal with the issue, Carter announced that he was "totally exasperated" and that he wanted to proceed without delay to implement the entire list of possible new sanctions that had been developed by the State Department: the break of diplomatic relations and the expulsion of all Iranian diplomatic, consular and military personnel from the US; a ban on all exports to Iran, with the exception of food and medicine; a formal inventory of Iran's frozen assets in the US and of the claims by US citizens against Iran; and the immediate invalidation of visas for entry into the US held by citizens of Iran, except in cases where compelling humanitarian circumstances or the US national interest dictated otherwise. These actions were announced immediately following the meeting but, as Saunders points out, they were "designed more to satisfy Americans that we were getting tougher than to influence decisions in Iran" (Saunders, 1985: 140-141). Most of the unilateral options available had been taken during the early days of the crisis and these measures were essentially the only ones left. Since the cooperation of US allies was essential if the level of pressure on Iran was to be increased, the State Department immediately began another intense effort to persuade allies of the US, particularly members of the European Community and Japan, to take similar actions, but it was clear that any agreement in this area, if one were even possible, would take another full round of diplomacy since the allies were obviously reluctant in the absence of a UN-approved regime of sanctions. At the meeting, the possibilities of mining Iranian harbours and implementing a naval blockade were again discussed, but there was little enthusiasm for either of these military options (Vance, 1983: 407-408; Sick, 1985: 288-289; Carter, 1985: 505; Turner, 1991: 107; Brzezinski, 1983: 491).

The rescue option was also discussed at the 7 April meeting, with the president indicating that he was still not ready to consider launching a rescue operation because it would almost certainly result in the death of some of the hostages. Jones informed the president that, in light of the successful reconnaissance flight, the rescue plan had been adjusted to include Desert One as the staging base for the first night of the operation, thus obviating the need for the seizure of the airfield at Nain. This change, he indicated, had increased the confidence of the Joint Chiefs that the rescue mission could succeed. During the meeting, the other members of the military planning group who were present,

Brzezinski, Brown and Turner, all spoke in support of the rescue option. Mondale spoke in favour of it as well, but Christopher, speaking for Vance, opposed any military action at this stage. The meeting ended without any indication that Carter would change his thinking about the rescue option, although he did make it clear that he thought "it had been a mistake for him not to have acted more assertively sooner" and "the time had come to bring things to a head." At this point, he considered it essential to either persuade other countries to join the US in implementing an effective regime of economic sanctions or to take more direct unilateral action (Turner, 1991: 105-106; Brzezinski, 1983: 491; Jones interview).

The next few days were critical ones in which the thinking of most of the senior foreign policy decision makers increasingly focused on the rescue option. Having already spoken in favour of the rescue option at the 7 April meeting of the NSC, Brown, Jones and Turner continued to supervise and infuse high-level energy into the planning effort. Brown had personally reached the conclusion that neither a naval blockade nor the mining of Iranian harbours would help bring the hostages out of Tehran alive and he was extremely wary of other punitive military actions because of their geopolitical consequences. For him, a rescue operation represented the only feasible military option. Having reached essentially the same conclusion, Jones held "a flurry of meetings" with his key advisers as the JTF's efforts to make final adjustments and preparations intensified (Kyle, 1991: 176; Jordan, 1982: 249; Jones interview). At the CIA, Turner continued to personally supervise every aspect of the effort in support of the operation, including the plan to infiltrate additional agents into Iran for a last-minute check on the situation and on the preparations that had already been made. Now that the plan included the use of Desert One rather than Nain as a staging area, he was convinced that a rescue operation was feasible and now, for the first time, considered it preferable to mining because it would require more time for mining to have an effect on Iran (Turner, 1991: 102-114; Turner interview).

Of the members of the military planning group, Brzezinski remained the most outspoken and enthusiastic about the need for a decision on the rescue issue. As Desert One and Oman were integrated into the plan and the intelligence picture continued to improve with the presence of additional agents in Iran, Brzezinski's confidence in the rescue plan continued to grow (Brzezinski interview). On 8 April, his principal aide

for Iran on the NSC staff, Gary Sick, wrote a memorandum to him entitled "Getting the Hostages Free" which argued the case for the rescue operation as the option which "offered a quick end to the crisis with a minimal loss of life" and which, if successful, "would deprive the ayatollah of his bargaining leverage and would puncture his aura of invincibility" in Iran (Sick, 1985: 290). The next day, Brzezinski instructed Sick to redraft the memorandum as one from him to the president. Brzezinski forwarded the revised memorandum, along with his personal comments, to the president on 10 April.¹⁴ The memorandum argued that the negotiating path had reached an end and that, unless the administration was prepared to accept continuation of the status quo "through the summer or even later," the basic choices left were to escalate the pressure on Iran through the application of military force or to attempt a rescue operation. Arguing that the consequence of the broad application of force "would likely be to drive Iran into the hands of the Soviets" and that the consequences of the status quo would include "the deleterious effects of a protracted stalemate, growing public frustration, and international humiliation of the U.S.," the memorandum concluded with a recommendation that the president "consider seriously reaching a decision on the rescue mission" (Brzezinski, 1983: 492). The policy of restraint, it concluded, "has run out. It is time for us to act. Now" (Sick, 1985: 290).¹⁵

By this time, the exasperation expressed in this written intervention was widely shared throughout the administration. As Sick points out, the decision taken on 1 April to postpone sanctions was an unpopular one, even within the White House. During the early days of April, both within the administration and throughout the country, "There was mounting impatience and anger with a cautious policy of restraint that seemed to produce only failure and repeated humiliation." In one memorandum written to Aaron during this period Sick noted that "The hawks are flying. I had two unsolicited suggestions for a blockade of Iran before breakfast this morning." Although their ideas were ignored by senior decision makers in the State Department, there were a number of foreign service officers with experience in Iran who argued that military pressure was now essential. Even Laingen, Howland and Tomseth, who were being held in the Foreign Ministry in Tehran and were able to maintain telephone contact with the State Department on a fairly regular basis, expressed doubts about the wisdom of continuing the policy of restraint for much longer (Sick, 1985: 280-281).

This pervasive sense of frustration was shared by Jordan, Powell and Mondale. Since he had missed the key NSC meeting of 22 March, Jordan received, at Carter's request, a special briefing from Pustay on the rescue option on 24 March, shortly after his return from Panama. To this point Jordan had been generally aware of the rescue planning effort, but had no knowledge of the details of the actual plan. Although Pustay was careful to point out that there were considerable risks involved with implementing the rescue plan and that the confidence the JCS had in it was still limited, Jordan was immediately convinced that it might work. Having experienced the frustrations of the negotiations in a very personal way and having seen the hostage crisis through a highly political prism from the outset, the idea of a successful rescue operation was an extremely attractive one to him. As he notes in his memoirs, referring to his mood at the time of Pustay's briefing, "I wanted desperately for this Godforsaken crisis to be over and done with." In this context, his immediate reaction to the briefing was to give the rescue option a serious place in his calculations. For Jordan, "here was a way to go in and snatch our people up and have the whole damn thing over! Not to mention what it would do for the President and the nation." By the end of the first week in April, he was increasingly beginning to think of the rescue mission as "the best of a lousy set of options" (Jordan, 1982: 227-249; Pustay interview).

The frustration of Powell with the hostage crisis was also especially high during the early days of April because of the administration's deteriorating relationship with the media. By late March, it was already clear that this relationship was taking another turn for the worse. Nevertheless, Carter's early morning meeting with the press on 1 April, where he announced that the administration would delay consideration of any new sanctions against Iran, was a new watershed in this relationship. As Powell points out, if the attitude of the press was "bad" for the early part of the primary campaign, it turned "terrible" at this point (Powell, 1984: 209; Powell interview). Since the announcement had taken place just before the voting began in the Wisconsin primary and Kansas caucuses, Carter was immediately accused by a number of journalists of trying to manipulate the hostage crisis for his own purposes, beginning an intense round of criticism that the president's actions were politically motivated. Although Powell did not express strong views about the need for a quick solution to the hostage situation, he was more worried during this period than he had been previously about the impact

that this growing criticism was having on the public's image of the administration and thus on Carter's prospects for re-election (Powell, 1984: 209-226; Rozell, 1989: 178-179).

As the one who was filling in for the president during the primary campaign, Mondale's frustration during this period was even more directly rooted in the effect that the crisis was having on the president's ongoing campaign. By late March, despite a strong performance by Mondale, the campaign had run into trouble, particularly following Kennedy's convincing victories in the New York and Connecticut primaries on 25 March. While he publicly defended the president's Rose Garden strategy, Mondale privately argued with him to end "his self-imposed isolation." By the end of the first week in April, more than ever, Mondale became convinced that, "Carter must get out" (Gillon, 1992: 277).¹⁶ Having been brought up to date on the rescue planning at the 22 March meeting, Mondale believed that it represented a way to move decisively beyond the existing predicament. He therefore spoke in favour of a rescue operation at the NSC meeting on 7 April (Brzezinski, 1983: 490; Turner, 1991: 106; Gillon, 1992: 273-280).¹⁷

The exasperation expressed in the memo that Brzezinski passed to the president on 10 April was not, however, shared by Vance or his senior advisers at the State Department. With the collapse of the Bourguet-Villalon scenario, they realized that it was not within the capacity of Bani-Sadr and other secular pragmatists to resolve the hostage crisis. At the same time, they had grave doubts about any fundamental changes to the administration's approach. Vance therefore saw the continued and pursuit of a strategy of negotiations and pressure as the "only realistic course." He also held firm in his beliefs that the risk of actual physical harm to the hostages continued to decrease as time passed and that the hostages would be released once Khomeini concluded that the Iranian revolution had reached the stage where the hostages no longer played such a vital role in promoting his political objectives. For Vance, taken together, the political reality in Iran and the risks to both the hostages and US interests that accompanied any form of military action "dictated that we continue to exercise restraint" (Vance, 1983: 408-409).¹⁸ Vance's basic view was shared by Christopher who, during the discussion of the military options at the 7 April NSC meeting, spoke out in favour of limiting US actions to diplomatic measures (Turner, 1991: 106). It was also shared by Saunders who recognized that "a feeling pervaded the administration that the patience of the American people was running out and that firm and

decisive steps had to be taken," but personally considered that greater patience was needed rather than a radically different approach (Saunders, 1985: 140).

Since there was virtually no contact at the operational level between those involved in the rescue planning and the State Department, other than Vance and, to a lesser extent, Christopher, virtually nobody at the State Department, including those such as Saunders and Precht who were deeply involved in the hostage crisis, had any knowledge that a feasible rescue plan existed (Saunders, 1985: 142-143; Newsom and Pustay interviews). Moreover, both Vance and Christopher seem to have underestimated the extent and implications of the consensus that was steadily building up in favour of a rescue operation. The briefing at Camp David on 22 March brought Vance up to date on the development of the rescue option to that point, but he left that meeting believing that the possibility of using military force against Iran was still not on the near-term decision-making agenda and therefore turned his attention elsewhere (Vance, 1983: 409; Vance interview). Over the course of the next two weeks, as the essentially compartmentalized decision-making process continued, he remained largely unaware of the momentum that was building up in favour of the rescue option. During this key period, he focused his personal energies on the transfer issue and, when that initiative failed, shifted his focus onto the issue of defining and implementing new sanctions against Iran. At the NSC meeting on 7 April, he even left Christopher to participate in the discussion on military options after the decisions on new sanctions had been made. In the immediate aftermath of those decisions, he met with the ambassadors of over 20 countries to explain the US position and to seek their support for an effective regime of international sanctions (Turner, 1991: 106; Carter, 1983: 505; Sick, 1985: 288-289).

When he left for a long weekend of rest in Florida after work on 10 April, Vance did not suspect that a decision on the rescue option was imminent. Indeed, had he done so, he would not have left when he did (Vance interview). Although Christopher participated in the discussion of military options on 7 April, where Brown and Turner as well as Brzezinski had spoken in favour of the rescue option, he did not have the benefit of the 22 March briefing and was apparently not fully aware of the extent to which the rescue option had been developed. In any case, at the NSC meeting on 7 April, there was no indication that Carter was about to decide to launch a rescue operation and Vance left Washington for Florida

the same day that Brzezinski was forwarding his "Getting the Hostages Free" memorandum to the president (Turner, 1991: 106; 142-143; Newsom and Turner interviews).

The period between 22 March and 11 April was one of disappointment and mounting frustration and for the president. At the beginning of this period, he was clearly exasperated and pessimistic about the prospects for further negotiations but, as his mood at the 22 March meeting of the NSC at Camp David revealed, he was determined to increase the pressure on Iran in a systematic but peaceful way while continuing to avoid any form of military action, including a rescue attempt. His 1 April decision to defer additional sanctions again demonstrated his willingness to pursue any avenue open to him to resolve the crisis without bloodshed. When Khomeini vetoed the transfer on 6 April, however, Carter's approach hardened very rapidly. By the time that he convened the NSC meeting on 7 April, he had concluded that the negotiations track was completely exhausted and again wanted to take a hard look at all alternative ways to address the problem. His first priority was to proceed immediately with whatever diplomatic and economic steps the US could take unilaterally to increase the pressure on Iran and to persuade other countries to take similar steps, but he also wanted to take a fresh look at the military options.

Meanwhile, the political pressures on the president were increasing. His approval rating continued to decline, reaching 39% at the end of March, the lowest it had been since the early days of the crisis (Edwards, 1990: 75-86). Carter thus faced a political reality that included an eroding base of public support, growing criticism in the media that his way of handling the hostage crisis was motivated by purely political calculations and a reelection campaign that had lost some of its momentum as a result of Kennedy's convincing victories in New York and Connecticut on 25 March. Although the president scored resounding victories of his own in the Wisconsin primary and Kansas caucuses on 1 April, these successes were marred by accusations in the media and by political opponents that the president's press conference that morning had been a desperate attempt to manipulate the situation to his advantage in order to influence voters in these two states. Carter's frustration at the administration's inability to find a way to bring the hostages back home safely was thus fuelled by the way that the crisis was beginning to have a negative impact on his chances for reelection, undoubtedly reinforcing his determination to find a way out of this crisis as soon as possible.

Over the four-day period that followed the 7 April meeting of the NSC, the president's determination to do something more decisive continued to mount. At the 7 April meeting, he was clearly frustrated and impatient and indicated that "the time had come to bring things to a head" (Brzezinski, 1983: 491), but he gave no obvious indication that he was nearing the point where he might make a decision to launch a rescue operation. On the contrary, his visceral aversion to the idea of using any form of military force was still evident and he opened the discussion on military options by stating that he was not yet ready to consider a rescue operation. As Turner notes in his account of this meeting, "He was obviously facing a decision he did not want to make" (Turner, 1991: 105-106). By the morning of 11 April, however, his mood was far more militant; making a decision on the rescue option had risen to the top of his list of priorities (Brzezinski interview).

The most obvious factor that contributed to the rapid shift in the president's thinking about the rescue option during the period of 7-11 April was that he had concluded that continuation of the current strategy of negotiations and pressure could not bring the hostages home for at least several months. He was now convinced that further negotiations with Bani-Sadr and Ghotbzadeh would be pointless and realized that, on its own, the US had no real leverage which it could use to place additional economic pressures on Iran without resorting to mining or a blockade. The measures implemented on 7 April would not accomplish much and there were few others that could be implemented unilaterally. Moreover, other countries, including Japan and key allies in Europe, were still reluctant to join the US in collective action (Vance, 1983: 407). In short, at this juncture, the only options immediately available which would allow him to take decisive action were military ones. For an issue-oriented, problem solving president who had taken on the hostage issue as his top priority and who saw himself as the trustee of both the national interest and the fate of the hostages, it was natural that he would look seriously at other possible solutions at this point; and Brzezinski, supported by the other members of the military planning group, were now telling him that the rescue operation was a possible solution.

Another factor was that the president was becoming even more concerned about the risk of physical harm to the hostages. Since the beginning of the crisis, he had considered the actions of both Khomeini and the students holding the hostages to be completely irrational. During the previous five months, he had never wavered from the view that he was

dealing with "a crazy man" who was "acting insanely" and a group of "Iranian fanatics" inspired by him (Carter, 1982: 458-459). At the same time, despite their own obvious anti-Americanism, Carter had been willing to negotiate patiently with Bani-Sadr and Ghotbzadeh to find a formula for the release of the hostages because he believed that the secular leadership in Iran would act more rationally. With the events of the first week in April, he lost the last vestige of his confidence that secular leaders could have any significant influence over events in Tehran. Having now concluded that there was "no government in Iran other than the fanatics" and that, in effect, he was "dealing with a hostile government" (Carter, 1982: 498), his concern about the safety of the hostages became more acute. The escalating pattern of conflict on university campuses in Iran, the growing violence in the Kurdish areas of northern Iran and increasing tensions along the Iran-Iraq border, the threats by the students to kill the hostages if Iraq invaded Iran (an obvious possibility given the growing tensions along the Iraq-Iran border) and renewed calls from militant clerics to place the hostages on trial in retaliation for the shah's move to Egypt added to the president's sense of uncertainty about what might happen and frustration about not being able to guarantee the safety of the hostages (Carter, 1982: 501-506; NSAD 31, 32, 39 and 121).¹⁹

The memorandum which Brzezinski sent to the president on 10 April obviously helped to focus the president's thoughts. By the following morning, Carter had clearly accepted Brzezinski's recommendation that it was time to make a decision on the rescue option. Following the regular foreign policy breakfast, during which the problems with the mining and naval blockade options were again discussed, he instructed Brzezinski to convene a meeting of the NSC.²⁰ As his mind focused on how he should handle the NSC meeting, he discussed with Powell whether, as press secretary, it might be better for him to miss the meeting so that, if a rescue operation were conducted, he could honestly claim that he had not misled the press because he had no prior knowledge. As Powell notes in his account of this discussion, it was obvious from his voice and expression at this point that a rescue operation "had now become a serious option" for the president (Powell, 1984: 226-227; Brzezinski, 1983: 492; Carter, 1982: 506; Sick, 1985: 292; Powell interview).

The 11 April NSC meeting, which was attended by Carter, Mondale, Christopher (substituting for Vance), Brown, Turner, Jones, Powell and Jordan, was an extremely crucial step in the decision-making process. It

began late in the morning and lasted about two hours. The president opened the meeting by stating that, in his judgment, the likelihood that the hostages would be released in the near future was remote, indicating his growing impatience at the reluctance of allies to join the US in bringing greater pressure to bear on the government of Iran and reemphasizing his concern that both the safety of the hostages and the national honour of the US were at stake. He made it clear from the outset that he was in a more militant mood. It was, he said, "time for us to bring the hostages home." Following his opening remarks, he asked for each of those present to express their views on what action should be taken (Carter, 1982: 506; Turner, 1991: 107; Brzezinski, 1983: 492; Turner interview).

Unlike the others present, Christopher had not been fully briefed on the details of the rescue plan. Nevertheless, he opened the discussion by arguing that several important non-military options still remained and proposed several specific additional steps that might be taken while efforts continued to get allies to join the US in imposing sanctions. His list included such things as taking the issue back to the Security Council, blacklisting Iranian ships and aircraft and working towards an international telecommunications embargo (Vance, 1983: 409; Brzezinski, 1983: 492).²¹

Brown immediately dismissed these actions as "not impressive" and, after once again reviewing the other military options, spoke in favour of a rescue attempt. Mondale did the same, arguing that the rescue operation offered "the best way out of a situation which was becoming intolerably humiliating." After indicating his continued support for the rescue operation, Brzezinski pointed out that the decreasing hours of darkness meant that the operation should take place as soon as possible. He also added that he believed consideration should be given to including two other elements in the overall plan: authorization for the rescue force to bring back some Iranian prisoners in order to have some bargaining leverage should other American hostages be seized in Iran and a contingency plan to conduct an immediate retaliatory strike if the rescue mission failed so that the US action would not be seen as complete failure (Brzezinski, 1983: 492-493; Brzezinski interview).

The president also asked to hear the personal views of Jones and Turner about whether a rescue mission should be launched and they both clearly indicated that they thought the time had come to attempt it (Turner and Jones interviews). Jones indicated that, from a military

perspective, the operation was feasible and had the backing of the other Joint Chiefs (NSAD 116). He also gave a full update on the rescue plan, which now included the use of Oman and Desert One as staging bases, and indicated that, with the necessary lead times for deployments, the earliest date to launch the rescue operation was now 24 April, which gave about a week of flexibility before the rapidly decreasing hours of darkness would rule out implementation of the current plan for another six months. Turner then gave an intelligence update which confirmed that conditions in Iran were still favourable for the rescue plan to succeed. Turner also reported on the growing tensions along the Iraq-Iran border which the CIA now feared might soon divert the attention of the Iranian government from the hostage issue (Turner, 1991: 107). Although their comments at the meeting were limited, Jordan and Powell also added their endorsement to the emerging consensus that the rescue option was now the best course of action open to the administration (Powell, 1984: 227; Sick, 1985: 292).²²

After hearing the views of everyone present and listening to the briefings of Jones and Turner, the president spoke at length. He was convinced that strong action was essential. He was also concerned about the safety of the hostages, especially in light of the recent threats made by the students at the embassy. Moreover, he was becoming increasingly worried about the damage that the stalemate was having on the reputation of the US. Indeed, he felt that the US "had been disgraced" by its inability to solve the hostage problem and was particularly affected by recent conversations with the Sadats who felt that the US approach was far too passive. The rescue mission, he concluded, "ought to go ahead without delay" (Brzezinski, 1983: 492-493; Turner, 1991: 107).²³

Despite the president's clear indication at the meeting that he was ready to launch the rescue operation, some of those closest to him still sensed some uncertainty in his mind. Thus, while Turner ends his account of the meeting by asserting that "Jimmy Carter had just crossed his Rubicon" and Brzezinski ends his with the statement "the die was cast" (Turner, 1991: 107; Brzezinski, 1983: 493), Jordan and Powell were less sure that the matter was completely settled. In their accounts they do not interpret the president's closing statements at the 11 April meeting as indicating that his mind was completely made up. Rather, they both sensed that, while the president clearly favoured the rescue option at this point, his decision was still a tentative one (Jordan, 1982: 250-251; Powell, 1985: 227-228; Powell interview). Whatever the precise degree of

certitude in his mind at this particular moment, given that the date set for the operation was nearly two weeks away, there was obviously time for the president to reverse his decision as a result of significant developments or simply as a result of a change of heart. That said, the 11 April meeting set the administration on a course towards implementation of the rescue option and, as such, was the most significant single moment in the decision-making process. With the exception of Christopher, it demonstrated that there was a solid consensus in favour of implementing the rescue plan and, for the first time, this consensus included the president.

The president still had to deal with the opposition of Vance. When Vance returned from Florida late on Monday, 14 April and was told about the decision, he was "stunned and angry" that such a "momentous decision" had been taken in his absence. On the morning of 15 April, he went to see the president and forcefully argued the case against the rescue operation. Carter offered him an opportunity, which Vance quickly accepted, to present his views later that day at a meeting of the NSC (Vance, 1983: 409). Vance also spoke privately with Mondale since he considered that the vice president had "both the position and the judgment to say this is a case with too many risks" (Gillon, 1992: 280).²⁴

The president opened the NSC meeting on the afternoon of 15 April by pointing out that Vance disagreed with the consensus that had been reached at the previous meeting and asking Vance to present the case for not proceeding with the mission. Speaking from notes which he had carefully prepared following his meeting with the president that morning, Vance explained the reasons for his opposition: he believed that the administration would eventually get a return on the investment it had made in the negotiating process; progress was being made in gaining the support of key allies for an effective sanctions regime, with a meeting of scheduled for the following week, and they would perceive a rescue operation at this point as a betrayal of trust; a new date had been set for the run-off elections for the Majlis, which Khomeini said would decide the fate of the hostages; there was no immediate danger to the hostages; even if the rescue operation were successful, it would almost certainly result in heavy casualties, including the deaths of some of the hostages and members of the rescue force as well as many Iranians; the Iranians could respond by simply seizing other Americans in Iran; and the use of any type of military force was inconsistent with the longer-term interests of the US because it could inflame anti-American passions in the entire

region and push Iran into the arms of the Soviet Union. It was, as Turner points out in his memoirs, "a calm, powerful argument" (Turner, 1991: 109). Nevertheless, the consensus held. Nobody supported Vance in his opposition to the rescue operation and, once again, the president indicated that he was ready to proceed (Carter, 1982: 507; Vance, 1983: 409-410; Sick, 1985: 292-293; Brzezinski, 1983: 494; Turner, 1991: 108-109; Jordan, 1982: 252-253; Vance and Newsom interviews).²⁵

On Brzezinski's initiative, the remainder of the meeting, which lasted for over two hours, was devoted to further discussion of two issues that he had raised at the previous meeting: whether the rescue force should bring back Iranian prisoners and whether punitive action should be taken if the rescue operation failed. There was very little support for the idea of bringing back what, in essence, would be hostages and the president rejected this proposal, although he did authorize the rescue force to hold Iranians while it was in Iran, if this was necessary to accomplish the mission.²⁶ There was greater support for the idea of conducting some sort of concurrent punitive strike if the rescue attempt failed. After the discussion, the president reaffirmed his desire to limit casualties on both sides and approved only contingency planning for such a strike, indicating that he would make a final decision on this issue closer to the date of the rescue operation (Brzezinski, 1983: 494-495; Turner, 1991: 109).

On April 11, while the key meeting of the NSC was taking place, the JTF conducted a final session of the "murder board" at Fort Bragg. The session was chaired by Gast, who Vaught had placed in charge of the murder board in March, so this review process was still not an independent one. The purpose of the meeting, which involved all of the senior commanders as well as key support staff and planners, was to examine every aspect of the plan with a view to exposing any remaining weaknesses and preparing for every possible contingency. Although the risks involved with an operation of this nature were highlighted and some final adjustments were made as a result of this process, those who participated in these discussions retained their belief that the rescue plan that had been developed over the previous five months was fundamentally sound, especially now that the use of Masirah and Desert One had been approved. Moreover, their confidence that the JTF was now ready to implement the plan produced "an air of intense excitement" in the room. The following night, at a desert location in California, an exercise focused on the Desert One refuelling operation was conducted. Although the short notice between the decision

to use Desert One and the exercise date prohibited a full-scale rehearsal of the complete Desert One scenario, the exercise demonstrated, to the satisfaction Vaught and his senior commanders, the ability of the tanker and helicopter crews to perform refuelling operations on the desert floor (Kyle, 1990: 176-191).²⁷

Given that it was absolutely essential to preserve the secrecy of the mission, the tentative decision taken by the president at the 11 April NSC meeting to go ahead with the rescue operation was very closely held. With the probable exception of Vaught, no one on the JTF knew what had taken place. The first indication that Vaught's senior commanders had that there had been further movement was on 13 April, immediately following the exercise in California, when Vaught instructed them to start deploying to the forward staging bases to be in position to launch the operation on the night of 24 April.²⁸ The deployments began with the first KC-135 tanker aircraft moving from England to Wadi Kena, Egypt on 14 April. The pace of these deployments was fairly constant over the following ten-day period, with 34 special mission aircraft and 20 support aircraft in place at five key staging points in the Middle East by 24 April (Kyle, 1990: 195-205).²⁹

Following the NSC meeting of 15 April, Brown and Jones organized a detailed mission briefing for the president for the evening of 16 April. The briefing consisted of an overview presentation on the entire rescue plan by Vaught and more detailed presentations by Gast and Beckwith on air operations and the assault phase. On the afternoon of 16 April, in preparation for the meeting with the president, Vaught, Gast and Beckwith gave a thorough briefing to the Joint Chiefs who had not been involved in the rescue planning and, to this point, had not themselves been briefed on the final details of the plan. The Joint Chiefs agreed that the JTF had developed a "sound achievable plan." In addition to Vaught, Gast and Beckwith from the JTF, the meeting with the president that evening was attended by Mondale, Jordan, Powell, Brzezinski, Brown, Jones and Vance (Beckwith, 1983: 1-10; Jordan, 1982: 254; NSAD 120).³⁰

The meeting lasted for well over two hours. Following each of the presentations there was a full discussion during which many tough and very specific questions were directed to the briefers. In response to questions by the president, Vaught described the two aspects of the mission which he considered the most critical: getting the rescue force into Iran undetected and keeping enough helicopters in operation to accomplish the mission. In response to other questions, Beckwith pointed

out that the first priority of the assault force would be to kill all of the armed guards. He also stated that, while the rescue force could not afford to be distracted by any targets of opportunity that were not essential to the success of the rescue mission, deadly force would have to be used on any Iranians who tried to interfere with the assault or escape the embassy compound. Vaught and Beckwith both highlighted their expectation that, while it was impossible to provide an accurate estimate of numbers, there would almost certainly be some American casualties, including some of the hostages.³¹ While emphasizing his desire to limit bloodshed on both sides, the president indicated that he accepted the logic of the assault plan. He asked only that, unless it would result in the loss of other American lives, the rescue force not leave behind any American bodies. At the end of the meeting, he told the military leaders present that he had complete confidence in them and stressed he would accept full responsibility if the mission failed. He also said he intended to leave all operational decisions to the military commanders once the operation began. He said he would monitor developments through the chain of command (from Vaught to Jones, and then through Brown to the president) and would be available for any decisions they wished to refer to him, but would not interfere in operational decisions (Carter, 1982: 507; Beckwith, 1983: 1-10; Jordan, 1982: 255-264; Turner, 1991: 110-114; Brzezinski, 1983: 495; Jones interview; NSAD 120).

The meeting raised the president's comfort level about the rescue plan. Although there are some differences in accounts of those present with respect to what the president actually said, it is clear that, unless there was a dramatic change of circumstances, he was committed at this point to the implementation of the rescue plan.³² In his own account of the period immediately following the 16 April briefing he states that, having "received satisfactory answers to all of my many questions," he left the meeting "clear in my resolve" and even "looked forward to the mission." With the implementation day still over a week away, he "continued to monitor the attitude of the Iranians in the hope that there might still be some possibility of an early release of the hostages," but he did not expect any sudden developments and therefore assumed that the rescue attempt would now proceed (Carter, 1982: 507-511).

The military planning group met daily during the next week to monitor final preparations, the forward deployment of the rescue force and the situation in Iran and to ensure that the secrecy of the mission was preserved. In order to maximize the chances that the JTF would have the

required number of helicopters for each phase of the operation, the group supervised an intense effort to ensure that all eight helicopters would be available for launch (Brzezinski, 1983: 495; NSAD 101 and 102; Pustay interview).³³ The complex deployment plan, which had been carefully designed to take into account the surveillance and intelligence capabilities of the Soviet Union, was implemented effectively and without compromising the mission. The CIA increased its surveillance of the embassy and four special forces personnel, including two from Delta Force, slipped into Iran to do final checks on the routings to be used on the second night, on the preparations that had been made at the hideout and the warehouse and on the security situation at the two locations where the hostages were being held. Meanwhile, a close intelligence watch was kept on both the Soviet Union and Iran for any signs that the mission might be uncovered.³⁴ As the execution date for the operation drew closer, there were no indications that either the Soviet Union or Iran suspected that a rescue attempt was imminent; both the CIA agents and the special forces personnel in Iran reported that conditions in the city looked extremely favourable for the operation; and probable locations at the embassy where the hostages were being held were narrowed down to just two: the chancery and the ambassador's residence (Turner, 1991: 115-118; Kyle: 1990: 205-234; Carter, 1982: 513; Beckwith, 1983: 258-266; Martin, 1982).³⁵

The president continued to monitor the situation very closely and was fully engaged in the efforts to protect the secrecy of the mission. In order to minimize the risks of leaks, he decided, after consultation with Mondale, Vance and others, not to notify key congressional leaders until after the operation had reached its final stages and not to inform the leaders of Oman, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, whose airfields and airspace would be used during the operation, until after the entire operation had been completed so that they could truthfully deny that they had any prior knowledge of the mission. When British officials began to speculate about the possible reasons why the US had moved aircraft into Masirah, the president dispatched Warren Christopher to London to brief Prime Minister Thatcher and Foreign Minister Carrington on the imminent rescue operation, in order to solicit their assistance in handling the situation in a way that did not compromise the mission (Carter, 1982: 510-513; Turner, 1991: 116-118; Odom interview).³⁶

Partly as a final check on the attitude of the Iranian government towards further negotiations and partly to diffuse any suspicions the Iranians might have that a military operation was imminent, the president

approved Jordan's request to meet with Ghotbzadeh again. Following the meeting, which took place in Paris on 18 April, Jordan reported his impression, based on a frank exchange with Ghotbzadeh, that there was "absolutely no chance the hostages will be released for two and a half months, and an even greater chance that it will drag on five or six months" (Carter, 1982: 512). Despite this pessimistic prognosis, Jordan took care during the meeting to show continued interest in the negotiating process and to avoid giving any impression that the US was contemplating military action. In response to Ghotbzadeh's concern that the US might launch an attack or mine Iranian harbours, for example, Jordan replied simply that "President Carter is not a militaristic man" (Jordan, 1982: 265-267). Moreover, having convinced Ghotbzadeh that the administration was willing to keep negotiating as long as the president remained convinced that the Majlis would resolve the hostage issue expeditiously following the run-off elections, he got Ghotbzadeh to agree to expel members of the American media from Iran as a way of lowering the temperature of the American public until serious negotiations could once again begin (Turner, 1991: 108).³⁷

Carter received Jordan's report on this meeting following his return to Washington on 19 April. That same day, the administration received a message from Laingen, which had been passed through the Swiss Ambassador in Tehran, recommending stronger action against Iran. As Carter notes in his memoirs, the combination of Jordan's report and Laingen's message "confirmed my resolve to proceed with the rescue." That same day, he called Brown on his secure phone to tell him that any lingering doubts that he might have had about the wisdom of conducting a rescue operation had now been removed and that the JTF should now implement the plan. With this call to Brown, the president was, in essence, giving his final authorization to implement on the rescue plan. From this point on, it would have taken either compromise of the plan or an enormous reversal of circumstances to get the president to reconsider the wisdom of launching the rescue mission. The decision had been made (Carter, 1982: 512; Jordan, 1982: 267).

Despite the growing resolve of the president during this period to implement the rescue option, the State Department continued its efforts to find new ways to apply pressure on Iran and to get other countries to join the US in applying sanctions. On 17 April, financial transfers to Iran not specifically authorized by the Treasury Department were prohibited, all imports from Iran were banned, military equipment that had been

purchased previously by Iran but was still in the US was placed on the market and travel to Iran was banned except for journalists and those who had been authorized by the State Department and Treasury. While, as Saunders notes in his account of this action, "these steps seemed more a tidying of the books than significant new applications of pressure," they did help to sustain the impression that, despite the recent breakdown in the negotiations, the administration would continue to pursue its strategy of negotiations and pressure, albeit with a shift to greater emphasis on pressure, to resolve the hostage crisis. The State Department's efforts throughout this period to persuade other countries to apply sanctions against Iran also reinforced this impression, especially since these efforts picked up momentum during this period. On 22 April, a group of key European and Asian allies of the US agreed to implement sanctions against Iran on 17 May unless "decisive progress" was made towards resolving the crisis by then (Saunders, 1985: 140-142; Vance, 1983: 407-408; NSAD 121). Although this development was one which the administration had been seeking for quite some time, it did not change the reality that no further progress could be made until the Majlis was in place and ready to deal with the hostage issue. The agreement therefore did not represent the kind of breakthrough that might have resulted in the president reconsidering his decision to attempt the rescue.

Meanwhile, right up until the rescue mission was launched, senior decision makers made a focused and successful effort to sustain an appearance of normalcy and to avoid sending any signals that might indicate that military action was imminent. During the week prior to 24 April, they all carried on with their normal schedules and the main focus of the military planning group, which continued to meet daily, was to ensure that the secrecy of the operation was not compromised (Turner, 1991: 115-118; Brzezinski, 1983: 495-496). As part of the overall deception effort, Powell made several carefully-designed interventions with members of the media in order to allay any suspicions they might have that military action would soon be taken against Iran.³⁸ At the same time, in order to ensure that curious members of the White House did not become the source of information which might arouse suspicions, Jordan used a staff meeting to stress that no military action was being planned (Powell, 1984: 228-232; Jordan, 267-268). Even Vance, who continued to oppose the mission and, as a result, submitted his letter of resignation on 21 April, took great care to protect the secrecy of the rescue operation as the

preparations and forward deployments went ahead in the days leading up to the implementation date (Vance interview).³⁹

During the week following the 15 April NSC meeting, the president had to deal with Vance's disaffection and resignation. For Vance, these were days of "deep personal anguish" (Vance, 1983: 410) during which he continued to press the case that the decision should be reconsidered (Gillon, 1992: 280; Turner, 1991: 116; Jordan, 1982: 264). Faced with a consensus that was obviously continuing to hold and feeling strongly that a rescue operation was not in the best interests of either the country or the hostages, he concluded that he would eventually have to explain his position publicly and therefore had no choice but to resign. On 17 April, he told Carter that he would resign if the operation went forward and on 21 April he met with the president and submitted his letter of resignation, making it clear that his resignation would stand regardless of the outcome of the operation. In order to preserve the secrecy of the mission, at the president's request, he agreed not to make his resignation public until after the operation was completed (Vance, 1983: 410-411; Vance interview; JCLD 13 and JCLD 14).⁴⁰

Neither Vance's continued opposition nor the first tangible progress in gaining the support of key allies for international sanctions against Iran weakened the resolve of the president or the consensus behind his decision. During the final few days before the rescue mission, his focus was no longer on the question of whether the rescue operation should be launched; it was on questions relating to the implementation of it. On 23 April, he received a final intelligence report from Turner who indicated that the intelligence community had concluded that conditions in Tehran were still good for the rescue attempt and that it would be at least six months before it would be possible to negotiate the release of the hostages. The president's two main concerns at this point were to preserve the secrecy of the mission and to ensure that there would be no wanton bloodshed. In light of his concern about secrecy, following a discussion on the status of the operation with Mondale, Brzezinski and Turner on 23 April, the president decided to maintain his normal schedule up to the point when the actual assault on the embassy was under way.⁴¹ On the issue of unnecessary bloodshed, he put pressure on Jones to give this matter his personal attention and, the day before the mission, decided not to allow the "concurrent attacks on other targets" that Brzezinski had pressed for in order to keep the mission as simple as possible and to avoid raising tensions unnecessarily (Carter, 1982: 513;

Turner, 1991: 117-119; Brzezinski, 1983: 496; Pustay interview). The die was now cast. The rescue operation would go ahead, but the action would be strictly limited to the attempt to bring the 53 hostages safely out of Tehran. There would be no broader action designed to either punish Iran or to create a broader context should the attempt fail. If the operation succeeded, the hostages would be brought home in a quick and satisfying way; if it failed, the fallout would not be mitigated and the administration and, indeed, the country would have to deal with the full weight of the failure.

Everything was now set for the actual operation. In terms of political process, the main dynamics of the period were the steady buildup of a consensus for the rescue operation leading up to the 11 April meeting; the crystallization of the rescue decision in the president's mind between 22 March and his call to Brown on 19 April, with the meetings of 11 April and 15 April being the two most important events; and the rapid isolation of Vance, complicated by his absence from the meeting on 11 April. Seen in the context of the themes that have been developed to this point, including the process themes raised in Chapters 3 and 4 as well as the more specific issues related to the hostage crisis raised in Chapters 5 and 6, some key elements of a possible explanation for the president's decision to launch the rescue mission are already apparent. What remains to be done is to pull these elements into a coherent analysis which, drawing on the concepts and process dynamics embodied in the political process model, identifies and assesses the key factors which explain the rescue decision. Before moving to the development of the explanation, however, the remainder of this chapter will conclude the historical account of events by examining the actual operation. As mentioned at the outset, the objective here will be to open up the black box of decision making, primarily at the military-operational level, to examine the way in which the operation unfolded to the point of failure at Desert One in order to highlight issues and themes relevant to an explanation for the failure itself. The explanations for both the decision and the outcome will then be presented in the following chapter.

The Operation: Failure at Desert One

The final rescue plan that was briefed to the president on 16 April was a complex one involving the use of a wide array of US military capabilities. Before the operation could begin, the plan called for the *Nimitz*, with the eight RH-53D helicopters designated and equipped for the

mission on board, to move into the Gulf of Oman and for over 50 special-mission and support aircraft with some role to play in the operation to deploy to Diego Garcia; Masirah, Oman; Wadi Kena, Egypt; and Daharan, Saudi Arabia. During the insertion phase of the operation on the first night, the helicopters, three MC-130 transport aircraft with the assault force on board, three EC-130 aircraft carrying fuel for the helicopters and over 200 personnel would land at Desert One. Following the refuelling operation, the rescue force would board the helicopters and move forward to its hideout sites near Tehran. For the extraction phase on the second night, four MC-130 aircraft, two C-141 heavy transport aircraft, three special-mission AC-130 gunships, fighter aircraft designated to escort the evacuating force out of Iranian airspace and approximately 200 more US military personnel would enter Iran. In addition, other aircraft, such as the KC-135 tankers, and hundreds of other personnel, such as the maintenance crews at the various staging locations, would be directly involved in supporting the operation. Some of these aircraft and personnel, such as those designated to conduct search and rescue operations and those designated to air drop extra fuel to the helicopters if it was needed, would have to enter Iranian airspace under certain circumstances (Kyle, 1990: 178-184 and 202; Beckwith, 1983: 9).⁴²

The insertion phase would begin at dusk on the first night with the lead MC-130 penetrating Iranian airspace at low altitude and at a carefully chosen point between two radars along the Iranian coast. The main tasks of those aboard this aircraft would be to set up the area at Desert One for the refuelling operation and to block the road running through the site so that all vehicle traffic would be intercepted. An hour after this lead aircraft landed at Desert One, the remaining C-130 aircraft (the other two MC-130s carrying the remainder of the rescue force and the three EC-130s carrying fuel for the helicopters), having followed the same flight profile, would arrive in formation. Shortly after landing and unloading, two of the MC-130s would depart, leaving the three EC-130s and one MC-130 on the ground for the arrival of the helicopters. The helicopters, which would depart the *Nimitz* so as to begin their low-level flight into Iran at dusk, would arrive at Desert One 15 minutes after the last EC-130 aircraft landed. Following the refuelling operation, which was expected to take about 40 minutes, the assault troops would board the helicopters which would fly them to a drop-off point about 50 miles southeast of Tehran. The helicopters would then move to another nearby location, where the crews would camouflage them and set up defensive

positions before sunrise. Once the helicopters had departed from Desert One, the remaining C-130s would return to Masirah (Kyle, 1990: 178-181; Beckwith, 1983: 253; NSAD 102).

The assault force would be met on landing at the drop-off site by the members of Delta Force who had slipped into Iran a few days earlier to take a first-hand look at the situation and arrangements that had been made, including the hideouts, the vehicles, the routes into the city and the conditions at the two locations where the hostages were being held. The troops would then travel about five miles by foot to a remote area with abandoned salt mines in the hills near the town of Garmsar, where they would rest and make their final preparations for the assault the following night. Meanwhile, the JTF Headquarters that had been set up in Wadi Kena, Egypt would monitor closely the situation in Iran to determine whether the insertion phase had been detected. If it had been, the entire rescue force could be withdrawn from this point by helicopter (Kyle, 1990: 181; Beckwith, 1983: 5-6; NSAD 103).⁴³

The extraction phase of the operation on the second night would begin with the departure from Wadi Kena of four MC-130 aircraft, which would transport the 100-man Ranger force that would seize and secure the evacuation airfield at Manzariyeh (about 60 miles south of the embassy), and four AC-130 gunships, which would provide close air support to the assault force at the embassy and the Rangers at Manzariyeh and prevent the Iranian F-4 fighter aircraft on alert duty at Mehrabad, an airfield on the outskirts of Tehran, from taking off. These aircraft would transit through Saudi airspace en route to Iran, where they would be refuelled by KC-135 tankers also flying out of Wadi Kena.⁴⁴ Two C-141s, one equipped as a hospital to take care of any wounded personnel, would then time their departure from Daharan so as to arrive at Manzariyeh ten minutes after the airfield was secured by the Rangers. The Rangers would not seize the airfield until the rescue force was in place in Tehran and committed to conducting the assaults (Kyle, 1990: 67-69 and 181-182; Beckwith, 1983: 255-256).

Meanwhile, shortly after sunset, using a Volkswagen bus, one of the members of Delta Force who had infiltrated into Iran a few days earlier would take the driving teams (each consisting of a driver and a translator) to the warehouse on the outskirts of Tehran where they would pick up the six trucks which had been positioned to transport the assault force into the city. At the same time, Beckwith and the other Delta Force agent would conduct a final check on the routes, which had already been

selected and confirmed by the CIA and special forces agents in Iran, and on the conditions in the vicinity of the embassy. Once this had been done, with the additional forces required for the extraction phase of the operation already en route but not yet committed to the assault on Manzariyeh, the two assault teams, one assigned the task of rescuing the 50 hostages at the embassy and the other the task of rescuing the three hostages at the Foreign Ministry, would use separate routes to move into Tehran so as to be in position to conduct their assaults shortly after midnight.⁴⁵ When everything was ready, Beckwith would give the final order for the assaults on the embassy and foreign ministry to begin, clear the Ranger force to seize Manzariyeh, and instruct the AC-130 gunships to take up their assigned positions over the city. He would also call for the helicopters to take up orbits just north of the city until they received instructions to land from the assault force (Kyle, 1990: 182-183; Beckwith, 1983: 253-255; NSAD 100, 103 and 125).

At the embassy, the assault would begin with a small group of Delta Force operators stealthily approaching and killing the students guarding the east wall of the embassy with handguns equipped with silencers. Following closely behind, using ladders, the remainder of the assault force would quickly enter the compound by climbing over the east wall. Shortly thereafter, once it was in position to begin the assault, the rescue force would blow a large hole in the east wall. The explosion, which would create an evacuation route to the soccer stadium across the street, would signal the start of the coordinated attacks within the compound. It was also hoped that this powerful explosion would add to the sense of confusion among Iranians in the immediate vicinity, including those guarding the students. Meanwhile, the two assault teams operating within the compound, each assigned its own area of responsibility, would quickly assault the guard posts and various buildings, kill all armed Iranians and free the hostages. Another smaller team, assisted by an AC-130 gunship if close air support was required, would secure the soccer stadium across the street on the east side of the embassy and the route to it for the hostages.⁴⁶ The helicopters would then land at the stadium, which had a suitable landing area, a defensible perimeter and walls which would provide some protection to the helicopters should a counterattack be launched before the evacuation was complete.⁴⁷ Once the stadium and the route to it were secure, the hostages would be taken to the stadium for evacuation to Manzariyeh, followed closely by the rescue force.⁴⁸ At the same time, in another part of the city, the other assault force would

scale the outside of the Foreign Ministry building, storm the third floor location where the three other hostages were being held, kill any armed Iranians that were encountered and take the hostages to a field nearby where one of the helicopters would pick up the hostages and rescue team and fly them to Manzariyeh. The entire operation, from the time that the first soldier scaled the wall at the embassy until all of the hostages and the entire rescue force was airborne en route to Manzariyeh, was expected to take no longer than 45 minutes (Beckwith, 1983: 5-8 and 254-256; Kyle, 1990: 183-184; NSAD 102, 103, 120, 125 and 136).⁴⁹

At Manzariyeh, all of the hostages and members of the rescue force that had conducted the operations at the embassy and Foreign Ministry would be loaded onto the two C-141 aircraft, with those requiring medical attention being placed on the one with hospital facilities and medical personnel on board. Once the C-141s had taken off, the MC-130s would depart with the Ranger force that had held the airfield, followed out of Iran by the AC-130 gunships. These aircraft would be escorted out of Iranian airspace by US Navy fighters from the *Nimitz*. The helicopters would be left behind (Kyle, 1990: 184; Beckwith, 1983: 256; NSAD 102 and 103).⁵⁰

By 24 April, all of the personnel and equipment necessary to implement this complex plan were in place at the various staging bases. Since the forward deployment had to be accomplished without compromising the secrecy of the rescue operation, the deployment plan had been carefully designed to conform, to the maximum extent possible, to the pattern of movements of US military aircraft that had been established in the region over the previous few months. The actual deployment was implemented over an eleven-day period during which every move was calculated to elude the intelligence-gathering capabilities of the Soviet Union, especially its satellite and signals surveillance capabilities, and to avoid raising the suspicions of Iran and other countries in the area and the curiosity of even the closest allies of the US.⁵¹ The more visible deployments were delayed until the last possible moment and handled with even tighter security. For example, the rescue force that would storm the two locations in Tehran arrived in Wadi Kena only on the evening of 22 April, were moved forward to Masirah hours before the operation began and, in both locations, were taken immediately to an area where their visibility would be as limited as possible (Kyle, 1990: 202-234).

At this point, all indications were that these precautions had worked and that the deployment had been achieved without compromising the

secrecy of the mission. It also appeared that the situation in Iran was suitable for the operation. Having done a thorough last-minute check of the entire area, the CIA and special forces agents in Iran were confident that conditions at the embassy, at the Foreign Ministry, around the hideout sites and in the areas of the city through which the assault forces would have to transit were now highly favourable for the operation.⁵² Information provided from CIA sources indicated that all of the hostages were being held in a single building, the chancery.⁵³ Soviet ships in the area were poorly positioned to detect the helicopter launch from the *Nimitz* or the MC-130 and EC-130 launch from Masirah. Moreover, the efforts made to rectify the remaining problems with the helicopters aboard the *Nimitz*, which had become extremely focused following the arrival of the helicopter crews on 20 April, had apparently succeeded; the crews had test flown all eight during the 20-23 April period and had found them to be mission ready.⁵⁴ Finally, the weather forecast looked promising for the mission, with no headwinds, temperatures or weather patterns expected which would prohibit or limit the planned helicopter operations over Iran for the next two days. The troops were confident and, in the judgment of the senior military commanders on the scene, ready for the operation. With everything seemingly on track, Vaught issued his "execution order" to launch the mission at 5:30 PM (Iran time).⁵⁵ A little over an hour later, at dusk, the first mission aircraft, the lead MC-130, took off from Masirah and headed towards the Iranian coast with Kyle and the rest of the personnel needed for the Desert One operation on board (Kyle, 1990: 214-236; Beckwith, 1983: 262-264; Turner, 1991: 118; NSAD 57, 83, 97, 100, 101 and 103).⁵⁶

The initial part of the mission went well. An hour after the lead MC-130 had taken off from Masirah, at 7:35 PM, all eight helicopters lifted off the *Nimitz* and began their 600 nautical mile journey to Desert One; at about the same time, two more MC-130s carrying the remainder of the rescue force and three EC-130s carrying fuel for the helicopters took off from Masirah to rendezvous with the helicopters at Desert One. At 7:55 PM, flying at low altitude, the lead MC-130 penetrated Iranian airspace at the planned point along the southeast coast of Iran. A few minutes later, the helicopter formation entered Iranian airspace along the same track, followed about an hour later by the formation of five C-130s. At this point, it appeared that the rescue force had not been detected by the coastal radars and everything was going according to plan (Kyle, 1990: 235-245; NSAD 42 and 44).⁵⁷

Shortly thereafter, the first signs of possible trouble appeared when the lead MC-130 entered an area of suspended dust (known to the Iranians as a "haboob") which restricted forward visibility. Given that the ground was still visible, major features ahead were still well-defined and the MC-130 reemerged into the clear after about 10-15 minutes, Kyle saw no cause for alarm and decided not to break radio silence to alert the helicopters. About 15 minutes after it had passed the first area of suspended dust, the lead MC-130 entered another area of suspended dust, this time a more serious one which severely restricted forward visibility. Although he still felt that the conditions were well within the capability of the helicopter crews to cope with, at this point Kyle ordered that radio silence be broken to send a message to the helicopters on the satellite communications (SATCOM) network that they were about to enter an area of reduced visibility in suspended dust. As a result of a serious error on the part of those tasked to send this message, it never got through.⁵⁸ In addition to being considerably thicker, the second area of suspended dust was about twice as large as the first one, with visibilities, as seen from the lead MC-130, as low as half a mile. After about 30 minutes in this second dust cloud, at about 10:00 PM, the lead aircraft again broke into the clear, about 100 miles from Desert One (Kyle, 1990: 246-249; NSAD 44 and 102).

The suspended dust, which would have a major impact on helicopter part of the mission, came as a surprise to the rescue force. This condition is, however, a fairly common phenomena in the desert areas of Iran. It is caused by downward currents of air, associated with thunderstorms but occurring a few hours later and about 100 miles away, which force a fine powder into the air where it hangs for several hours. The fact that this condition came as a surprise was one of the most significant weaknesses of the rescue plan and will be discussed in some detail in the next chapter.

At about the time the lead MC-130 entered the second area of suspended dust, the helicopter formation experienced its first problem. Having received an indication that it had lost nitrogen pressure inside one of its rotor blades, helicopter number six carried out a precautionary landing and, in accordance with standard operating procedures, number eight broke formation to assist number six while the rest of the formation continued the flight towards Desert One. After confirming the problem by means of a mechanical inspection on the ground, the crew of number six abandoned their aircraft and loaded onto number eight which, when it

resumed its flight path, was about 15 minutes behind the main formation. The flight leader, Lieutenant Colonel Ed Seiffert, sent a message to Vaught on the SATCOM network that two helicopters had landed but, from this point on, neither he nor any of the other JTF commanders knew the precise status of numbers six and eight until the rendezvous at Desert One. In accordance with his plan which called for radio silence to the maximum extent possible, Seiffert decided to wait until the helicopter force arrived at Desert One to determine what had happened (Kyle, 1990: 249-251; NSAD 102). This point marked the start of a serious degradation in the command, control and communications of the rescue force which was another serious weakness of the operation and one which will be examined in some detail in the following chapter.⁵⁹

As the lead MC-130 was approaching Desert One, the main helicopter formation entered the first area of suspended dust. At the low altitudes at which they were flying, they encountered visibilities which varied between one half to one quarter of a mile. Nevertheless, they were able to maintain their formation and navigate their way through the first area of suspended dust without serious incident. As Kyle had suspected, the second area was much worse for the helicopters. Shortly after entering it, Seiffert lost sight of the ground and all of the other helicopters except for his immediate wingman (number two). Having concluded that the visibility was now too poor to continue, he decided to attempt to get the formation back into the clear area behind him and to organize subsequent action from there. After instructing his radio operator to make another call on the SATCOM radio to inform Vaught that the formation was encountering a visibility problem, Seiffert attempted to turn the formation around with a 180-degree turn of his own helicopter. Due to the extremely poor visibilities, only number two saw this manoeuvre and followed it. The rest of the formation, now reduced to four helicopters, continued to press forward along the planned track towards Desert One (Kyle, 1990: 252-255; NSAD 102).

After reaching a clear area, the lead helicopter, followed by number two, landed on the desert floor. At this point, the helicopter force was in disarray. Numbers one and two were on the ground between the two areas of suspended dust; number six had been abandoned; number eight, now with the crew of number six on board, was about to pass the position of numbers one and two but with no one else knowing the status of these two crews; and four helicopters, which had lost sight of their lead, were still on their way to Desert One, but were now beginning to fall significantly

behind schedule because they had to reduce their speed as a result of the near-zero visibilities they were encountering. Moreover, after a short time on the ground during which he concluded that the rest of the JTF was now committed to the rendezvous at Desert One, Seiffert and number two headed back into the dust, trailing the main formation by about 35 minutes.⁶⁰ Although he directed SATCOM messages to be sent to inform Vaught when he had landed and again when he lifted off, none of the other helicopters had functioning satellite communications radio on board and therefore none received the message. The crew on board number three did not even know that it had the lead at this point. The normal organization and discipline involved with formation tactics had completely broken down (Kyle, 1990: 255-256 and 265-267).⁶¹

More problems with the helicopter force were still to come. At this stage, still flying at low altitudes because they feared both losing visual contact with the ground and being detected by Iranian radars, the pilots were having an extremely difficult time navigating and maintaining formation in the dust.⁶² They had trained for good visual flight conditions and were now at low level in instrument flight conditions. The dust entered their cockpits, collecting on everything, including the flight instruments, and the cockpit temperatures rose to nearly 100 degrees Fahrenheit, an increase of about 20 degrees from the clear areas. In some areas, there were extended periods during which the pilots could not see the ground. The physical strain in these conditions took its toll on all of them and the struggle to deal with poor visibility and horizon definition left most of them with vertigo problems. Moreover, at about the same time, helicopter numbers two and five experienced serious mechanical malfunctions (Kyle, 1990: 253-254 and 265-268; NSAD 101 and 102).

Shortly after it followed helicopter number one back into the dust cloud, number two lost one of its two hydraulic systems, a situation which, under normal conditions, called for a landing as soon as possible. Although this malfunction left him with no backup system and precautions had to be taken to avoid overtaxing the remaining system so as to avoid complete loss of control, the pilot decided to continue and investigate the problem at Desert One. In order to maintain radio silence, he did not inform the flight lead of his problem at this stage. Meanwhile, number five was experiencing serious problems with a number of its flight and navigation instruments and the co-pilot, who was wearing night vision goggles while the pilot monitored the flight instruments, was experiencing

severe vertigo. Struggling with these problems, both pilots lost sight of all the other helicopters and, to maintain safe separation, turned slowly away from the known path of the formation. At this point, the crew was unsure of its position and was not able to see the ground to look for identifiable features. Not knowing the weather ahead was better and lacking the navigation instruments necessary to find Desert One in the dust, the crew decided to return to the *Nimitz*. They attempted to advise Vaught of their decision with their SATCOM radio but were unsuccessful in doing so. When the remainder of the formation broke out of the second area of suspended dust about 100 nautical miles from Desert One, the crew of number seven realized that number five was missing and conducted a brief search before resuming course. At this point only six helicopters were headed for Desert One and one had serious mechanical difficulties of which that only its crew was aware (Kyle, 1990: 266-271: NSAD 101 and 102). The command, control and communications of the operation were becoming even more seriously degraded at this point.

While the helicopters were struggling through the suspended dust, the C-130s were keeping precisely on schedule. At about the same time that the formation entered the second area of suspended dust, around 10:30 PM, the lead MC-130 was on final approach for landing at Desert One. After successfully activating the remotely-controlled runway lights, the aircraft did a surveillance pass prior to landing and located, with its forward-looking infrared sensor, a truck moving east on the road that passed through Desert One. After holding for a short time for the truck to pass, the aircraft touched down safely on the south side of the road. The roadblock team and combat controllers were immediately unloaded to secure the area and prepare for the arrival of the other C-130s and helicopters. Shortly thereafter, Kyle left the aircraft to set up a command post on the road and establish contact with Vaught (Kyle, 1990: 256-261).⁶³

Within minutes of their arrival at Desert One, the roadblock team was confronted with two separate incidents on the road. The first involved a bus with 44 people on board which arrived on the scene even before the roadblock team was in position. It stopped after warning shots were fired. Since the plan called for the occupants of any vehicles that were stopped to be evacuated to Wadi Kena and returned to Manzariyeh following night, some members of Delta Force were assigned to guard them until they were loaded on the last C-130 to depart Desert One. The second incident involved a gasoline tanker truck. When the driver refused to

stop despite his vehicle being hit by rifle fire, the roadblock team fired a light antitank weapon. The tanker was immediately enveloped in flames, but the driver managed to reach a small pickup truck which had been following him and which quickly reversed course back to the west and escaped. While acknowledging an increased risk that the rescue attempt would be discovered as a result of this incident, Kyle and Beckwith agreed that the operation should continue. Although somewhat more worried when he was informed of the incident about an hour later, Vaught agreed with their assessment. No more vehicle traffic was seen for the remainder of the time that the rescue force was at Desert One (Kyle, 1990: 259-262 and 275; Beckwith, 1983: 269-270; NSAD 6; NSAD 100 and 117).⁶⁴

An hour after the lead MC-130 had touched down, right on schedule, the formation of five C-130s arrived. They landed in the planned sequence and were marshalled into the desired locations by the combat control team. By midnight, everything was set for the arrival of the helicopters which were due to land fifteen minutes later. On the north side of the road, two of the EC-130s with fuel for the helicopters were parked and ready for their arrival; on the south side, a third EC-130 was also ready with fuel and one MC-130 was standing by to take those who would not be going on to Tehran back to Masirah. The other two MC-130s, which had brought the rest of the rescue team to Desert One, were already on their way back to Masirah. Beckwith had contacted his advance party in Iran, who was now waiting at the drop-off site, and had confirmed that the everything was ready for the arrival of the assault force and that the weather in the Tehran area was suitable for the operation (Kyle, 1990: 272-275; NSAD 42, 43, 44 and 101).

Meanwhile, in Washington, decision makers followed normal schedules in order not to arouse suspicions that something unusual was taking place. True to his word, once the operation began at 9:00 AM Washington time, the president left the implementation phase completely in the hands of the military commanders. Jones and Brown made an effort to keep the president up to date as the mission progressed but, since his schedule included a private session with Israeli Labour leader Shimon Peres and a briefing to Hispanic leaders on the administration's latest anti-inflation program, Brzezinski was their immediate point of contact in the White House during these periods. Shortly after the helicopters were launched, Jones informed Brzezinski that the operation was under way and, shortly thereafter, Brzezinski informed the president. The president, Mondale, Vance, Brown, Brzezinski, Jordan and Powell met for lunch. During the

lunch, Jones called Brown to report that two helicopters had landed in the desert but that he had no further information about their status and it looked like a minimum of six helicopters were still on the way to Desert One. At 3:15 PM Washington time, Brown called Brzezinski to report the vehicle incidents at Desert One. While Brzezinski readily agreed with the assessment of Vaught, Jones and Brown that these incidents were not a reason for aborting the mission, the president expressed some concerns when he was briefed by Brzezinski a few minutes later. After consulting directly with Jones, the president also agreed that the mission should continue (Carter, 1982: 514-519; Turner, 1991: 118-126; Brzezinski, 1983: 497; Jordan, 1982: 270-274; Sick, 1985: 297-298; NSAD 6, 9 and 10).

At Desert One, with everything set for the arrival of the helicopters, the key issues were how many helicopters would arrive and when. Vaught and Kyle were still unsure about the status of the first two helicopters that had dropped out of the formation two hours into the flight were also unaware that another one had reversed course about an hour later and headed back to the *Nimitz*. What they did know from another SATCOM call from Seiffert shortly after the last EC-130 had landed, was that the arrival of at least part of the formation would now be about an hour behind schedule and, since this delay meant that the C-130s waiting on the ground with their engines running would probably need to be refuelled on the way back to Masirah, the JTF Headquarters scrambled KC-135 tankers from Wadi Kena to be ready to meet them.⁶⁵ They also knew that significant further delays would make it impossible for the helicopters to reach the hideout sites near Tehran before daylight (Kyle, 1990: 275-287).⁶⁶

The first two helicopters, numbers three and four, arrived at 12:55 AM, about 50 minutes behind schedule. Over the course of the following half hour, four more helicopters arrived, with the last two, numbers one and two, touching down just after 1:30 AM. As each of the helicopters arrived, it was immediately marshalled into a position behind one of the EC-130 aircraft for refuelling. Shortly after the sixth helicopter reached Desert One, believing that he now had the minimum required number of helicopters to continue the operation, Kyle informed Vaught that the rescue force would begin the journey to its hide sites near Tehran in approximately 40 minutes, after the last two helicopters were refuelled and almost an hour and a half behind schedule. Although the timing would be tight, Kyle calculated that the helicopters could still drop off the

assault force and move to its own hideout location by dawn (Kyle, 1990: 278-282 and 285-286; NSAD 42, 43, 44, 82, 89, 101, 127).⁶⁷

As the refuelling operation began, the blowing sand and noise of running engines made coordination very difficult. Nevertheless, Kyle slowly pieced together the situation with the helicopters. Shortly after the arrival sequence began, he was informed, on his SATCOM radio, that helicopter number five was on its way back to the *Nimitz*.⁶⁸ With the arrival of two crews in number eight, he knew that the helicopter force now consisted of six aircraft. He was also aware, from conversations with the several of the pilots, that the flight through the suspended dust had been a difficult ordeal which had exhausted them both physically and mentally. Nevertheless, since the weather was clear ahead and Seiffert confirmed that he was prepared to proceed with the next stage of the operation, the assault forces began to load onto the helicopters. With the refuelling of the last two helicopters progressing well and the launch of the formation anticipated in about 20 minutes, Kyle and Seiffert were both still unaware of the hydraulic problems that number two was experiencing. Meanwhile, helicopter number two had shut down so that its crew could remove some inspection panels and try to determine the cause of the hydraulic problem. A quick investigation revealed that the fluid in one of the aircraft's two hydraulic systems had completely escaped through a cracked connection, causing the backup pump for the flight control system to burn out. When the pilot of number two went over to the lead aircraft to report his problem, Seiffert decided that number two was no longer safe to fly (Kyle, 1990: 280-288; NSAD 100 and 101).⁶⁹ This brought the number of mission-capable aircraft down to five. Given that this was below the number previously established as the absolute minimum to continue to the next stage of the operation, the obvious course of action was to abort the mission. The decision to limit the helicopter force to eight aircraft and each of the decisions by the helicopter crews to abort, which will be examined in more detail in the next chapter, had now become enormously significant in terms of their impact on the outcome of the mission.

Given his reluctance to make a recommendation to abort the mission, Kyle pressed both Seiffert and Beckwith to see if they would be willing to continue the mission with five helicopters. After Seiffert confirmed that he could not carry the entire assault force with five helicopters and Beckwith refused to consider going on with fewer assault force personnel, Kyle informed Vaught that there were now only five mission-capable

helicopters. Vaught's initial reaction was similar to Kyle's; he asked Kyle to consult with Seiffert and Beckwith to determine whether they would be willing to continue the mission with only five helicopters. Kyle informed Vaught that he had already done this and that his recommendation was that the mission should be aborted. He also sought guidance about what should be done with the occupants of the bus (Kyle, 1990: 288-291; NSAD 1, 13, 67 and 116). Vaught took this recommendation forward to Jones who then briefed Brown on the situation. Both readily concurred with the decision to abort, but Jones asked Vaught to "hold one before executing to see if we can get a call through across the river" to the president. Brown then called Brzezinski at the White House (Brzezinski, 1983: 497; NSAD 6).

Having received an optimistic report just twenty-five minutes earlier that the rescue force was about to depart Desert One with six helicopters, Brzezinski was surprised and disappointed at this turn of events. He therefore "quizzed Brown sharply on whether the abort was necessary" and insisted that he consult further with Jones and "obtain the opinion of the commander in the field" before speaking with the president. Ten minutes later, having received an initial briefing on the situation by Brzezinski, Carter called Brown and, at the urging of Brzezinski, "asked Brown for the field commander's assessment."⁷⁰ When Brown assured him that the recommendation reflected the wishes of the commanders in the field, the president quickly approved the termination of the rescue operation (Brzezinski, 1983: 497-498; Carter, 1982: 515-516; NSAD 6).⁷¹ Jones then informed Vaught that the recommendation to abort the mission had been approved by the president and instructed him to leave all captured Iranians at Desert One. Twenty minutes after he had made his recommendation to abort, at about 2:00 AM, Kyle received instructions from Vaught to withdraw all aircraft (except for helicopter number two which was to be destroyed) and US personnel from Desert One and to release the occupants of the bus. The withdrawal operation began immediately (Kyle, 1990: 291-293; NSAD 6, 43 and 102). The rescue attempt was finished; the task now was to get all of the aircraft headed back towards their staging locations as quickly as possible so as to take advantage of the remaining hours of darkness.

The immediate priority was the departure of one of the EC-130s on the north side of the road which had become critically short of fuel.⁷² In order to allow this aircraft to turn around and position itself for takeoff, the two helicopters immediately behind it, numbers three and

four, had to be moved to new positions.⁷³ Therefore, after consulting with Seiffert and explaining what was needed to the pilots, Kyle directed that numbers three and four be repositioned, with number three moving first. As number three lifted off, it was immediately engulfed in swirling dust, lost sight of the EC-130 and, seconds later, crashed into it. The left side of the EC-130 and the helicopter were immediately ignited into a towering ball of fire, lighting up the area in a kaleidoscope of flames, sand, black smoke and violent, multi-colour explosions involving a wide range of munitions (Kyle, 1990: 294-295; Beckwith, 1983: 278-280; NSAD 101).

Everyone on the north side of the road immediately became involved in the efforts to rescue personnel from the crash area and to evacuate to a safe distance. With shrapnel flying everywhere, the crews of the other aircraft reacted instinctively: the other EC-130 on the north side of the road immediately taxied away from the crash area and, on instructions from their flight leader, the helicopter crews abandoned their aircraft. Meanwhile, Kyle and the combat control team focused their efforts on organizing an emergency evacuation. Since the heat was too intense to approach the two burning aircraft, one helicopter had been lost in the crash and shrapnel was cutting into the other three helicopters on the north side of the road, Kyle decided to leave the helicopters behind and load all other equipment and personnel onto the three remaining C-130s. As this was being done, he brought Vaught up to date on the situation and requested that an air strike be launched to destroy the helicopters once the rescue force had departed. About 20 minutes after the crash, after a thorough check of the area to ensure that no surviving US personnel would be left behind, Kyle ordered the three remaining C-130s to take off. The bodies of eight servicemen (three members of the helicopter crew and five members of the EC-130 crew) were left behind in the burning wreckage. Just after 5:00 AM, nine hours after the lead MC-130 had entered Iranian airspace, the three C-130s carrying the remainder of the rescue force once again entered international airspace heading towards Masirah (Kyle, 1990: 295-307; NSAD 43 and 67).

Following the decision to abort the mission, Carter called for a meeting of his senior foreign policy advisers. Shortly thereafter, Mondale, Brzezinski, Powell, Jordan and Christopher gathered in the White House and were joined by Vance and Brown a little later. About an hour after the decision to abort and about half an hour after the rescue force had departed Desert One, as this high-level group was discussing what

should be communicated about the aborted raid to the government of Iran and to the American people, Jones called the president to inform him that there had been a serious accident during the withdrawal phase of the operation with some casualties (Brzezinski, 1983: 499; Carter, 1982: 516).

Over the course of the next few hours, the senior military decision makers, including Jones, scrambled to deal with a host of new issues related to the failed mission: coordinating air cover and tanker aircraft for the evacuating force, accounting for all personnel and establishing an accurate casualty list, making contingency plans for a search and rescue mission should one be needed to pick up any rescue force personnel left in Iran, organizing a medical evacuation for those who had been injured in the crash, monitoring Iran for signs that the activities of the rescue force had been reported, and deciding whether to launch the air strike that Kyle had requested to destroy the helicopters at Desert One (the strike was not approved).⁷⁴ At the same time, knowing that answers to some hard questions would have to be ready for senior decision makers in Washington as soon as possible, they tried to develop a clearer picture of what exactly had happened in the desert (Kyle, 1990: 305-310; NSAD 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12).

As the facts were put together, the reality of how badly the rescue attempt had gone became increasingly apparent to senior decision makers, including the president. Not only had a lack of mission-capable helicopters forced cancellation of the mission before the insertion phase of the operation had even been completed, the rescue force had left behind eight dead servicemen, seven aircraft and 44 witnesses at Desert One. To make matters even worse, when the helicopter crews had abandoned their aircraft on the north side of the road, some of them had left behind highly sensitive documents from which the Iranians would soon be able to reconstruct the entire rescue plan, placing those who had assisted with the arrangements in Iran, including the special forces personnel who had slipped into the country a few days earlier, in grave danger (Kyle, 1990: 303 and 307; NSAD 7 and 58).⁷⁵ The failure of Operation Eagle Claw could hardly have been more complete. Not only had it failed to bring the quick and decisive end to the hostage crisis that the senior decision makers who had launched it wanted so badly, it had turned into a military fiasco that provided powerful images of the inability of the US to solve the hostage crisis to a global audience.

Some of the key factors that need to form part of the explanation of the failure of the rescue attempt are already apparent from this

historical account of the operation. Perhaps less obviously, some of the other issues and themes raised earlier in this study are also relevant to this explanation. Having opened up the black box of the decision-making process over the five and a half month period between the seizure of the embassy and the collapse of the rescue effort in Iran on 24-25 April, it is now possible to identify and assess the impact of the most important factors which contributed to the failure. It is now possible, in other words, to take the final step in the development of the political process explanation for the outcome as well as for the decision. This will be done in the following chapter which will consider the process over the entire period and, drawing on the concepts and process dynamics embodied in the political process model and the themes developed in earlier chapters, attempt to answer the two fundamental questions posed at the beginning of this study: why was the decision taken to launch the rescue mission and why did the operation fail?

ENDNOTES - CHAPTER SIX

1. The characterization of the rescue decision as one that "crystallized" is Brzezinski's. He identifies the period between the Camp David meeting and the NSC meeting on 11 April as the one in which this crystallization took place (Brzezinski, 1983: 487). However, for reasons that will become evident in this chapter, the period during which the decision crystallized in the president's mind is more accurately defined as one between the Camp David meeting on 22 March and his call to Secretary of Defense Brown on 19 April.
2. Carter was so determined to avoid placing Sadat in an awkward position that, on 21 March, he instructed Jordan to encourage the shah to move back to the US if he could not be convinced to remain in Panama. On 22 March, after discussing the issue with Mondale and Vance, who agreed that the shah should not be allowed to return to the US, Jordan reached the president by telephone at Camp David and persuaded him to determine how Sadat himself felt about the shah's move to Egypt. When Sadat indicated that he was willing to accept the shah, the president agreed that the shah should be encouraged to go to Egypt. The shah left Panama for Egypt on 23 March, where he died on 27 July (Jordan, 1982: 212-223; Vance, 1983: 406: JCLD 36).
3. Although he did not pursue the issue at the meeting, Turner still believed that the option of mining was a good one. In his memoirs, he says there was "some justification" for the objections to mining raised by Brown and Jones at the 22 March meeting, but also makes clear his chagrin that "mine warfare is a poor stepchild in the Navy," that "few admirals know enough about it to be its advocates" and that the Navy saw it "as an essentially passive and uninteresting tactic" (Turner, 1991: 101).
4. According to Saunders, this meeting was arranged by Jordan in order to give Bourguet a direct appreciation of the extent to which US patience was wearing thin (Saunders, 1985: 134).
5. On 30 March, to prepare the way for a response through the media to whatever action was taken in Iran, Carter called in a number of senior newsmen to the White House and "told them frankly what was going on" (Carter, 1983: 502).
6. According to Sick, Villalon put this letter into play because he had concluded that the negotiations were frozen, the US was about to pursue a strategy of pressure and he had take action into his own hands. Sick, who had Villalon in his office when he found out about the letter, believes that Ghotbzadeh knew that Villalon was the author of the letter but Bani-Sadr did not (Sick, 1985: 271-273).
7. Bourguet was in Panama at the same time as Jordan to work on his case for the extradition of the shah. Jordan, acting completely on his own authority, asked Brown to hold the shah's aircraft in the Azores. By Jordan's own account, "The president was livid when he found out that I had stopped the shah's plane, scolding that I had grossly overstepped my authority" (Jordan, 1982: 225-227).
8. The most serious reaction to the shah's move from Iran was more threats to put the hostages on trial and punish them (Carter, 1983: 501). As Sick points out, neither Bani-Sadr nor Ghotbzadeh had much affection for the US. Their desire to end the hostage crisis was motivated by their conviction that it was "fatally poisoning Iran's international position and eroding the accomplishments of the revolution they had believed in." Unfortunately for them and for the administration's hopes that it could negotiate an end to the hostage crisis with them, "their vision of the revolution and its purposes was radically different from the vision of Khomeini." Although they were to remain in their positions as president and foreign minister to the end of the hostage crisis, the political positions of Bani-Sadr and

Ghotbzadeh were both weakened enormously by the events of early 1980 (Sick, 1985: 274; Bani-Sadr, 1991: 1-13).

9. 1 April was the first anniversary of the establishment of an Islamic republic in Iran and both Khomeini and Bani-Sadr were scheduled to make major speeches. Khomeini's speech, which was to be read by his son Ahmed (common practice since his hospitalization), was made available on the evening of 31 March. It was an extremely vitriolic one in which, among other things, he accused the US of orchestrating the shah's move to Egypt, calling it "a new political project to perpetuate his domination" (Sick, 1985: 275-277).

10. The three votes against the transfer were cast by Ayatollah Beheshti and two other clerics (Saunders, 1985: 135).

11. The reasoning of the JTF at this point was that it could not afford the time to rehearse a plan that had not been approved. In retrospect, it was a questionable judgment which will be discussed in Chapter 7 (Kyle, 1990: 161).

12. The detained Iranians would have been evacuated from Desert One on one of the C-130s and then be brought back into Iran with the evacuation force at Manzariyeh on the second night of the operation (Kyle, 1990: 275; Turner, 1991: 110). The president eventually approved the limited detention of Iranians to preserve the secrecy of the mission at an NSC meeting on 15 April (Brzezinski, 1983: 492).

13. The access agreement with Oman was a direct consequence of the efforts launched by Brzezinski in early 1979 to develop a new "regional security framework." The agreement with Oman was followed by one with Kenya on 27 June and Somalia on 22 August (Sick, 1983: 74-75).

14. Sick writes that the memorandum went to the president the night of 9 April whereas Brzezinski says he gave it to the president on 10 April (Sick, 1985: 290; Brzezinski, 1983: 491-492). Since the memorandum went from Brzezinski's office to Carter's, Brzezinski's account of the timing is probably the more accurate.

15. According to Brzezinski, Sick took the initiative in writing the original memorandum of 8 April; he was not asked to do so by Brzezinski. That said, as Brzezinski pointed out in an interview conducted for this project, "it corresponded to my own growing sense of frustration, so this is why I decided to forward it to the president after some revisions" (Brzezinski interview).

16. Robert Strauss, who was in charge of the reelection campaign, held the same view. Just after the additional new sanctions were announced on 7 April, Strauss showed his frustration in a conversation with Jordan: "Hamilton, Goddammit, the President has to get out of the White House and lead this country! The American people want to see and feel their President. They'll understand his predicament better if he's out there explaining it." Shortly thereafter, at a weekly campaign meeting, Strauss tried to convince Carter to abandon the Rose Garden strategy, but Carter replied that "We are all going to have to hold steady" (Jordan, 1982: 249).

17. From late November until the 22 March NSC meeting at Camp David, in accordance with the wishes of the president, Jordan and Powell were left almost entirely out of discussions about military options. Mondale was far more engaged. Consistent with these different levels of involvement, in mid-March, Brzezinski "informed" Powell and Jordan about the way in which the rescue option had been developed but "discussed it more fully" with Mondale (Brzezinski, 1983: 490). Even at the NSC meeting on 7 April, Jordan and Powell left the meeting before the discussion of military options began (Turner, 1991: 72-76 and 106).

18. According to Brzezinski, Vance even had misgivings about breaking diplomatic relations, preferring to simply expel all Iranian diplomats (Brzezinski, 1983: 401).

19. In a revealing entry which in his diary on 10 April, the day before the key NSC meeting which he called to consider the rescue option, Carter wrote that "The Iranian terrorists are making all kinds of crazy threats to kill the American hostages if they are invaded by Iraq whom they identify as an American puppet" (Carter, 1982: 506).

20. Carter probably came to the conclusion that it was time to take this decision only after the foreign policy breakfast early that morning. At the breakfast, he gave no indication that he was about to call a meeting of the NSC to consider the rescue option. Jordan, who attended the breakfast, was scheduled to be in Atlanta later that day to attend two "fund-raisers" for the campaign. When the president called the NSC meeting, Jordan was already on his way to the airport. He returned to the White House for the meeting (Jordan, 1982: 250).

21. Although Christopher clearly shared Vance's strong opposition to the use of military force against Iran, there is some disagreement about the precise position Christopher took at the 11 April meeting. In his short account of this meeting, for example, Vance argues that Christopher "was not fully briefed on the rescue operation" and "properly declined to take a position on the rescue mission" (Vance, 1983: 409). This is consistent with the account of Jordan who points out that, at one point during the meeting, Christopher asked him whether Vance realized "how far along" Carter was in his thinking about the rescue option and later stated that, since he had not discussed the issue with Vance, he did not feel that he could accurately represent Vance's views (Jordan, 1982: 251). Although Powell believes that Christopher "was inclined to recommend that the President order the mission," he agrees that, in light of his uncertainty about precisely where Vance was in his thinking on the rescue option, Christopher expressed reluctance to make a personal recommendation about the rescue attempt (Powell, 1984: 227). Turner, on the other hand, states that "Warren argued articulately against the rescue operation" (Turner, 1991: 107). Seen in the context of other accounts, including those of Brzezinski and Sick (Brzezinski, 1983: 492-493; Sick, 1985: 292), Turner's assertion undoubtedly arises from an interpretation which equates Christopher's argument that viable non-military options remained with opposition to the rescue option.

22. The next morning, while he was in Atlanta, Jordan wrote a long memorandum to the president which outlined his latest thoughts on the entire situation in Iran. Fearing that his support for the president's decision might have "sounded lukewarm" at the NSC meeting, he expressed considerable enthusiasm for the rescue option, concluding that once the president was satisfied that the basic plan was sound, he should proceed with the mission. According to Jordan, "I felt better after putting myself squarely on the side of the mission - advisers are no good if they don't advise" (Jordan, 1982: 251-252).

23. Brzezinski and Turner both refer to comments the president made at the 11 April meeting about the views of the Sadats. Brzezinski records him as saying that "Sadat had told him that our international standing was damaged by our excessive passivity" and Turner records him as saying "he had been stung recently when Mrs. Anwar Sadat told him she could not understand how we could have acted so supinely" (Turner, 1991: 107).

24. Based on interviews with both Vance and Mondale, Gillon points out that Vance lobbied Mondale to join him in opposing the rescue attempt. During a long, private conversation in the Rose Garden, Vance argued that something would inevitably go wrong: "It never works the way they say its [sic] going to work. There's a good chance a disaster could occur here and I hope you will give this serious consideration." Mondale was not swayed; he had already made up his mind that the risks of doing nothing were greater than the risks of attempting the rescue (Gillon, 1992: 280).

25. In his account of the 15 April meeting, Jordan again characterizes the president's decision as a tentative one, quoting him as concluding the discussion with "I haven't made a final decision, but at this point, I am inclined to go ahead" (Jordan, 1982: 254). Brzezinski, on the

other hand, quotes the president as saying, more decisively, "I will stick with the decision I made" (Brzezinski, 1983: 494). Whatever Carter actually said, it is likely that, having given Vance a chance to present his arguments against the rescue attempt and having seen that the other members of the NSC were not swayed by them, Carter's confidence increased that the position he took at the 11 April meeting had been the correct one.

26. Brzezinski received support for his broader proposal to bring back some prisoners from Brown, Jones and Deputy Secretary of Defense, Graham Claytor, who attended this particular meeting, but the others opposed it. The president did authorize the rescue force to hold prisoners while the operation was under way in Iran for purely operational reasons (Brzezinski, 1983: 494). This authorization allowed the mission commander, for example, to hold any Iranians who discovered the rescue force before the assault was conducted in order to preserve the element of surprise. This authorization was, of course, essential to the plan to detain any Iranians that were stopped in vehicles on the road at the Desert One site; it might also have been essential later on in the mission if, for example, the rescue force was discovered near the hideout sites in the mountains near Tehran.

27. Although the 12-13 April exercise was planned immediately following the decision to use Desert One, there was insufficient time to bring together all of the aircraft involved in the Desert One operation and still be able to deploy them forward in time to be ready for the rescue mission on 24 April. To meet the 24 April date, for example, the Okinawa-based MC-130 transport aircraft had to be prepare for deployment on 14 April and depart Okinawa for Diego Garcia on 15 April. As Kyle points out in his account of the final preparations for the operation, "There's no doubt that we would have been better off concentrating our Night-One rehearsals on the Masirah/Desert-I scenario, but the late approval of these options precluded that" (Kyle, 1990: 176, 189-191, 205).

28. On April 15, for example, Beckwith still did not know that the rescue plan was about to be implemented. Jones went to Fort Bragg that day to do a final check on the preparations and to ask Beckwith directly what he thought about the level of preparedness for the mission. Beckwith, who five months earlier had characterized the plan as "straightforward - and suicidal," was quick to respond: "Sir, we've got to do it. We're ready" (Beckwith, 1983: 198 and 252). The next day he travelled to Washington to brief the president.

29. The five key staging points were Masirah, Oman; Wadi-Kena, Egypt; Diego Garcia, in the Indian Ocean; Daharan, Saudi Arabia; and the Nimitz, which was now in position in the Gulf of Oman. Throughout this period, preserving the secrecy of the mission was a paramount concern for the members of the military planning group. Brzezinski was so concerned about it that he suggested, in the memorandum he sent to the president on 10 April, that the president "convene a full-scale NSC meeting, including some of his key domestic advisers, at the end of which he should announce for the purpose of deception that he had decided against a rescue mission." Following this larger meeting, Brzezinski recommended that "a separate, smaller meeting, confined only to the people who 'needed to know'" be held "at which the actual decision to undertake the rescue would be reached" (Brzezinski, 1983: 492). Although the president did not follow Brzezinski's advice, the circle of those who were informed about the results of the meeting was kept extremely tight. In his account of the period following the 11 April meeting, Kyle states that "The Chairman probably told Vaught, but I don't even know that for sure" (Kyle, 1990: 177). In any case, when he instructed his commanders to begin the deployment to the Middle East, Vaught did not tell them that a decision had been reached to launch the mission, only that the task force was to move to its various staging locations in the Middle East. Further, he instructed them, as they prepared their units for the deployment, to tell their personnel only

that they were moving to "a new training location," not to the Middle East (Kyle, 1990: 195-196).

30. Frank Carlucci, Deputy Director of the CIA, attended the briefing for Turner, who was scheduled "to host a dinner for the head of a foreign intelligence service that evening" and could not miss it "without indicating that something very significant was happening." Christopher, Claytor, Odom and Pustay also attended the meeting (Turner, 1991: 110; Beckwith, 1983: 4). The briefing to the Joint Chiefs prior to the meeting with the president was more than a practice or a simple courtesy. As Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Jones had to take care to offer advice to the president that carefully reflected the consensus of the Joint Chiefs. Jones later played an influential role in the debates that led to the Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 which, among other things, greatly strengthened the role of the Chairman in providing advice to the president and secretary of defense on operational issues (Kester, 1988: 378-389; Jones, 1982: 38-42 and 73-83; Pustay and Gast interviews).

31. Beckwith expressed concern that some of the hostages would try to protect their guards and others might try to assist the assault by attacking their guards and taking their weapons. In either case, given the rules of engagement which had been adopted for the instantaneous "shooting decisions" they would have to make, the hostages would become targets of the assault force. According to Beckwith, he registered this point with the president and he accepted it. Moreover, during the meeting, Vaught stated that, while it was not possible to give a precise estimate of American casualties, he expected something like 10-12, including a few hostages. The president, in other words, had every reason to expect that there would be casualties among the hostages, even if the rescue mission were successful (Beckwith, 1983: 6-7; Turner, 1991: 113).

32. Jordan quotes the president as concluding the meeting by saying "I will make my decision in the next few days" while Beckwith quotes him as saying "The only way I will call it off now is if the International Red Cross hands back our Americans. There's not going to be just pre-positioning forward. We're going to do this operation" (Jordan, 1982: 263; Beckwith, 1983: 9). Turner's characterization of Carter's comments is the most consistent with the president's own memoirs: "The President said he had made his decision and the operation was to proceed. Only if there were some unexpected development would he call it off" (Turner, 1991: 114).

33. Prior to this point, the JTF had intended to launch just seven of the helicopters and to use the eighth as a backup for the launch. While it is not entirely clear from the record whether it was the military planning group or the JTF which first concluded that the eighth helicopter should be launched, there was definitely last-minute concern at the level of the military planning group and, at the very least, this interest further energized the JTF to succeed in its effort to ensure that all eight helicopters would be ready for launch on the night of 24 April. At this stage, the requirement for a minimum of six helicopters to take the rescue force forward from Desert One was well understood (NSAD 40, 48, 67, 100, 102 and 127).

34. Referring to the mood of the military planning group about the need to preserve secrecy during this final week leading up to the rescue attempt, Turner notes that "Our planning group had been excessively secretive thus far. Now we became almost paranoid" (Turner, 1991: 115).

35. One of the members of Delta Force who slipped into Tehran during this period was Dick Meadows, a retired US Army officer with an impressive background in special forces operations, including the Sontay raid in Vietnam. The other two special forces personnel were from Europe.

36. The source of the problem was an Omani general (a former British officer) who accurately deduced that the US deployment into Masirah meant that a rescue mission was about to be launched. In order to preserve the secrecy of the mission, the Omanis were deliberately told that the aircraft were going to be used in a clandestine airdrop operation in support of the rebels in Afghanistan. When it became apparent that these developments were causing British officials to become concerned about the purpose of the deployments to Masirah, Carter immediately sent Christopher to London to talk to Thatcher and Carrington (Carter, 1982: 512; Kyle, 1991: 210; Turner, 1990: 116).

37. As a direct result of the 18 April meeting, Ghotbzadeh did make an attempt to honour this commitment just before the rescue mission was launched. On 23 April, he announced that, once they had expired, the credentials of American journalists in Iran would not be renewed (Turner, 1991: 108).

38. On the day before the rescue attempt was launched, for example, in the aftermath of the agreement by key allies of the US to impose sanctions on Iran on 17 May unless progress towards a solution occurred, Powell stated that he expected "weeks of waiting" to see what would happen in Iran before the next steps could be taken (Kyle, 1990: 221).

39. During an interview conducted for this project, Vance recalled that, after he had submitted his letter of resignation and before the rescue mission was launched, he had visited Pierre Trudeau in Canada. Vance had enormous respect for Trudeau and wanted to tell him about his forthcoming resignation but did not do so because he could not have done so without reference to the rescue decision. According to Vance, "it broke my heart that I couldn't tell Pierre ... I've always felt badly about that" (Vance interview).

40. In his account of Vance's resignation, Carter recalls that on 21 April he asked Vance to meet with a senior delegation from the Methodist church which had requested a meeting in order to encourage the administration not to take military action. In what Carter describes as "a very serious moment - the first time I, as President, had ever had anyone directly refuse to obey an official order of mine," Vance told him that he could not meet with the group. Later that same day, Vance delivered his letter of resignation (Carter, 1982: 513).

41. At that point, the president intended to invite key congressional leaders to the White House for a briefing. On the evening of 23 April, he met with Senate Majority Leader Robert Byrd to solicit his advice on the issue of notifying Congress in the event that military action were taken against Iran. Although Carter informed Byrd that some sort of secret operation was imminent, at the last minute he decided not to inform him about the timing or the details of the actual mission (Carter, 1982: 513-514; Turner, 1991: 116-117).

42. In order to keep the pre-mission deployment to a reasonable size, the aircraft designated for these two contingencies, the airdrop (C-141s) and search and rescue operations (HH-53H Pave Low helicopters to be carried to Daharan by C-5 transport aircraft) were kept on alert in the US (Kyle, 1990: 224).

43. If they were to be used to withdraw the rescue force at this point, the helicopters would have to be refuelled again along the way. In this case, C-141 aircraft would drop fuel bladders and the equipment necessary for another refuelling operation at a designated location in the Desert. A flawless practice of the airdrop for this emergency extraction possibility was conducted during the final rehearsal on 12-13 April (Kyle, 1990: 188).

44. Only three of the AC-130 gunships would actually enter Iran. The fourth would act as a spare and turn around before Iranian airspace was penetrated unless it was needed (Kyle, 1990: 181).

45. The six trucks were to be used by Delta Force for its trip to the embassy while the Volkswagen bus was to be used to transport the much smaller and more lightly-equipped assault team to the Foreign Ministry. False walls had been built in the cargo area of the Mercedes trucks to conceal the presence of the members of the assault force. Based on the experience and careful observations of CIA officers and agents and the special forces personnel who had been in Tehran for a few days, no problems were expected at the two checkpoints that would have to be passed. If, for whatever reason, the trucks were stopped and thoroughly searched, Beckwith was prepared to seize the Iranians involved in the incident and take them along. Flexibility for Beckwith to delay the assaults by up to an hour was built into the plan in the event that last-minute problems were encountered en route or at the two locations where the hostages were being held (Kyle, 1990: 182-183 and 214; Beckwith, 1983: 254).

46. The last-minute intelligence that had been provided by the CIA to Beckwith in Egypt had resulted in a fairly major adjustment to the size of the two assault teams operating within the compound. Beckwith had originally placed 40 operators on each team, but in Egypt, given that it was now expected that all of the hostages would be found in the chancery, he augmented the team responsible for that assault while reducing the size of the other team (Turner, 1991: 118; Beckwith, 1983: 264).

47. Intelligence analysts predicted that it would take at least ninety minutes for the nearest military units with armoured vehicles to organize and react. The ability of the National Police to react to the assault was more difficult to predict, since the precise locations, responsibilities and capabilities of the various police units in the area were not known. What was known was that the National Police was loyal to Khomeini, generally supportive of the revolution and more militant than the Iranian Army. Given that the National Police had light armoured vehicles and that its reaction time would be considerably shorter than that of the military units stationed in the Tehran area, one of the main reasons that AC-130 gunships were added to the rescue force was to deal with a possible police reaction (Beckwith, 1983: 249-250; NSAD 123).

48. Satellite photographs revealed that, soon after the seizure of the embassy, the students had placed large poles in the athletic field in the centre of the embassy compound. If these could be removed quickly, depending on the space available, one or two of the helicopters would land on the field to take the hostages out while the others landed at the stadium to extract Delta Force. Whereas a minimum of six helicopters were required to take the full rescue force from Desert One to the night one drop-off point, with the lighter fuel loads in the helicopters at this point, only five were required to take the hostages and rescue force to Manzariyeh (Turner, 1991: 71; Kyle, 1990: 184; Beckwith, 1983: 255-256).

49. If the information that all of the hostages were in the chancery proved to be accurate and everything went well, the operation could take as little as 20 minutes. However, Beckwith could not afford to rely too heavily on this last-minute input and, while assigning more troops to the ninety-room Chancery in order to shorten the time needed to rescue the hostages if the information proved to be correct, he remained wary that it might not be and thus limited his modifications to the plan at this point (Turner, 1991: 118; Kyle, 1990: 216 and 229; Beckwith, 1983: 264-265).

50. It is not clear from the available record whether the helicopters would have been destroyed at Manzariyeh. Kyle suggests that the destruction of the helicopters was part of the plan, but he is not sure (Kyle, 1990: 184). Similarly, there is some uncertainty with respect to the rescue force's intention once it had left the embassy area. Beckwith claims that once the helicopter evacuation of the area was complete, the plan called for the AC-130 gunships to destroy the

buildings. It is probable, however, that the president's concern about avoiding unnecessary bloodshed, which culminated in his decision not to allow "concurrent attacks on other targets" forced Vaught to eliminate this part of the plan. Since the president made this decision on April 23, the day before the mission was to be launched, it is possible that Beckwith was not informed of this last-minute change; or it may be that he simply chose not to acknowledge it in his memoirs (Beckwith, 1983: 250).

51. Since early January, the JTF had been creating an "operational footprint" in the area so that the deployments required for Operation Eagle Claw would not appear to be abnormal. The flow pattern of the actual deployment plan was also designed to make it as difficult as possible to follow aircraft movements. The departure of three MC-130s from Wadi Kena to move to Masirah was, for example, coordinated with the arrival in Wadi Kena of three more MC-130s from Germany so that it would look like three aircraft had made a local flight (Kyle, 1990: 202-214).

52. The infiltration of special forces agents proved to be valuable. As a result of their reconnaissance efforts during the 21-24 April period, the hideout for the assault force was moved a short distance to a better location, plans were made to remove some light poles at the soccer stadium before the helicopters were called in and a ditch that had been dug in front of the warehouse where the vehicles were stored was filled in adequately to allow the trucks to pass (Kyle, 1990: 214-215).

53. This information was passed to Vaught and Beckwith while they were in Wadi Kena. According to Turner, the information was obtained from a Pakistani cook at the embassy who had left Tehran on 23 April on the same flight as one of his CIA officers (Turner, 1991: 118). It is very likely, however, that this was a cover story used to protect an Iranian who was working with the CIA and had gained access to the hostages (Kyle, 1990: 216; Kyle interview). Turner states in his account that the information provided was that the hostages were being held at two locations, the chancery and ambassador's residence (Turner, 1991: 118), but it is clear from the record that the hostages were all being held in the chancery and that this information was passed to the JTF (Kyle, 1990: 216; Beckwith, 1983: 264; Beckwith interview; NSAD 97). The JTF also knew the precise location in the Foreign Ministry building where the hostages were held (NSAD 39 and 136).

54. In addition to the technical experts from Sikorski, the crews brought new parts for the two helicopters that had been the most problematic. By their third flight off the *Nimitz*, the JTF pilots believed that the helicopters "were in as good a condition as any they had flown" (Kyle, 1990: 217).

55. For simplicity, all times used here are local times in Iran. Local times in Masirah and Wadi Kena were a half hour earlier and in Washington were nine and a half hours earlier.

56. Based on the assessment of the helicopter force commander who flew near the Iranian coast on 21 April and concluded that there would be enough darkness to mask the penetration of Iranian airspace by this time, the launch times were moved up by 50 minutes from those previously planned, providing more flexibility to get the assault force to its hideout before dawn (Kyle, 1990: 227). The helicopter force commander, Marine Colonel Chuck Pitman, flew aboard helicopter number five. The flight leader, Lieutenant Colonel Ed Seiffert, was responsible to Pitman for the execution of the mission but all tactical decisions in the air were the responsibility of Seiffert. As it turned out, Pitman's helicopter turned around prior to Desert One and so Seiffert had complete authority over the helicopter force at that point.

57. An aerial refuelling exercise with Navy fighters from the *Nimitz*, which conformed with the previously-established pattern of exercises in the area routinely monitored by the Soviets, was conducted at the time of the launch to divert attention. Meanwhile, the JTF Headquarters at Wadi Kena kept a close watch on signals intelligence from Iran. It was

initially concerned about a message from a gendarmerie post near the southeastern coast of Iran which reported seeing two C-130 aircraft with no lights on flying eastward towards Chah Bahar and was relieved when, shortly thereafter, the Iranians concluded that the C-130s must be the ones that had been operating in the Chah Bahar area earlier that day (which may very well have been the case). As Kyle notes in his memoirs, "It was definitely to our advantage that Iran had C-130s and H-53s, since from the ground no one could tell theirs from ours." To ensure that this was true in the case of the helicopters, the RH-53Ds were painted in the desert brown and tan colour scheme of the Iranian H-53s (Kyle, 1990: 217, 228, 247-248).

58. The person assigned to send the message had difficulty coding it properly and elected not to send it uncoded. This was a serious error in judgment because an uncoded message could have been sent on the SATCOM system with very little risk. Had the helicopter flight leader received a warning about the low visibility condition ahead, he might have been better prepared to deal with it. Part of the problem was that the SATCOM technology being used was extremely new so the JTF did not have access to it until just prior to the mission and therefore was not as familiar with it as it should have been. In any case, not getting the message out was a serious error which meant that the suspended dust came as a complete surprise to the helicopters. In his account of this, although his supporting cast let him down, Kyle accepts responsibility for the error as "a lick on me" (Kyle, 249-252; Pustay interview).

59. Only helicopters number one and five had SATCOM radios on board. The helicopters used flashlight signals to communicate within the formation. To communicate with helicopters number six and eight once they had broken formation, the flight leader would have had to use his regular radio, which would have carried a greater risk of detection. Along with other pieces of equipment that had been considered non-essential, the secure radios had been removed from the helicopters which meant that any Iranian listening posts which intercepted radio transmissions between helicopters would have heard the complete, unencrypted voice transmission and might have been able to deduce that a US operation in Iran was under way (Kyle, 1990: 217 and 329-332). As will be discussed in the next chapter, the risks of such detection in this desert area were low and, in retrospect, the helicopter flight leader was too reluctant to use his radio. This was especially true when more serious problems were encountered later in the flight. These problems will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

60. The lead MC-130 landed at Desert One shortly after Seiffert landed between the two areas of suspended dust (Kyle, 1990: 255-260). Once the advance party landed and began to prepare the site at Desert One, even in the absence of the problems with vehicle traffic that will be described shortly, it was quite possible that signs of the activities at Desert One would be discovered before the rescue force could return for another attempt. As it turned out, the vehicle incidents made discovery virtually certain.

61. The only other helicopter with a satellite communications radio on board, number five, did not receive these messages because it was not functioning properly (Kyle, 1990: 269-271). When Seiffert turned around, he should have made a short radio call to keep the formation together and to maintain discipline. This poor exercise of command and control will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

62. The main formation was still at about 200 feet. When he re-entered the second area of suspended dust, Seiffert increased the altitude of his two-ship formation to 500-1000 feet where the conditions were somewhat better; however, at several points the dust was so thick that the two aircraft lost sight of each other and at one point conducted an emergency climb to 10,000 feet. The C-130 formation, which flew at about 1000 feet, experienced visibilities that were never less than one mile (Kyle, 1990: 265-266 and 277).

63. The plan called for Kyle to establish contact with Vaught using the Delta Force SATCOM radio right from the outset. By mistake, however, this radio was loaded onto another MC-130. Since the SATCOM radio aboard the lead MC-130 was damaged during the landing at Desert One, Kyle was left without an efficient radio link to Vaught until the Delta Force SATCOM equipment arrived an hour later. His link to the JTF Headquarters in Wadi Kena for the first hour was with a High Frequency (HF) radio, which meant that only short, coded messages could be passed. The preparations for the arrival of the other C-130s and helicopters included setting up a portable navigation aid to assist during the final stages of their flight (TACAN) and lights for the other landing area on the north side of the road (Kyle, 1990: 261-264).

64. While Kyle was the on-scene commander, he clearly relied heavily on Beckwith's assessment of the situation. Kyle recalls thinking that "everything had gone to hell in a handbasket" until Beckwith convinced him that the situation was still under control. Beckwith thought that there was a good chance that the gasoline trucks had been carrying some sort of contraband (thus the "moonshine tactic" of having an escape vehicle following closely behind) and would therefore not report the incident. He considered it unlikely that the occupants of either vehicle had seen the C-130, the bus or anything else at Desert One and therefore would know only that they had been ambushed. Based on these considerations, Kyle decided to continue the operation and to place his faith in the ability of the JTF Headquarters to determine, by means of its ongoing, real-time signals intelligence effort, whether the incident would result in the compromise and therefore the cancellation of the operation (Kyle, 1990: 262-263; Beckwith, 1982: 269-270).

65. KC-135 tankers flying out of Diego Garcia were already in the area participating in the aerial refuelling exercise but did not have sufficient fuel to hold for the C-130s, so fresh tankers were scrambled out of Wadi Kena and sent through Saudi airspace to the southeastern coast of Iran (Kyle, 1990: 228 and 278). The engines on the C-130s were kept running in order to avoid the risk that engines might not restart if they were shut down (Ryan, 1985: 81-83).

66. Had the departure time not been moved forward by 50 minutes, the JTF would already have compromised its ability to complete the insertion phase under cover of darkness since the hours of total darkness on this date were just sufficient for the length of the mission with very little flexibility. Moving the departure time forward had resulted in some discomfort for the crew of the lead MC-130 which was not totally masked by darkness while it was over the Gulf of Oman, but the change ultimately gave the JTF far more flexibility to deal with any delays later on. To arrive in total darkness, the helicopters had to reach their hideouts by 4:46 AM. With the delays that had occurred, Kyle calculated they could just manage to reach the helicopter hideout by that time (Kyle, 227 and 238-239; NSAD 127).

67. Each helicopter took about 40 minutes to refuel. In light of late and staggered arrival of the helicopters and his concern that daylight would approach before the helicopters reached their hide site, Vaught pressed Kyle on the possibility of sending the first four helicopters onwards and following with the other two once they were refuelled. Concluding that "Separating the helos again after they had finally gotten together seemed like a bad idea to me," Kyle resisted the suggestion and the helicopters were kept together as a group (Kyle, 1990: 277-282).

68. Helicopter number five, which had been steering a course back towards the Nimitz for about an hour and a half at this point, tried to inform JTF Headquarters and the Nimitz of its problem on its SATCOM radio but was not able to establish contact. It eventually contacted the Nimitz on its high frequency (HF) radio, and the Nimitz relayed the message to Kyle and Vaught on the SATCOM network (Kyle, 1990: 280).

69. Seiffert did not know that helicopter number two had shut down because it had been marshalled to the south side of the road for refuelling, while Seiffert's own helicopter (number one) had been directed to the north side. Kyle did not know because, during the first 20 minutes following the arrival of numbers one and two, his attention was focused on the north side of the road where he went to talk to Seiffert and to make a call to JTF Headquarters from one of the EC-130s with a SATCOM radio (the Delta Force operator had packed up the SATCOM radio at the command post to board one of the helicopters for the second leg of the trip). The darkness, noise and blowing sand hid what might have been obvious under normal circumstances: that one of the helicopters had shut down and its crew was investigating some sort of mechanical problem (Kyle, 1990: 285-287).

70. For a few moments, Brzezinski was tempted to push harder than he did on the issue and try to convince the president "to go in a daring single stroke for the big prize, to take the historic chance." In the end, he decided that he would press for continuation of the mission with five helicopters only if Beckwith was prepared to do this and so he did not go beyond pushing the president to ask for the opinion of the field commander (Brzezinski, 1983: 498). As part of his initial briefing to Jones on the situation, Vaught had informed him that "all commanders at the refuelling site recommend we extract the force" (NSAD 6). Jones probably did not brief Brown on this detail, which meant that Brown was not able to deal with this input from Brzezinski when he raised it, but Jones provided Brown with this information before the subsequent call from the president.

71. In his memoirs, Brzezinski, who was the only one with the president at the time of the decision to abort, sensed the profound disappointment of the president. He recalls that, after the president had hung up the telephone, neither of them spoke and the president "put his head down on top of his desk, cradling it in his arms" (Brzezinski, 1983: 498).

72. The fuel load of this particular aircraft was well below that of the other C-130s and had already reached the point where the KC-135 tanker aircraft may have had to enter Iranian airspace to refuel it, a situation which Kyle wanted to avoid. The refuelling plan for Desert One called for two EC-130s to refuel three helicopters and one EC-130 to refuel two helicopters. Since three helicopters were already refuelling from one EC-130 by the time it was known that only six helicopters would make it to Desert One, adjustments were not made to spread the refuelling task evenly (two helicopters for each EC-130). This left two EC-130s to refuel just three helicopters, allowing them to pump some of the fuel they had brought in for the helicopters into their own tanks when the unexpected delays occurred. The MC-130 also had some bladder fuel on board which had been brought as spare fuel in case problems with any of the EC-130s were encountered, so it was able to pump this fuel into its own tanks as well (Kyle, 1990: 284-287).

73. Helicopter number four still needed more fuel to make it back to the Nimitz, so the plan was to move numbers three and four to the northeast until the EC-130 had departed the area and then to bring them back in behind another EC-130 so that number four could get the extra fuel it needed (Kyle, 1990: 294-295).

74. Vaught discussed Kyle's request for an air strike with Jones. Both believed that an air strike was not worth the risk since even one directed at the helicopters could escalate the tensions with Iran and increase the risk of harm to the hostages, particularly if some Iranians were around the helicopters at the time. Jones later spoke with the president who, commenting that "we'll charge them for the helicopters later," readily agreed with Jones's recommendation (Kyle, 1990: 303; NSAD 6). The first indication that the Iranian authorities knew that there had been an incident at Desert One came about the time the C-130s were landing back in Masirah (Turner, 1991: 122). Given the release of the bus passengers and the accident and abandoned equipment at Desert

One, it was inevitable that the news that some sort of US operation had taken place in Iran would reach Tehran that morning.

75. Turner initially fought hard to delay the US announcement of the failed operation to give these people some time to take the necessary steps to ensure their safety and get out of Iran. However, once it was clear that the Iranian authorities knew of an incident at Desert One, Turner reluctantly agreed to an announcement. All US personnel in Iran involved in the rescue attempt were eventually able to leave without being discovered by the authorities (Turner, 1991: 122-124).

CHAPTER SEVEN - POLITICAL PROCESS EXPLANATIONS

At the outset of this study, in Chapter 1, it was stated that the rigorous application of the political process model to the case of the hostage rescue attempt would result in a specific interpretation of events. It was pointed out that this study would argue that the rescue decision is best explained as the product of a number of specific factors including ones related to the president's changing image of the international system, his personal style of leadership and the process that he set in place to deal with the hostage issue; ones related to the political context in which the decision took place, such as the collapse of the negotiations and the growing pressures on the president to "do something;" and ones related to military-operational considerations such as the closing window of opportunity for implementing the rescue plan due to the rapidly decreasing hours of darkness each night in Iran. It was also pointed out that this study would argue that the outcome is also best explained in terms of a number of specific factors, some operant primarily at the military-operational level of decision-making, such as the way that military units were chosen and prepared for the mission, and others operant primarily at the political level of decision making, such as the geographical restrictions placed on the military planners. Further, it was suggested that the study would make a unique contribution to our understanding of this particular historical event by highlighting the ways in which decision making at the political level and decision making at the military-operational level touched and influenced each other to produce both the decision and the outcome. In the case of the outcome, it was suggested that the study would allow us to move beyond existing explanations by highlighting an aspect which has largely been ignored in the literature to date, the way in which decision making at the military-operational level was influenced by decision making at the political level, ultimately determining the specific shape of the rescue plan and limiting its prospects for success.¹

It is now time to develop the explanations which will make this case. The narratives in Chapters 5 and 6 opened up the black box of the decision-making process to examine the decision and the failure; but these narratives essentially explained how the rescue decision was taken and how the operation failed. What remains to be done now is to explain why the decision was taken to launch the rescue operation and why the operation ended in total failure at Desert One. The final stage of the task, in

other words, is to complete the application of the political process model by identifying the key factors which contributed to the decision and the failure, assessing their impact on events and developing explanations which take these factors into account. Some of the most important factors which will contribute to these explanations are already apparent from the analysis in Chapters 5 and 6, but these need to be clearly articulated and their impact assessed. Other factors related to some issues and themes developed in Chapters 3 to 6, although perhaps of less obvious relevance, are equally important and these too need to be identified and assessed. Finally, these factors need to be carefully integrated into succinct but comprehensive explanations for the decision and the outcome.

This chapter will thus attempt to answer the two fundamental questions posed at the beginning of the study: why did the president decide to launch a rescue operation and why did that operation fail? Why, in other words, did the administration move so decisively away from its strategy of negotiations and pressure and attempt to solve the hostage crisis by using a military raid? To what extent, for example, was it the result of purely political calculations and to what extent were the president and his key advisers misled by overly optimistic military commanders? And what accounts for the total failure of the operation? Was it the result of poor execution or bad luck? Was the mission predestined to fail right from the start? Does responsibility for the failure rest solely with the military commanders involved in the planning and execution of the mission or is there more to it than this?

Answers to these key questions and to the host of related but more specific questions raised in Chapter 2 will be provided in this chapter.² Having examined both the overall political context and the US-Iran policy context and having pulled the political process "conceptual net" through the decision-making process related to Operation Eagle Claw, we are now in a position to make judgments about which factors were most important as the rescue option was developed, considered, chosen and implemented. We are also in a position to make some final judgments about the specific impact of these factors on the course of events and, by doing this, to arrive at explanations for the decision and the outcome which take these factors into account.

This chapter will thus take the final and most direct step in the application of the political process model to the case of the hostage rescue attempt: synthesizing the analysis in the previous chapters into actual explanations. To do this in the case of the decision to attempt

the rescue, the actual decision will be explained as the product of the activities and inputs of the senior decision makers discussed in earlier chapters. However, consistent with one of the main advantages of the political process model, the focus will be very sharp on the one person who actually took the decision, the president, and therefore on the specific factors which contributed to the decision as it was played out through him, including factors which were influenced by decision-making at the military-operational level. In the case of the operation, the outcome will be explained as the product of activities at the military-operational level. The main focus will be on the organization which actually performed the mission, the JTF, and therefore on specific factors which contributed to the failure in Iran, including factors related to the way in which the operation was shaped during the planning stage by decision-making at the political level.¹

It is important to understand that the analysis to this point has certainly not been simply a neutral observation of "the facts." On the contrary, the analysis in Chapters 3 to 6 has been informed by the political process model which tells us what "facts" to look for and the foundation for a specific interpretation has therefore already been laid. Indeed, the whole purpose of the broader analysis in Chapters 3 and 4 and the more specific historical account of the hostage crisis and the development and consideration of the rescue option in Chapters 5 and 6 was to open up the black box of the decision-making process in order to highlight the key issues and themes relevant to the development of political process explanations. The explanations which follow will take into account the overall political context presented in Chapter 3 and the US-Iran policy context presented in Chapter 4. They will also take into account the specific ways, highlighted in Chapters 5 and 6, in which the activities of organizations and key decision makers impacted on the situation during the period between the seizure of the embassy and the failure at Desert One. Most significantly in terms of the contribution of this study to the literature on the rescue attempt, the explanation for the decision will highlight the way in which decision making at the military-operational level influenced decision making at the political level, ultimately culminating in the president's decision to launch the mission; and the explanation for the failure will highlight the way in which decision making at the military-operational level was influenced by decision making at the political level, ultimately determining the shape of the mission and limiting its prospects for success. In short, the key

objective of this study will be met in this chapter by developing political process explanations for the rescue decision and outcome which will focus on the entire political and military-operational decision-making process. These explanations will be followed by some critical comments about what has and has not been accomplished in this study.

The Rescue Decision: A Political Process Explanation

Having looked closely at the way in which the decision to launch the rescue mission was taken, it is clear that no single factor can be isolated to account for the president's decision. On the contrary, careful examination of the evidence points to a number of significant factors, some of which may already be obvious to the reader, that together pushed Carter, arguably a president with a stronger visceral reluctance to use military force than most, into taking the decision to launch the rescue mission: the complete collapse of the negotiations; his strong personal investment in the hostage issue and intense desire to find a way to bring the hostages home; his mounting concerns for the safety of the hostages; rising pressures to "do something," including mounting political pressures, which added to his sense of frustration and impatience; his decreasing faith in the ability of the State Department to find a solution to the hostage crisis; his increasing sympathy for Brzezinski's view that continuation of the stalemate was unacceptable in terms of its effects on broader US interests; the strengthening consensus of his key advisers in favour of the rescue mission; his personal assessment that the rescue option was the only acceptable military option and had a reasonable chance of success; his willingness to accept some risks to try to put an end to the crisis; and the closing window of opportunity for launching the mission.⁴

The evidence also shows that the dynamics surrounding the final decision-making process were entirely consistent with the usual dynamics of foreign policy decision making during this period. No extraordinary effort was made to pressure the president into making a decision with which he was uncomfortable. Indeed, the president was clearly in charge, standing confidently at the focal point of the final decision-making process and slowly strengthening his resolve to launch the rescue operation. Although Brzezinski clearly played a key role in developing and advocating the rescue option and used the full range of process tools at his disposal to place the option on the president's agenda and to push him towards a final decision, the process was one which was consistent

with the broader foreign policy decision-making dynamics of this period, dynamics with which the president was completely comfortable. The evidence also shows that groupthink took place in the military planning group but was not a major factor in the decision and no extraordinary effort was made to manipulate the process to exclude Vance from the key 11 April NSC meeting, although his absence made the final decision-making process more awkward and difficult for everyone and his fundamental disagreement with the decision ultimately resulted in his resignation.

One of the key aspects of the decision-making context in which the rescue decision took place was that the negotiating effort had completely collapsed. For over five months, the administration remained firmly committed to the strategy it had adopted at the outset of applying economic and political pressure on Iran while, at the same time, making every effort to negotiate a solution. As long as a viable negotiating track was open, the administration even demonstrated a willingness to suspend efforts to find ways to increase the pressure and took no real interest in military solutions. Thus, while contingency planning continued to take place, there was virtually no serious high-level discussion about either imposing further sanctions or taking military action against Iran during the entire period of negotiations through the Bourguet-Villalon channel from mid-January to mid-March. The collapse of this effort spurred a new round of high-level discussion about possible ways to increase the pressure on Iran and about possible military action but, in light of Bani-Sadr's promise to transfer the hostages to the custody of the government by the end of March, the president deferred consideration of additional actions to see if Bani-Sadr could deliver on his promise. It was only when Khomeini vetoed the transfer on 6 April that the president was willing to take further action against Iran.

It is clear from the record that Carter's strong preference was for a negotiated settlement. Indeed, on several occasions, he explicitly stated his strong desire to avoid military action. Even at the key meeting of the NSC on 22 March, which took place in the aftermath of the collapse of the scenario negotiated through the Bourguet-Villalon channel and at which the rescue plan was briefed to him for the first time, the president made it clear that he continued to oppose any form of military action, including a rescue operation, unless the hostages were harmed or such harm was imminent. Khomeini's veto of the transfer of the hostages was a decisive turning point. Whatever faith the president had that the administration could negotiate the release of the hostages with Bani-Sadr

and Ghotbzadeh completely evaporated in face of the obvious reality that these two secular leaders did not have the authority to deliver on their end of an agreement. At this juncture, the president's focus thus quickly shifted back to the search for effective ways to increase the pressure on Iran and, for the first time for several months, to the possibility of taking some type of military action. In short, the collapse of the efforts to negotiate the return of the hostages followed closely by the failure of the government to take custody of them, changed the decision-making context rather abruptly, setting the stage for serious consideration of the rescue option.

Another factor which set the stage for a rapid shift in the administration's basic approach at this point was that the president had made an enormous personal investment in the hostage issue during the preceding five months. From the early days of the crisis, in light of his decision to let the shah in the US and consistent with his philosophy that the role of the president was to act as the trustee of the national and public interest, he made it clear that he accepted personal responsibility for the fate of the hostages; and, consistent with his preference for deep personal involvement in the select areas he cared most about, he immediately raised the issue of the safe return of the hostages to the top of his list of priorities. It became one of his issues and he brought his issue-oriented problem-solving style of leadership to bear with intense energy and personal commitment, energizing the administration with his determination to find an early solution. Over the course of the next five months, he was intimately involved in almost every twist and turn in the search for ways to bring pressure to bear on the revolutionary leadership of Iran and in the efforts to reach a negotiated settlement. As Turner notes in his memoirs, it was clear from the outset that Carter wanted to assume "the role of number one action officer" (Turner, 1991: 51). Moreover, he personalized the issue by developing a close relationship with the families of the hostages. The hostages were never far from his thoughts. He constantly searched for new ideas about how to ensure their safety and secure their release and he prodded his advisers to do the same. From the early days of the crisis right through to the final decision-making process leading to the rescue attempt, the hostage issue was one which consumed his time and intellectual energy in a way that few issues have ever consumed a US president. Throughout these efforts, he never wavered from his clear sense of purpose: the hostages had to be brought home as quickly as possible.

Given this level of involvement, it was inevitable that Carter would go through periods of emotional turmoil as he rode the roller coaster of hopes and frustrations involved with the day-to-day management of the issue. As the efforts to negotiate a solution went through various stages, his life, as Rosalyn Carter points out, "became a seesaw of emotions as scheme after scheme fell apart" (R. Carter, 1984: 319). By the time that the negotiations collapsed completely in early April, he was still a very engaged problem solver and, with no solution in sight, he was clearly more angry, frustrated and impatient at the lack of progress than he had been for the previous five months. He was certainly not ready to accept the notion that his administration would simply have to wait patiently for the revolutionary leadership in Iran to reopen negotiations once it had decided that the hostages were no longer required for its own purposes.

With hindsight, it is clear that Carter's extremely high level of personal involvement in the day-to-day management of the hostage crisis is one of the reasons that the administration felt such pressure to find an early solution. Given the failure to bring the hostages home for 444 days, it is easy to be critical of this approach. Indeed, since he left office, even Carter has had some second thoughts about whether his level of personal involvement served the objective - bringing the hostages home - that he wanted so desperately to achieve (Cogan, 1990: 427). Had it been possible for him to place the issue lower on his personal agenda, it is quite possible, especially given his visceral aversion to the use of military force, that Carter would not have altered so radically the administration's approach to solving the hostage problem in early April. That said, it is important to recognize what Donovan later called "the sheer novelty of the situation" (Donovan, 1985: 174). Given the serious threat to American lives and the dramatic affront to US foreign policy that the hostage crisis represented and given way that the media immediately focused national attention on events in Tehran, it would have been difficult for any president to have avoided a high level of personal involvement in handling the issue. For Carter, however, it was impossible since anything less than an extraordinary level of personal investment would have been completely at odds with his whole trustee philosophy and his issue-oriented, problem-solving style of leadership. His instincts were never more obvious; his initial reaction and subsequent involvement were vintage Jimmy Carter.

Carter's intimate personal involvement was thus still one of the essential elements of the decision-making context in early April. By this time, finding a solution to the hostage crisis had become much more than an important issue facing his administration; in light of the way in which he had personally supervised and energized every aspect of the implementation of the strategy of pressure and negotiations over the previous five months, it had become an intense personal challenge and commitment. Simply put, given this extraordinary level of involvement on his part, the failure of the strategy of pressure and negotiations to bring the hostages home after five months had frustrated him to the point where he was ready to consider seriously any method which might produce the only result he found acceptable: the safe and early return of the hostages.

Another factor that contributed to Carter's sense of urgency was that his concerns about the safety of the hostages increased as a result of Bani-Sadr's inability to deliver on his promise to transfer the hostages to the custody of the government. Having never understood the complex forces at work in Iran, Carter had considered the holding of the hostages to be essentially non-rational in nature, "an inhumane act committed by a bunch of radicals and condoned by a crazy old man" (Jordan, 1982: 99).⁵ He had placed his hopes for a negotiated solution on the secular members of the revolutionary leadership, such as Bani-Sadr and Ghotbzadeh, because he believed that they represented the only rational forces left in Iranian society. With the collapse of the negotiations, however, he concluded that these secular leaders simply did not have the authority necessary to deal with issues related to the hostage situation and that, therefore, there was "no government in Iran except for the fanatics" (Carter, 1982: 498). In this context, the renewed threats to the safety of the hostages made by both the students, who threatened to kill the hostages if Iraq invaded Iran, and some militant clerics in early April, who called for the hostages to be tried in retaliation for the shah's move to Egypt, convinced the president that the situation was extremely volatile and dangerous, and therefore increased his motivation to find an effective formula to secure their release as soon as possible. On 10 April, the day before the key NSC meeting at which he first indicated his desire to go ahead with the rescue operation, he expressed concern in his diary about the "crazy threats to kill the American hostages" and this consideration was a major factor in leading him to the

conclusion that the US "could no longer afford to depend on diplomacy" (Carter, 1982: 506; NSAD 39; Turner, Newsom and Powell interviews).

The extent to which the hostages were really at risk at this point is, of course, an open question. There had been all sorts of threats made at various points during the previous five months and none of the other key decision makers shared the president's heightened concern in this area (Vance, Brzezinski and Turner interviews). Carter had never really understood the dynamics of the revolution taking place in Iran and had placed the same faith in Bani-Sadr and Ghotbzadeh that he had placed in Bazargan and Yazdi, while the real political centre of gravity continued its inexorable shift towards Khomeini. The president's increased level of concern about the safety of the hostages at this key juncture may therefore have been as rooted in the realization that came with the failure of Bani-Sadr to deliver on his promise to take custody of the hostages, namely that the secular leaders were incapable of taking charge of events in Tehran, as it was in the specific threats being made at the time. Having placed his hopes to this point in Bani-Sadr and Ghotbzadeh, this realization was a startling one which provided him with a whole new perspective on the "crazy threats" being made to the hostages. The president's concerns about the physical safety of the hostages under the existing conditions of captivity thus increased dramatically shortly before the NSC meeting of 22 March, adding to his sense of urgency that a way had to be found to bring them home quickly.

Growing pressures on the administration from the outside to "do something" to bring the hostage crisis to an end added to the president's sense of frustration and impatience. From the outset, the media kept the hostage crisis in full public view with sensational coverage which included powerful images of daily events in Iran. As the crisis dragged on, the media coverage turned more and more critical. By early April, trenchant criticisms that the administration's policy of restraint and the president's "Rose Garden strategy" were completely ineffective and inappropriate were being heard with increasing regularity and force. Concluding that the existing policy was now playing into the hands of Iran and humiliating the US, an increasing number of journalists were arguing that the administration needed to take a whole new approach. To make matters worse, an increasing number of them were also making forceful allegations that the administration was attempting to exploit the crisis to enhance the president's prospects for reelection. Meanwhile, the public support that the president had enjoyed for his handling of crisis

during the first few months had all but disappeared. By early April, his approval rating had fallen to a level that was only slightly above the extremely low ratings he had got throughout most of 1979 and polls specifically focused on the hostage crisis showed that a growing number of Americans were unhappy with the status quo and wanted the administration to take stronger action against Iran (Vandenbroucke, 1993: 121; Rozell, 1989: 162-164; Turner, 1991: 82 and 106). Even within the administration itself, there was widespread evidence of growing impatience and frustration with the cautious and restrained approach that had been taken during the previous five months (Sick, 1985: 280-281).

In this context, there is no doubt that the president was under enormous political pressure. He was, after all, an incumbent president who was being forced to deal with a serious challenge to his renomination for president from within his own party. His primary losses in New York and Connecticut in late March and widespread criticism that his early morning meeting with the press on 1 April, during which he announced that he would delay the imposition of sanctions on Iran in light of the "positive step" that Bani-Sadr had taken towards the transfer of the hostages to the custody of the Revolutionary Council, was politically motivated to coincide with the opening of polls at the Wisconsin primary and Kansas caucuses certainly added to this political pressure. Moreover, even the families of the hostages, to which the president had given much time and sympathy, were beginning to question his judgment.⁶

Despite their ex post facto disavowals that domestic politics played any role at all, Carter and his closest political advisers were keenly aware of these harsh political realities. They took considerable care not to explicitly discuss the relationship between the hostage crisis and domestic politics in foreign policy decision-making fora (Brzezinski, 1983: 490; Turner, 1991: 82 and 106; Cogan, 1990: 426-427) but, at the same time, they were certainly sensitive to the political implications of the actions under discussion at various points. Sick, for example, notes that, on the margins of the meeting which he attended in the Oval Office on the morning of 1 April, "President Carter huddled briefly with Powell and Jordan to consider the political implications of the decision to forgo sanctions in response to Bani-Sadr's speech" (Sick, 1985: 277). Moreover, all of those involved in the final decision-making process leading up to the rescue decision understood that huge political risks were involved in this particular course of action. Brown, for example, speculated that if the rescue mission failed, it would mean "the end of the Carter

presidency" while Jordan, when he was first briefed on the details of the rescue plan on 24 March, instinctively recognized that "It will be a great coup for the Pentagon if the mission succeeds - and Carter's ass if it fails" (Powell, 1984: 228; Jordan, 1982: 229).

It is, of course, not possible to establish the extent to which these political pressures influenced the president's decision to launch the rescue attempt since it is not possible to isolate this variable and determine whether he would have made the same decision in the absence of political pressures. Certainly Carter's claim in the immediate aftermath of the operation that "the political connotations of the holding of our hostages is not a factor for me" is not credible (New York Times, 30 April 1980: A16); at the same time, to assert that the decision to rescue the hostages was largely a political one is to misunderstand the president and his overall philosophy and style of leadership. This was a president whose trustee philosophy was deeply engrained and who frequently demonstrated his reluctance to bend to immediate political pressures. Moreover, more than anything else, he was a president who saw the hostage crisis as a problem to be solved and, by the time that he finally gave it serious consideration, the rescue option represented the only hope of a solution within what he considered to be an acceptable time frame. The political pressures arising from the realities of an election year were an inextricable part of the decision-making context and undoubtedly added to his sense of frustration and impatience, but they certainly did not constitute decisive pressures as some analysts have suggested.⁷

Another major factor in the decision-making process was Carter's diminishing confidence in the State Department.⁸ He had always been frustrated with what he considered to be the inertia and lack of imagination of this "sprawling Washington and worldwide bureaucracy" (Carter, 1982: 53) and, even before the hostage crisis began, the centre of gravity in foreign policy decision making was already shifting slowly towards the White House. With the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, however, a dramatic quantum shift took place. To this point, despite the president's growing frustrations with the ability of the State Department to produce the results he demanded, Vance's influence was still the dominant one. Afghanistan weakened Vance's position enormously. Simply put, Carter's volte face towards a more confrontational approach to East-West relations was a decisive repudiation of the policy of dialogue, diplomacy, patient negotiation and accommodation to which Vance was still totally committed and an equally decisive embrace of the harder-line, more

confrontational approach to foreign policy problems advocated by Brzezinski. In this context, new initiatives by the State Department such as the early 1980 effort to revive detente were doomed to failure from the outset. As Sick observes, Afghanistan "was a body blow to Vance, and he seemed to age visibly under the impact. It marked the end, at least for some time, of the policies to which he had devoted his professional life" (Sick, 1985: 291-292). Other foreign policy problems that faced the president during the first few months of 1980, such as the stalemate in the Middle East peace process and the voting problem on the issue of West Bank settlements in the UN, reinforced the president's growing mistrust of the State Department's ability to manage key issues and thus further reinforced his reliance on the White House for ideas and advice.

The president's experience with the State Department's handling of Iran issues had not been a happy one even before the hostage crisis began. During the final days of the shah's rule and during the brief period under Bakhtiar that followed, he had several disputes with Sullivan and it was only a forceful intervention by Vance that stopped the president from getting Sullivan out of Tehran during this crucial period. Moreover, because he did not fully trust either Sullivan or the State Department to carry out his directives fully, he dispatched Huyser to Iran to open up a separate channel of information and advice and, after receiving a full report from Huyser in Washington six weeks later, called together State Department officials responsible for Iran and sternly told them to support fully his decisions and policy choices with respect to Iran or resign. However, despite this dissatisfaction and his substantive involvement at several points in the decision-making process, such as when he overruled the Sullivan-Vance recommendation to open direct talks with Khomeini, Iran did not become one of his top-priority issues until the seizure of the embassy and in the months immediately preceding the hostage crisis he left the day-to-day management of relations with revolutionary Iran to the State Department. It was in this context that the State Department played a key role in convincing the president, whose instincts told him to do otherwise, to allow the shah to enter the US for medical treatment in late October.

Despite this background, once the hostage crisis began, Carter fully supported the negotiations and pressure strategy recommended by Vance because it corresponded to his own preference for a peaceful resolution of this conflict. Although he pushed Vance to come up with more effective ways to place pressure on Iran, got Jordan involved in the negotiations

and was more open than Vance to discussion about the possible use of military force, it was not until the negotiations completely collapsed in early April that the president seriously reconsidered the basic strategy that had been established during the first few days of the crisis. At this point, the president saw little chance that productive negotiations would be possible for several months and no immediate unilateral options for increasing the pressure. Given his view of the State Department as a bureaucracy with enormous inertia and little imagination, Vance's counsel for continued patience and restraint came as no surprise; but it ran counter to his own desire to examine other ways to solve this problem. Seen in the context of the broader move by the administration away from the politics of accommodation and compromise, it was inevitable that the president, despite his visceral aversion to the use of military force, would look seriously to Brzezinski and others for alternative views on the way to solve this difficult problem. He had lost his faith that Vance's approach to the hostage crisis could produce the results he wanted in an acceptable period of time; and this loss of faith was entirely consistent with and reinforced by the shift in the centre of gravity of the foreign policy decision-making process away from the State Department that had taken place over the previous few months.

Closely related to this, as both cause and effect of the this loss of faith in Vance's approach, Carter began to share Brzezinski's concern that continuation of the stalemate would have a longer-term negative impact on US interests abroad. From the outset, Brzezinski had argued that, in addition to the lives of the hostages, US vital interests and national honour were at stake (Brzezinski, 1983: 480-485). Carter and Vance wanted to find an honourable way to end the crisis too, refusing, for example, to consider seriously meeting Iran's demand for an apology (Moses, 1989). At the same time, their single overriding objective during the first five months of the crisis was the safe return of the hostages. Once the negotiations collapsed in early April, the president began to voice concerns similar to those of Brzezinski, stressing that the honour and reputation of the US were at stake and that the administration "had been disgraced" by the way in which it had "leaned over backward with the Iranians, to the point of being inept." At the key meeting of the NSC on 11 April, he indicated that he now considered Sadat's criticism that the administration's handling of the crisis was having a negative impact on the international standing of the US was valid (Turner, 1991: 105-107; Brzezinski, 1983: 493; Carter, 1982: 507). These broader concerns were

evident in the days leading up to the rescue decision and clearly reinforced the president's resolve to find a way to end the stalemate.

Another important factor in the decision was that the president knew that, with the exception of Vance, his key advisers were solidly behind the rescue option. At the 7 April meeting, the members of the military planning group present, Brzezinski, Brown, Jones and Turner, supported by Mondale, all spoke out in favour of the rescue operation (Turner, 1991: 106). Brzezinski followed up this discussion by sending Sick's memorandum, along with his personal comments, to the president on 10 April. This document, entitled "Getting the Hostages Free," argued the case for launching the rescue operation in a succinct, persuasive and forceful way. It obviously focused the president's mind on the rescue operation. Moreover, it had the effect that Brzezinski had hoped for because the next morning the president asked Brzezinski to convene a meeting of the NSC to make a decision on the rescue option. From the discussion at the 7 April meeting, the president knew where his key national security advisers stood and that, with the exception of Vance, a strong consensus supporting Brzezinski's recommendation to launch the rescue mission had developed (Turner and Jones interviews). It was thus in full knowledge that a consensus in favour of a rescue option now existed and the only dissenting voice would not be present that Carter called the 11 April meeting. He was close to making what he would later describe as "the hardest decision he had ever made" (R. Carter, 1984: 324; Vance, 1983: 409) and this was a highly supportive context in which to make such a decision.

Another factor in both the tentative decision Carter made on 11 April and the subsequent strengthening of his resolve over the next week or so was his conclusion that the rescue operation represented the best military option and had a reasonable chance of success. With respect to other military options, the only options seriously discussed after the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan were mining and naval blockade and the debate about their relative merits focused on which of these actions to close Iran to foreign shipping was more acceptable in terms of the probable response of Iran, the Soviet Union, major allies and other countries in the area. As late as the 7 April meeting, Carter still expressed some willingness to consider direct military action along these lines to increase the economic pressure on Iran, but there was little enthusiasm for either action because of the perceived risks to broader US interests and the hostages (Turner, 1991: 106; Sick, 1985: 288-292;

Brzezinski, 1983: 497). The rescue operation was the clear preference of most of his senior foreign policy advisers at this point and, as he gave the possibility of military action more serious consideration, Carter slowly came to the same conclusion. In essence, during the first ten days of April, he slowly accepted the conclusion reached by the military planning group that the rescue option was the only military one available to the administration (Jones interview).⁹

During this same period, Carter also slowly came to accept the assessment of the military planning group that there was a "reasonably good chance" the rescue operation would succeed. Brzezinski had first reached this conclusion in mid-March, but Jones was still more cautious in his assessment during his first full briefing of the rescue plan to the president at Camp David on 22 March. During the following two weeks, however, once the successful reconnaissance flight into Iran had allowed the JTF to incorporate the use of Desert One into the plan, this significantly increased the confidence that Jones, Turner and Brown had in the plan and, at the 7 April NSC meeting, Jones, supported by the other members of the military planning group, gave a more favourable assessment of the prospects for success (NSAD 116; Jones and Turner interviews). Clearly this increasingly optimistic assessment made an impression on the president. The updates on the planning for the mission and the intelligence situation given by Jones and Turner at the 11 April meeting further raised the president's confidence that the military was adequately prepared to conduct the rescue mission and the briefing given by the JTF on 16 April raised his comfort level to the point where he was convinced that the rescue mission was ready, that it should be launched and that it had an excellent chance of success. As he notes in his memoirs, he was so comfortable with the plan and clear in his resolve at this point that he actually "looked forward to the mission." He was confident, in other words, that the solution to the hostage problem that had eluded him for so long was now within his reach (Carter, 1982: 501-508; Brzezinski, 1983: 489-495; Turner, 1991: 101-114; Sick, 1985: 284-296).

The extent to which all of this was wishful thinking on the part of the president and most of his key advisers is, of course, an important question. Clearly, as pointed out in Chapter 5, bureaucratic momentum had built up behind the rescue operation in DoD and many of those involved in the decision-making process at both the military and political levels believed that, as Beckwith put it, "American needs a win" or, as Brzezinski put it, a successful rescue operation would provide the kind of

"shot in the arm" which the US had "badly needed for twenty years" (Jordan, 1982: 262; Brzezinski, 1983: 496). Picking up on this theme, some analysts, such as Vandembroucke, have argued that wishful thinking on the part of both military planners and senior decision makers so coloured their thinking that they underestimated the risks involved with the operation and were therefore overly optimistic about the prospects for success (Vandembroucke, 1993: 132-143). Vance's opposition to the rescue attempt was, among other things, a direct challenge to the view that the risks had been adequately assessed and, interestingly, in light of the failure of the mission, some of the others involved in the decision making process have conceded that at least some of Vance's concerns may have been valid. Turner, for example, acknowledges that Vance "may have been more right than the rest of us in how to approach this problem" (Turner, 1991: 133) and even Brzezinski, the most energetic advocate of the rescue option, now acknowledges that Vance was justified in having "a higher sense of Murphy's law" about the rescue operation than he had (Brzezinski interview).

That said, there is ample evidence that those involved in the decision-making process, including the president, understood the risks were considerable. On the military side, as acting Chairman of the JCS, Jones had been intimately involved in the Mayaguez rescue attempt and Vaught, Gast, Beckwith and Kyle and many of the other key players in the JTF had been involved in operations which had not gone according to plan. They obviously wanted the mission to succeed and believed that, given reasonably good luck, it would; but collectively they understood that there were many uncertainties and some variables in the equation that could not be controlled once the operation began. The risks, as Jones and Turner correctly point out, were not quantifiable in any meaningful way and the overall assessment therefore necessarily had to be a qualitative one (Jones and Turner interviews). There is no evidence that Jones or the JTF misled either Brzezinski or the president during their briefings; on the contrary, they took great care to point out that there were risks and their characterization of the chances the mission would succeed in rescuing the hostages without large numbers of casualties as "reasonably good" is still defensible in light of the available evidence, even though the mission ended in total failure.¹⁰ In this regard, it is important to understand that an operation with a "reasonably good" chance of success can, by definition, still fail. Carter understood that the mission could fail and he also understood that there would likely be casualties among

the hostages.¹¹ Moreover, if it did nothing else, Vance's forceful arguments against the mission on 15 April brought the risks involved with the rescue operation into clear focus.¹²

Another factor which had an impact on the rescue decision was Carter's willingness to accept risks in his efforts to bring about an end to the hostage crisis. This acceptance of risks was consistent with an aspect of his decision-making style which tends to be overlooked. On several previous occasions, he had proven that he was willing to take risks in pursuit of his foreign policy objectives. As Sick points out in referring to the high-stakes initiatives that led to the Panama Canal treaties and the Camp David Accords, "he almost seemed to court political danger on issues that he felt were important and when he believed he was right" (Sick, 1985: 222); and as Time noted in March 1979, following his successful trip to the Middle East to revive the stalled peace talks between Israel and Egypt, Carter had "taken a tremendous risk and won" in "one of the most startling and swiftly executed diplomatic initiatives in years" (Rozell, 1989: 120). In the case of the hostage crisis, he had already taken some risks in authorizing the escape of the six Americans hiding with Canadian diplomats in Tehran, the reconnaissance mission to Desert One and the entry of Army scouts into Tehran to prepare for the rescue mission. Once he had concluded that it was essential to "do something" in the near term to bring the crisis to an end, given that the risks involved with other forms of military action were much higher, accepting the risks of the rescue mission became a logical necessity.¹³ The issue came down to the kind of assessment of risk versus potential payoff always inherent in military operations such as this and, in the president's mind, the possibility of bringing an end to this particular crisis that was quick, complete and satisfying outweighed what he perceived to be the risks involved. He certainly had no precise way of knowing the statistical probability of success at each stage of the operation, but he did know that risks were involved and he willingly accepted them (JCLD 4, 5, 18, 39, 40, 44, 46, 48 and 49).

A final factor in the decision was the closing window of opportunity for the operation. Unless the operation was launched by the end of April, it would be November before the JTF would again have the combination of hours of darkness and temperatures it needed to implement the two-night plan. The alternative was to stretch the mission to three nights, but the risks of a three-night operation, which had not yet been rehearsed, would be significantly greater. Jones had stressed these time constraints at

the first full briefing of the rescue plan to the president at Camp David on 22 March and they were undoubtedly part of the president's calculus in the days leading up to his decision. By the time that he called the decisive NSC meeting on 11 April, there was almost no flexibility left in terms of timing. Considerable lead time was necessary to implement the forward deployment plan for the mission, so the first available date at this point was already 24 April. Since the commanders needed at least a few days of flexibility to deal with contingencies such as bad weather, the administration already had, in practical terms, reached the point where at least a decision to deploy was needed unless it was prepared to forego the rescue option in the near term.

Clearly then, a close look at the decision-making process which led up to Carter's decision to launch the rescue operation highlights a number of important factors that must be taken into account in developing a comprehensive political process explanation for the decision. No single factor can be isolated to account for this decision. That said, in light of the evidence presented here, the basic explanation is quite simple and can be succinctly expressed. This will be done in the following few paragraphs.

First of all, the president made a highly personal investment in finding an early solution to the crisis, an investment which was rooted in his trustee philosophy about the role of the president and in his hands-on, issue-oriented, problem-solving style of leadership. Given this personal investment and the "Rose Garden strategy" he had adopted from the outset, the complete collapse of the negotiating track in early April was a severe setback. Within days, it became obvious to him that further negotiations would not be possible in the near term, that further unilateral economic actions would not significantly increase the pressure on Iran and that punitive military options still carried great risks. Yet, more than ever, he wanted to find a way to solve this particular problem and, having already made such an enormous personal investment of time and energy in searching for a solution, the prospect of simply waiting until the Iranians were ready to reopen negotiations was unacceptable. Given his recently-acquired, post-Afghanistan mood, he was also becoming increasingly concerned with the broader US interests at stake in any protracted stalemate.

Following the 7 April NSC meeting he was aware that, with the notable exception of Vance, a strong consensus in favour of a rescue operation was building and, given the paucity of alternative courses of

action, the president began to think more seriously about the rescue option. He realized that Vance's opposition would obviously have to be dealt with. Yet he was comfortable with the shift in the centre of gravity of the foreign policy decision-making process towards the White House that had taken place, especially following the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, and was quite willing to consider a course of action that was being advocated by his national security adviser while being vigorously opposed by his secretary of state.

By the time that he received Brzezinski's memorandum on 10 April, the president was becoming receptive to most of the arguments it made in favour of the rescue option. His natural inclination to act rather than to accept Vance's counsel of caution and restraint was reinforced by the significant and growing pressures "to do something" that were being placed on the administration from a wide variety of sources, including the media, political opponents and the general public. The final factors that contributed to the tentative decision to launch the rescue operation that the president took at the 11 April NSC meeting and to the strengthening of his resolve over the course of the next week were his growing concern about the physical safety of the hostages; his acceptance, despite the vigorous challenge mounted by Vance, of the military planning group's assessment that the rescue operation had a "reasonably good chance of success;" his willingness to accept risks in his search for a solution to the hostage crisis; and the need to commit to the operation before the window of opportunity closed at the end of April.

During the final decision-making process which led to the decision to launch the rescue operation, decision making at the military-operational level influenced decision making at the political level. During the early months of the crisis, because the rescue option was not viable in anything but desperate circumstances, there was very little discussion of it beyond the level of the JTF and the military planning group. Except for the periodic attempts by Brzezinski and Turner to get the president to authorize the reconnaissance mission, the status of the rescue mission was not raised at NSC meetings or other meetings with the president and his key political advisers. Since he was clearly focused on the negotiations and pressure track, the president was content to leave the task of supervising the development of the rescue option to Brzezinski.

In late March, this dynamic changed. With the negotiations obviously in trouble and the JTF ready to execute a plan which the

military planning group now believed had a good chance of success, military considerations suddenly became an inextricable part of the decision-making process at the political level. This new dynamic began at Camp David on 22 March when the president was briefed on the rescue plan and gave his authorization for the reconnaissance mission and for the entry of Army scouts into Iran. This was a significant moment because it was the first time that the president had been fully briefed on the development of the rescue option and it placed it squarely on his menu for choice as a possible way to solve the crisis. From that point on, senior decision makers, including the president, began to take seriously the growing "bureaucratic momentum" behind the rescue plan, expressed in the form of confidence by the JTF in its ability to implement it, and to take account of timing considerations in their thinking. The increased confidence in the plan that Jones expressed during the 7 April NSC meeting following the incorporation of the use of Desert One and Oman into the plan was, for example, a key input and his interventions on the timing issue during the meetings of the NSC on 22 March, 7 April and 11 April were important ones which highlighted the need for an early decision if the existing plan was to be implemented before November. Another key intervention was the briefing to the president by the JTF commanders on 16 April during which the president asked many questions and, in his own words, "received satisfactory answers" (Carter, 1982: 507). This briefing was an important one which strengthened the president's resolve to go ahead with the mission. Throughout the period during which the rescue operation was seriously considered and selected, in other words, considerations which were a product of decision making at the military-operational level became an important part of the dialogue at the political level, culminating in the president's decision to launch the operation.

A few final comments related to the decision-making process at the political level are in order. First, no extraordinary effort was made to pressure the president into making the rescue decision. On the contrary, the process which led to the rescue decision was entirely consistent with the usual dynamics of foreign policy decision making in the administration during this period. Brzezinski was clearly leading the advocacy effort with respect to the rescue operation; but Vance's opposition to any form of military action, including a rescue operation, was well understood by everyone, including the president. There was a real choice to be made here, and the president knew it. For a president who saw himself as a

"policy premier," this was a position in which he was completely comfortable: standing at the focal point of the decision-making process and, after receiving "separate streams of advice," making an important decision. This was no aberration; this was the decision-making process, with all its inherent strengths and weaknesses, that had been put in place to accommodate Jimmy Carter's preferred way of making decisions.

Second, Brzezinski played a highly significant roll in the rescue decision. Indeed, by energetically launching the rescue planning effort and then closely supervising its progress over the entire period, he was the main driving force behind the development of the plan. Moreover, once the negotiations failed, frustrated at being "diddled to death" by the Iranians, he took full advantage of his position to place the rescue issue on the NSC agenda and, over the next few weeks, as the confidence of the military planning group increased with the inclusion of Desert One and Oman into the plan as staging bases, he continued to foster the consensus that was building in favour of a rescue operation. At the same time, despite the engagement of the full NSC, including Vance, in the discussion on 22 March, he kept the rescue planning activity highly compartmentalized, leaving Vance, whom he knew still opposed implementation of the plan, completely out of the loop. His efforts to promote more serious consideration of the rescue option culminated in the "Getting the Hostages Free" memo which he sent to the president on 10 April and which obviously played an important role in convincing the president that it was time to call a meeting to make a decision. Equally obviously, Brzezinski chose not to make Vance aware that he was recommending the president "consider seriously reaching a decision on the rescue mission" (Brzezinski, 1983: 492), which meant that Vance was unaware that things might move as quickly as they did when he left for his long weekend on the afternoon of 10 April (Vance interview).

That said, it is important to see Brzezinski's role in the context of some of the issues and themes raised earlier in this study. Brzezinski's use of the full range of the process tools at his disposal, including his unique access to the president, to place the rescue issue on the agenda and to push the president towards a final decision shortly after the negotiations collapsed was entirely consistent with the role that he was playing and the approach he was taking to many issues during this period. In this case, he certainly did not act as a process manager to ensure that the inputs of all senior decision makers, including Vance, were taken into account. On the contrary, he acted as an advocate of the

rescue option, allowing his own goals, values, beliefs and perceptions to govern both his advice and his management of the process. It is important to understand, however, that this approach was one with which the president was completely comfortable; indeed, the way in which the centre of gravity of the foreign policy decision-making process had shifted away from the State Department and towards the White House was largely a result of the president's leadership style, growing frustrations with the State Department and changing beliefs about world politics. He was aware that the views of Brzezinski and Vance were diametrically opposed on the rescue issue, with Vance's natural point of reference being the Pueblo incident and Brzezinski's the Entebbe rescue, and that the decision-making process under him was a highly compartmentalized one, but neither of these issues concerned him much.¹⁴

Third, the compartmentalization of the decision-making process undoubtedly contributed to groupthink within the small, closed military planning group that Brzezinski chaired, but this was not a major factor in the decision. The president authorized the rescue planning at the outset and Brzezinski, assisted by the group, supervised the development of an operational plan. Given the importance of the issue to the president, it was reasonable to have White House involvement in the supervision of the planning and the composition of the group was appropriate since, given the sensitive nature of the issue, there was no reason to include other agencies in the planning process.¹⁵ The result was that a small, closed group supervised the development of the rescue plan, but the key decider, the president, was not involved in that process and one of his two main foreign policy advisers was adamantly opposed to the implementation of it. In addition, the president's closest political advisers, Mondale, Powell and Jordan, were not part of this process either. Thus, at the level of the NSC where the decision had to be taken, groupthink was certainly not one of the central dynamics. The extent to which groupthink by the military planning group impacted the decision itself therefore comes down to an issue of whether the way the rescue mission was presented realistically to the others. If the risks were represented fairly, as it was argued above they were, then the groupthink that took place in the military planning group cannot be held responsible for the president's decision.

Finally, on the specific issue of the 11 April meeting, it appears that no deliberate effort was made to exclude Vance. Vance obviously did not know that a decision on the rescue attempt was about to be made when

he left for Florida after work on 10 April, but neither did anyone else. The problems with the mining and blockade options were discussed at the foreign policy breakfast that took place on the morning of 11 April, but the rescue option was not. The first indication from the president that he was seriously reaching the point where he was ready to make a decision on the rescue option came later in the morning when he asked Brzezinski to call an urgent meeting of the NSC, a meeting that was so impromptu that Jordan had to be recalled to the White House for it as he was heading to the airport for a campaign trip to Atlanta (Jordan, 1982: 250-251). Even Brzezinski, whose responsibility it was to convene NSC meetings and set an agenda, had to ask the president the purpose of the meeting when he was told to call it (Brzezinski, 1983: 492).

This timing of this key meeting does not appear to have been an attempt to orchestrate a decision in Vance's absence. The president had proven on many occasions that he was not reluctant to make decisions when there were disagreements among his principal advisers. When one considers his pattern of decision making during the previous three and a half of his presidency, it is almost inconceivable that Carter considered Vance's absence would be of some help to him in reaching a decision and, since it was very clearly the president himself who asked for this key meeting, it is not possible that Brzezinski was pulling the strings behind the scene. The simple reality is that, after reflecting on Brzezinski's recommendations of the day before and after once again reviewing the other options, including the mining and blockade options in a further discussion with his principal advisers that morning, the president concluded that the time had come to make his decision on the rescue operation. Since Vance was in Florida, the meeting would have to go ahead without him.

Even if Vance had been able to attend the meeting on 11 April and had been able to voice his objections then rather than at the 15 April meeting that was held specifically for that purpose following his return from Florida, it is highly unlikely that the outcome would have been any different.¹⁶ In the end, the president embraced the rescue option because he became convinced that it was the only reasonable course of action left open to him. Vance's disagreement with this assessment was something that had to be dealt with, but it was not something that would sway the president. While Vance never once wavered from his firm belief that the interests of both the hostages and the US would best be served by continuing the policy of caution and restraint, Carter had moved irreconcilably in the opposite direction following the collapse of the

negotiations. He was simply unwilling to wait until the Iranians were willing to negotiate if there was any other avenue towards a solution open to him. Vance's absence from the meeting clearly made the final decision-making process more awkward and difficult, but it was his substantive disagreement with the president over the advisability of launching Operation Eagle Claw that posed the far more serious problem for both Vance and the administration.

The Failure: A Political Process Explanation

Before moving on to a discussion of the specific factors which contributed to the failure of the rescue operation in Iran, it is important to understand that the rescue plan developed by the JTF over the five and a half months leading up to Operation Eagle Claw was a complex one and success depended on the success of each one of three major phases: the insertion, assault and extraction phases. The performance of the helicopter force was critical to success during both the insertion and extraction phases and the operation failed during the insertion phase when there was an insufficient number of helicopters to go on from Desert One to the next stage of the mission. The explanation for the failure that follows will therefore necessarily focus on the insertion phase and on the helicopter problems. It will, of course, highlight only factors which contributed to the outcome. However valid criticisms might be in other areas, they are not relevant to this explanation unless they contributed to the failure of the mission on the night of 24-25 April.

Having looked closely at the decision-making process during both the planning and execution stages of the operation, it is clear that no single factor can be isolated to account for its failure. Rather, as in the case of the decision, the evidence presented in previous chapters leads one to the conclusion that the failure must be explained in terms of a number of factors. Many of these factors were operant primarily at the military-operational level of decision making and, in various combinations, have been cited widely as the causes of the failure. Others were operant at the political level and contributed to the failure of the operation by determining its shape and limiting its prospects for success.

As pointed out in Chapter 1, the factors which contributed to the failure of the mission at the military-operational level of decision making have been the subject of intense discussion and debate over the past 14 years. Indeed, over the years, in addition to the official DoD inquiry done by the Holloway Group (JCLD 51; NSAD 102), the planning and

implementation phases of the mission have been analyzed in considerable depth by those involved in the rescue mission (Beckwith, 1983; Kyle, 1990: NSAD 39, 75 and 105), some of those close to it (Brzezinski, 1982 and 1983; Sick, 1985; and Turner, 1991) and independent analysts (the best of which are Ryan, 1985; Martin and Walcott, 1988; and Vandenbroucke, 1993). While there has been no consensus in this literature about what the most important factors contributing to the failure were, the debate about the process and decisions taken at the military-operational level has been lively and useful, highlighting the key problem areas in the planning and execution of the mission. Because so much went wrong, the handling of the rescue issue by the military has proven to be fertile ground for telling criticisms and, in the case of the participants, for recriminations.¹⁷

From the evidence presented in earlier chapters, it is clear that the most important factors at the military-operational level which contributed to the failure relate to the number of helicopters assigned to the mission, the unexpected poor visibility conditions encountered en route and the performance of the helicopter pilots. If more helicopters had been used, better weather conditions encountered or less conservative decisions been taken by the pilots, in other words, the rescue force almost certainly would have continued on from Desert One and, perhaps, have succeeded in rescuing the hostages. Two other factors also contributed to the overall failure, albeit in a less obvious and immediate manner: the ineffective way in which command and control was exercised during the operation and the ad hoc, off-line way in which the JTF was organized and prepared for the mission.¹⁸

The plan called for six helicopters to go on from Desert One since, at existing temperatures and altitudes, six were needed to lift the assault force to the hideout sites near Tehran. If the fleet size fell below that, the mission was to be aborted at that stage. Six helicopters arrived at Desert One but, in the judgment of the flight leader, only five were capable of going on. The decision to abort was therefore automatic. The assignment of only eight helicopters to the mission has therefore been the focus of much heated criticism since one more mission-ready helicopter at Desert One would obviously have made an enormous difference. Only few days after the mission, Yitzhak Rabin, the former Israeli Army Chief of Staff as well as former Prime Minister, captured the puzzlement of many when he asked, "America doesn't have enough helicopters?" (Middleton, 1981: 106). The planners had done their own statistical studies and were clearly trying to balance operational security and size of the tanker

force at Desert One with reasonable redundancy; but their plan fell short of the mark as post-mission analysis has demonstrated that the eight-helicopter fleet size "represented greater risk than perceived by mission planners and reviewers" (JCLD 51). More redundancy would have reduced the risks; it is as simple as that. The Holloway Group's analysis of this is excellent. While recognizing that increasing the fleet size may have increased the chance that the mission would be compromised and would have significantly reduced the fuel reserve available at Desert One, the Group concluded that 10-12 helicopters could have been accommodated within the constraints of the plan and would have been a more appropriate fleet size for the operation (JCLD 51; NSAD 102; Ryan, 1985: 38-41).¹⁹ With hindsight, it is clear that limiting the size of the helicopter force to eight was one of the most fundamental errors that the JTF made.²⁰

The unexpected weather conditions encountered en route also had an enormous impact on the outcome of the mission. From the outset, the assumption of the planners had been that the mission would be launched only if good visual flying conditions existed and, while some of the rehearsals had involved flying in more difficult weather conditions, they did not prepare the helicopter pilots for the poor visibility conditions actually encountered in Iran. The helicopter pilots were taken completely by surprise when they encountered suspended dust, or "haboobs," which at times lowered flight visibility to near zero and quickly turned the journey to Desert One into a nightmarish experience. The JTF weather team had identified suspended dust as a possible phenomenon that could be encountered in Iran but this information was not passed on to the helicopter pilots. This was a major breakdown in communications. While post-mission analysis confirmed that it was completely beyond the capabilities of the JTF to forecast or detect suspended dust, it is a fairly common phenomenon in Iran and the pilots should have been briefed on it and should have developed contingency plans to deal with it.²¹ As it was, they were not prepared and the reduced visibility caused by the suspended dust was directly responsible for one of the aborts (helicopter number five), for the late and out-of-sequence arrivals of the helicopters that made it to Desert One and for the fatigue and frustration level of the helicopter pilots who made it to Desert One, making them reluctant to go on (JCLD 52; NSAD 19, 57, 87 101 and 102; Ryan, 1985: 32 and 72; Kyle, 1990: 327-329).

Another key factor was the performance of the helicopter pilots, particularly their conservative abort decisions. With hindsight, it is

clear that the decision of the pilot of helicopter number six to abort was the most questionable one. This decision, taken by a Marine pilot after he received a warning that nitrogen pressure had been lost in one of the rotor blades of his helicopter two hours into the flight, was based on the experience and procedures of the Marines with the CH-53; had he applied the Navy's experience and procedures for the RH-53 he was flying which has rotor blades made of a different material and a much better warning system, he would have concluded that the mission could have continued despite the warning indications. Simply put, this abort decision was a far too conservative one, given the crucial importance of having enough helicopters to complete the insertion phase (JCLD 51; NSAD 102; Kyle, 1990: 333-334; Martin and Walcott, 1988: 34).²² The decision of the pilot of helicopter number five to turn back when he was only an hour from Desert One was also avoidable. Although he had lost visual contact with the formation and had lost the use of instruments essential to flight in the conditions of poor visibility he was experiencing, he could have broken radio silence to ask for the weather at Desert One. Had he done so, he would have found out that continuing on to the rendezvous site would have been possible and easier than returning to the *Nimitz*, the course of action he chose. As it was, he broke radio silence to call the *Nimitz* that he was returning, a call that was no more risky than a call to Desert One to find out the weather conditions would have been (NSAD 102; Kyle, 1990: 266-271 and 334-336).²³ Finally, the helicopter flight leader's decision to ground helicopter number two at Desert One was highly questionable. This helicopter had already flown for two hours after it lost one of its two hydraulic systems and the pilot was certainly willing to accept the increased risk and continue the mission. However, he was overruled by the flight leader at Desert One. Again this abort decision was a very conservative one, particularly since it was the one that effectively ended the mission (Kyle, 1990: 336-337; Turner, 1991: 336-337).²⁴ All of these abort decisions were therefore questionable, the ones involving helicopter numbers two and six because they were based on essentially "peacetime" rather than "combat" criteria and the one involving helicopter number five because the risk of calling ahead to Desert One was not taken. Had just one of the three not aborted, the entire outcome of the operation might have been different.

The low-level tactics used by the helicopter flight were also highly problematic. Despite the poor visibility they encountered, the pilots stubbornly stuck with their plan, remaining at about 200 feet during the

entire length of their route in order to avoid radar detection and to navigate by visual means. This reluctance to adjust their tactics to the situation made their experience in the suspended dust extremely difficult. Had they climbed to a higher altitude and navigated with their PINS (Palletized Inertial Navigation System) and Omega systems until they received the signal from the portable navigation aid (TACAN) that had been set up at Desert One, their ordeal probably would have been much less painful. After penetrating Iranian airspace at low level between two coastal radar sites to avoid detection, the C-130s had climbed to a more comfortable level of about 3,000 feet above ground where, although still in the suspended dust, they had encountered visibilities significantly better than those encountered by the helicopters. They had not been detected at that higher altitude; indeed, in-depth analysis before the mission had shown that the rescue force aircraft did not have to worry about radar detection at altitudes up to 5,000 feet above ground along the planned route. Nevertheless, the helicopter flight chose to remain at low altitude, which forced them to slow down and therefore get well behind schedule as well as to experience greater vertigo problems and fatigue than they would have experienced at higher altitudes.²⁵ The suspended dust experience clearly stressed out the pilots and contributed to the decisions to abort helicopter number five only an hour short of Desert One and helicopter number two during the refuelling operation. The stress and fatigue caused by this experience was undoubtedly also a factor in the accident during the withdrawal from Desert One (Kyle, 1990: 235-282 and 337-338: NSAD 19 and 102; Gast and Kyle interviews).²⁶

Another factor which affected the performance of the entire JTF was the way in which command and control of the operation was exercised. With respect to the helicopters, the flight leader lost control of his flight when he turned around shortly after entering the second area of suspended dust. Since the other helicopters, with the exception of helicopter number two, did not see their leader turn around, the only way control could have been maintained was by using the radio. Although it would have increased the risk of detection slightly to have made radio calls at this point, the integrity of the flight should have been maintained. As Kyle points out, remaining organized should have been the first priority and "radio silence should have been broken to direct the wingmen to rejoin the leader in the clear area to get reorganized and decide how best to attack the dust" (Kyle, 1990: 331). "It was," he says, "utterly ridiculous to sit there in radio silence while the mission was falling apart." Had he

done this quickly, the flight leader would still have had the option to abort the mission since the lead C-130 had not yet landed at Desert One. As it was, the helicopter flight lost almost all of its discipline and individual pilots began making the important decisions. Once the formation broke up, nobody in the entire chain of command ever had a full picture of what was happening with the helicopters and therefore could not exercise any degree of positive influence on events.

Once these problems began, communications on the entire command net were inadequate. The plan called for radio silence to the maximum extent possible, but the situation quickly deteriorated to the point where some radio calls would have helped enormously and the slight risks involved with making them would have been worth taking. Had Kyle's message about the suspended dust been passed to Vaught and the helicopters, for example, they would have been able to anticipate the suspended dust situation. Once the helicopters entered the area of suspended dust, sufficient calls to keep Vaught, Kyle and the various sections of the staggered formation informed about the overall situation, especially the weather conditions at Desert One, would have been extremely useful. Most importantly for the outcome, they would have resulted in a more informed decision about whether to turn back or continue on by the pilot of helicopter number five. As Kyle notes with deep regret, "the flow of information between field commanders and the command centre necessary to control the mission adequately never developed." Ultimately, according to Kyle, the responsibility to ensure that there were adequate communications rested with Vaught and he "should have restored command and control immediately" once it became apparent that things were going wrong (Kyle, 1990: 329-332).²⁷

Overarching all of this are many issues concerning the way in which the JTF was organized and prepared for the mission. The most telling ones, at least in terms of the impact that they may have had on the outcome, are the extent to which security considerations became the dominant concern of the JTF, the off-line and ad hoc way in which the JTF operated and the lack of a full rehearsal of the final scenario. Although maintaining the secrecy of the operation was obviously essential, the approach taken by the JTF was more rigorous than necessary. The result was a cautious approach with respect to the frequency and duration of joint training involving the various units assigned to the JTF, an excessively conservative approach to the use of radio transmissions during the insertion phase and a review process that excluded people not already

involved in the planning of the operation. Secrecy was preserved but, as the Holloway Group pointed out, slightly reduced restrictions in this area could have "been beneficial in operational terms without necessarily sacrificing security" (JCLD 51; NSAD 67; Gast interview).²⁸ The JTF would undoubtedly have been better prepared to deal with the situations it faced on the night of 24-25 April if it had more thoroughly practiced the integration of command, control and communications at the headquarters level and had developed a more flexible approach to taking calculated risks with radio transmissions when they were necessary to maintain effective command and control. It might also have been better prepared in a number of areas if it had allowed an independent review process to challenge its assumptions, such as the expected failure rate of the helicopters, and to help identify potential problem areas, such as unexpected poor visibility en route.

The off-line ad hoc way in which the JTF was formed and operated contributed to the highly compartmentalized planning and training that took place. As the Holloway Group pointed out, building on an existing organization and starting with an existing contingency plan would have provided a more stable framework around which to organize the rescue force and develop the rescue plan (JCLD 51). That said, no existing organization had nearly the capabilities to conduct an operation of this nature and so, from the outset, the small planning cell in the JCS Special Operations Division which first looked at the rescue option had little choice but to bring in experts from several different organizations to help identify the most effective way to handle the problem. Over the course of the following weeks, the creation of an off-line JTF organization in the Pentagon evolved naturally from this starting point. The result was a JTF headquarters in Washington that tasked various units around the country to provide specific resources to the operation, resulting in a highly compartmentalized approach to planning and training. One of the key weaknesses in the structure that emerged was that no individual exercised effective command over the air component of the rescue force; worse, in the case of the helicopters, the training program was supervised initially by Gast and subsequently by Pitman, both of whom had no formal appointment in the command structure (NSAD 102; Odom and Gast interviews; Ryan, 1985: 41-43).²⁹ During Congressional testimony shortly after the failed mission, Beckwith compared the experience to that of a football team which trained its defence, quarterback, backfield and offensive line in different parts of the country and then brought them

together on the day of the game. The team simply would not be able to develop the teamwork and motivation necessary to win (Beckwith, 1983: 294-295). Beckwith's analogy graphically highlighted the problem of compartmentalization caused by the creation of an off-line JTF organization, the ad hoc selection of personnel and equipment from diverse locations and commands across the country and the absolute veil of secrecy thrown over the whole process. The result of this off-line, ad hoc, highly-secretive approach was thus a degree of compartmentalization which ultimately prevented the JTF from achieving the level of communication, teamwork and mutual understanding that would have optimized its performance on 24-25 April.³⁰

Finally, there was no full rehearsal of the final scenario. With the decision to use Desert One rather than Nain coming so late, only a partial exercise of the Desert One procedures was possible. Kyle, who was appointed at this point as the on-scene commander for the refuelling operation, never benefited from a full practice with all of the aircraft and personnel participating. When he arrived at Desert One, with the noise level created by so many engines running, the swirling sand and the immediate excitement caused by the vehicles that had been stopped on the road, he experienced significant difficulties in maintaining effective communications and control. Even more importantly, the helicopter pilots never benefited from a full practice in swirling sand conditions similar to those experienced at Desert One. None of this had an impact on the decision to abort the mission; but the swirling sand was obviously a major cause in the subsequent accident and the difficulties Kyle experienced with communications and control forced him to limit his focus to getting everyone safely on the remaining C-130s during the emergency withdrawal phase, leaving the problem of the classified material that was still on the helicopters inadequately addressed (NSAD 19 and 102). To the extent that a full rehearsal would have exposed the helicopter pilots to the swirling dust encountered at Desert One or would have identified the problems of command and control that Kyle experienced, it very well may have improved the outcome in the sense of preventing the withdrawal from turning into a fiasco.³¹

Valid criticisms of the JTF in many other areas have been made over the past 14 years, but the weaknesses they expose in the JTF's performance were not major factors in the failure of the mission. The more telling of these criticisms relate to the inadequacies in both the selection of the best communications equipment for the mission and the procedures adopted

for using the equipment which was selected;³² the optimistic risk assessment that had been made regarding the possibility that the operation might be compromised by the activities at Desert One;³³ and the selection of Marine pilots for the mission.³⁴ Criticisms with much more debatable validity have been made in many other areas, such as the maintenance support provided by the *Nimitz*;³⁵ the overall effort of the intelligence community;³⁶ and the plan for night two.³⁷

Given the factors at the military-operational level of decision making which contributed to the failure of the mission and the other valid criticisms that can be made of the JTF's performance, it is easy to understand why explanations for the failure of the operation have focused on this level. Simply put, despite its obvious desire to create the best possible rescue option, the performance of the military was not very good. Not only did the three-phase plan it had developed have to be aborted during the first phase of the operation, mistakes by the rescue force during its withdrawal from Iran left an indelible image of failure which would haunt the military and entire country long after the Carter administration had left office. This tendency to explain the failure solely in terms of the performance of the military has been reinforced by the military's quick acceptance of total responsibility for the outcome (NSAD 75 and 105). Typical of this attitude was the speech given by the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Hayward, one week after the operation in which he forcefully argued that it had been the JCS who had "let America down" and that blame "should be cast in only one direction ... at the feet of the Joint Chiefs of Staff who provided to the President our professional military advice that this mission was feasible" (NSAD 110 and 116). The tendency was also reinforced by the limited focus of the Holloway Group, the only official inquiry into the rescue mission. As Holloway made clear in a statement released with his report, "We were not chartered to produce a white paper examining the Iranian hostage crisis at the national level. Our focus was essentially within the Department of Defense" (JCLD 50). Given this limited focus and the numerous problems uncovered in the group's final report, analysts have found the military-operational level of decision making easily-accessible, fertile ground in their search for explanations for the failure.

It is therefore not surprising that, unlike the way in which military-operational factors which may have contributed to the failure have been subjected to close scrutiny and analysis, political factors have, except for occasional passing comments, largely been ignored.

Vandenbroucke, for example, who has produced one of the more comprehensive recent analyses of the failure, limits his criticism of the political level of decision making to a brief remark about Carter's political advisers not asking the military planners "to be more specific about their estimates of 'good chance' of success" and a brief suggestion that wishful thinking "may have played a part" in the White House as well as the Pentagon, resulting in an "optimistic view" of the plan (Vandenbroucke, 1993: 151). Similarly, Ryan limits himself to a few passing comments about "excessive restrictions" from the White House (Ryan, 1985: 15). Those who were involved in the political decision-making process or were close to it also appear to believe that the failure can be explained exclusively in military-operational terms. Thus, for example, Carter explains the failure in terms of "a strange series of mishaps - almost completely unpredictable" (Carter, 1982: 518), while Brzezinski explains it in terms of a failure of technology (Brzezinski, 1982: 79). Even Turner, whose account of the planning for and implementation of the rescue operation is the most comprehensive and recent one by senior decision makers in the administration, devotes only three short paragraphs of his entire three-chapter analysis of the operation to "problems at the White House" (Turner, 1991: 145). In short, Sick's conclusion to his brief discussion of the rescue mission captures the thrust of what to this point has been conventional wisdom: "The rescue mission was a failure, but it was a failure of military execution, not of political judgment or command" (Sick, 1985: 302).

In light of the evidence presented in previous chapters, this conventional wisdom needs to be revised. When one looks at the failure of the operation in the context of the entire decision-making process to include the political level as well as the military-operational one, an entirely different reality emerges. Indeed, seen from this perspective, it is clear that there was an overarching political dimension to the failure as well as the obvious military one. In the same way that the broad focus on the entire decision-making process taken in this study highlights, in the case of the president's decision to launch the operation, the way in which decision making at the military level influenced decision making at the political level; it also highlights, in the case of the failure, the way in which decision making at the military-operational level was, in turn, influenced by decision making at the political level, thus helping to determine the actual shape of the mission. The political process approach taken here shows, in other words, that explanations limited to

the military-operational level of decision making tell only part of the story.

Drawing on the analysis presented earlier, it is clear that decision making at the political level had an impact on decision making at the military-operational level in four key ways: by putting pressure on the military planners to find an option that could be implemented as soon as possible and to remain ready at all times; by approving the reconnaissance flight to Desert One at such a late date; by refusing to allow the use of Oman until the very last minute; and by insisting on such an incredibly tight veil of secrecy. Indeed, in each of these four areas, the impact was a profound one which framed the entire context of military-operational decision making, determined key aspects of the operational plan and limited the prospects for success, and thus deserves a central place in explaining the failure of mission. These dynamics took place during the five and a half month period in which the rescue plan was developed, not during the actual mission itself. Despite some early criticism to the contrary, there was no interference from political decision makers during the actual implementation of the plan on the night of 24-25 April.

On 6 November, just two days after the hostage crisis began, the rescue planning process was set in motion when Brzezinski instructed Brown "to have the Joint Chiefs of Staff develop a plan for a rescue mission." Later that day, at the first NSC meeting of the crisis, Carter confirmed the instruction by asking Brown and Jones "to develop a workable plan" (Brzezinski, 1982: 28; Sick, 1985: 210-216). From this first moment, Brzezinski began to energize and closely supervise the planning process. Having already set up the military planning group on 5 November, he used that forum to receive frequent updates on the planning process and to make inputs into it. On 8 November, with the military just beginning its desperate scramble to find a concept of operations that might work, Brzezinski called the senior planners to the White House to give him a briefing on their progress and three days after that, on Sunday, 11 November, he went to the Pentagon "for a much more comprehensive review of how the mission might be executed" (Brzezinski, 1982: 28) and there is little doubt that "his visit had instilled in the planners a feeling of urgency" (Beckwith, 1983: 188). In short, from the very beginning, enormous pressure was exerted on the planners to develop the rescue option as quickly as possible. The same kind of pressure was sustained throughout the entire period prior the operation, resulting in frequent warnings from Vaught to his various commanders that the implementation

might be imminent whenever there were indications from intelligence sources or the White House that things were taking a turn for the worse in Iran (Beckwith, 1983: 252; Jones, Pustay, Gast and Kyle interviews). The JTF was, in other words, kept under constant pressure to be as ready as possible to deploy at any given moment from the onset on the crisis until the decision was taken to launch the operation. After asking DoD to develop a workable plan, the president did not push the military; this pressure came squarely from Brzezinski (Turner, 1991: 67, 88 and 145; Gast interview).

The result of this pressure was that everything, from the way in which the basic concept of operations was established to the way in which training problems were addressed, was seen in terms of its impact in the short term; there was no breathing space to consider alternative concepts, such as modifying a supertanker to carry helicopters into the northern part of the Persian Gulf (Turner, 1991: 69); to allow training time for any scenario that was not yet part of the current plan, such as the Desert One staging possibility (Kyle, 1990: 191); or to follow proven but slower methods of training personnel for their missions, such as assigning the helicopter mission to an established helicopter unit with a reasonably compatible mission (JCLD 51; NSAD 102). The emphasis placed on having the best possible rescue option available to the president on a day-to-day basis was never relaxed during the entire period of over five months between the beginning of the planning for the rescue operation and the rescue decision. Given this pressure, the notion of making short-term sacrifices in the day-to-day readiness of the force in order to achieve a better rescue option in the longer term was never seriously discussed; rather, after the conceptual framework for the initial plan was set during first few days of the crisis, an incremental approach to improving the basic plan was taken by the JTF under the watchful eye of Brzezinski and the military planning group. Whether other concepts of operations, shifts in emphasis in training or different selection criteria for key units and personnel involved may have produced a better rescue option and, if so, at what pace is, of course, an open question; but the point here is that these things were never considered because, given the pressure to get ready and stay ready placed on the planners, there was never any breathing space to do so. The concept was locked in early and the overriding criteria was always the need to be as ready as possible as soon as possible (Pustay, Gast and Beckwith interviews; NSAD 105).

As it turned out, it was early February before Vaught felt he had a workable plan, the end of February before he thought the JTF was ready to go into Iran, and mid-March before Brzezinski, Brown and Jones were willing to conclude that the plan had "a reasonably good chance of success" (Kyle, 1990: 136-140; Brzezinski, 1983: 489; NSAD 102 and 116).¹⁸ Given their lack of confidence in the rescue option to this point, it is difficult to imagine that, even if some hostages were actually being killed, that the rescue possibility would have represented the best option of the US government. Nevertheless, the pressure applied by Brzezinski was one of the key realities that drove the whole planning effort (Pustay, Gast, Kyle and Beckwith interviews), shaping the mission at an early stage and forcing the JTF to accept the impact on the day-to-day readiness of the rescue force as the overriding criterion for all subsequent adjustments.

In the case of the CIA reconnaissance flight to Desert One which the JTF and military planning group both wanted so badly, it was very clearly the president's personal decision not to allow the flight until the end of March. Desert One was identified in January as a possible alternative to Nain and the president was asked to approve a reconnaissance flight to the location on four separate occasions: on 24 January by Brzezinski, on 14 February by Turner, and on 28 February and 7 March by Brzezinski, the last time after obtaining the concurrence of Vance since he felt that a joint recommendation might have a better chance of being approved by the president. Each time the president refused to authorize the mission for fear that it might be discovered and have a negative impact on the negotiations. It was only on 22 March, at his first full briefing on the rescue plan at Camp David, that the president first gave his tentative approval for the flight. Even then he was still reluctant and indicated he might change his mind before the end of the month when the flight was to take place. On 27 March, Turner obtained final approval from the president and the flight took place successfully on 31 March (Turner, 1991: 88-105; Brzezinski, 1983: 489).

The impact of this delay on the shape of the rescue plan for the first five months of the crisis was profound. Without a reconnaissance mission, the suitability of the location for C-130 operations could not be adequately confirmed. With the constant pressure to be ready to launch at any minute, the Nain option was exercised right up until the reconnaissance flight took place, including during the last major JTF exercise conducted before the mission on 25-27 March because, as Kyle

notes, "we could ill afford the time to rehearse a plan that had not been approved." It was only during the first week in April, after the reconnaissance mission was successful, that the JTF changed the refuelling location for night one of the operation to Desert One and shifted the focus of its preparatory effort to include this option. The result was that the Desert One scenario, which was less risky than the Nain one in terms of compromise, was never adequately practised with enormous implications for the rescue force, particularly for Kyle, who was now thrust into the position of on-scene commander, and for the helicopters, who would now have to deal with the refuelling in the sand.³⁹ As Kyle notes in his account of all of this, the JTF would undoubtedly have been better prepared if it had shifted to the Desert One scenario sooner in its training, but that possibility was precluded by the pressure to keep ready and the last-minute approval of Desert One (Kyle, 1991: 161 and 186-191). Since the president was not briefed on the rescue plan until 22 March, he did not understand the trade-offs involved here and therefore the full implications of his refusal to allow the reconnaissance mission.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, since the switch to the Desert One scenario could not take place until the concept was validated with the reconnaissance flight, the president's refusal to allow it resulted in the weight of the planning effort being focused on the wrong scenario right up until the eleventh hour. The refusal thus resulted in a lack of practice in at least two areas which became highly problematic during the operation, the exercise of command and control and the performance of the helicopters in the sand at Desert One; it had, in other words, a direct impact on the outcome.

The impact of the restrictions on the use of Oman until the very last minute were even more profound. The early efforts of the planners to get forward staging bases in countries like Turkey and Oman which would, from an operational perspective, have been logical staging areas for the operation were, as Kyle notes, "persistently rebuffed." Despite their continual pleas for nearly five months, the only staging bases that the military planning group would authorize them to use were Wadi Kena, Egypt and Diego Garcia, and so they had no choice but to plan the heavy aircraft part of the mission out of these locations (Kyle, 1990: 35-45).

In terms of how it affected the shape of the mission in the longer term, the most important result of this restriction was that the planners were forced to rule out any kind of scenario in which helicopters would fly to and from the Tehran area behind HC-130 tankers, conducting air-to-air refuelling as required en route, a concept had been proven during the

Sontay raid in Vietnam. Indeed, given the Sontay experience, the first instincts of the planners at the outset had been to develop such a scenario, but the geographical restrictions tied their hands because the HC-130 tankers, flying out of Egypt, would themselves have to be in-flight refuelled and they did not have this capability. The concept of a ground refuelling operation on the way to the Tehran area thus had its roots in the prohibition against the use of staging areas in closer proximity to Tehran than Wadi Kena and Diego Garcia. However, while working through the various phases of development of the ground refuelling plan, the planners never completely gave up on the idea of a Sontay-like scenario. By the end of February they were again trying to find a way around the restrictions, this time by pushing for modifications to the MC-130, which were already capable of being in-flight refuelled, to allow them to act as refuelling tankers for the helicopters. By the end of March a technical solution had been identified but, since it would take time for the necessary modifications and the training of MC-130 and helicopter pilots to take place, the option was still several months away at that point (Kyle, 1990: 31-40; 143-160).

At the same time, the planners continued to push for a better staging base to shorten and simplify the night one scenario. By mid-March, having concluded that Masirah Island, Oman was the most suitable location, they had set their sites on the use of this remote airfield which would reduce the one-way flying time for the C-130s for night one from twelve hours to four. The JTF took the idea forcefully to Jones who, in turn, took it to the military planning group. On 3 April, the planners were suddenly given permission to use Masirah (Kyle, 1990:146-174). While elated, the members of the JTF who had pushed so long and hard for a better staging option were also puzzled. As Kyle notes in his memoirs, why the JTF was not allowed to use Oman in the plan for five months and was given permission just three weeks before the operation has been a question that has troubled him for years (Kyle, 1990: 339). Since the use of Masirah as a staging base significantly increased the confidence of the JTF and military planning group in the rescue plan and was therefore an important part of the process which led to the rescue decision (Brzezinski and Kyle interviews), the answer to Kyle's question is important.

Unfortunately, it is still not possible to piece together precisely what happened during this period to produce the Oman decision because the issue is still somewhat "sensitive" (Jones, Pustay, Gast and Odom interviews). That said, the key to the use of Oman was simply to secure

an agreement with the Omanis about the use of their facilities; they would obviously not be told in advance about the rescue mission. As part of the effort to develop a new strategic framework for the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf which began in December 1979, the administration was already engaged in discussions with Kenya, Somalia and Oman aimed at securing agreements which would allow US military forces to use certain facilities in their countries. While these talks had not yet reached the stage where access agreements were imminent, they placed the administration in a position where it could move quickly. Once the military planning group decided to put an agreement with Oman on the front burner, it simply had to push the State Department, which had the lead in the negotiations, to increase the priority it was giving to this issue. The result was a formal access agreement with Oman on 9 April, but the negotiations had obviously already reached the point where a satisfactory arrangement had been worked out by the time that Masirah was incorporated into the rescue plan on 3 April. The president's agreement to stage the rescue operation out of Oman must have been sought either at the Camp David meeting on 22 March or shortly thereafter (Sick, 1983: 68-73; Brzezinski, Newsom, Pustay, Gast, Odom, Kyle and Beckwith interviews). Unfortunately for the planners, the sudden approval of the use of Oman came too late for the HC-130s to be assigned to the mission and for the essential training to take place. If the mission was to be launched before the hours of darkness and temperatures forced them to go back to the drawing board, the deployment to forward staging bases would have to start in about ten days. The die, in other words, had already been cast.

The essential question is why this initiative was not pushed earlier. At the 4 December 1979 NSC meeting, the president authorized a State-Defense team to negotiate naval and air access arrangements with Kenya, Somalia and Oman and initial discussions began later that month (Brzezinski, 1983: 443-554; Newsom interview). Such arrangements were also entirely consistent with the Carter Doctrine announced in the president's State of the Union address on 23 January (Lankevich, 1981: 133-137). The push to secure the agreement with Oman that began in mid-March could therefore have been made earlier. Brzezinski did occasionally prod the State Department during the December-March period to produce these access agreements, but the kind of decisive push that took place in late March was not made (Odom interview). Clearly the Omanis were nervous (Odom and Gast interviews), but no more so in the early months of the crisis than they were at the point when the agreement was negotiated.

Given the importance of the use of Masirah to the planners, either Brzezinski failed them in getting the president to approve the use of Oman or he did try and the president overruled him, as the president did on the issue of the reconnaissance flight until late March. The issue moved quickly following the first full briefing to the president on 22 March, but the prohibition on the use of Masirah until that time had a profound impact on the shape of the rescue mission. Had access to Masirah been obtained earlier, the whole concept of operations would have been different; the en route ground refuelling operation that was eventually moved to Desert One would not have been part of the plan.

With respect to both Desert One and Masirah then, the essential decision making at the political level took place at the eleventh hour. Once the president was fully briefed in late March and began to consider the rescue option more seriously, these two watershed decisions were taken quite quickly, allowing the slow and painful incremental planning process that had taken place over the previous five months to shift, in Kyle's words, "from cruise to supersonic speed" (Kyle, 1990: 172). Unfortunately in terms of the prospects for success, these key changes came too late for the Desert One option to be adequately rehearsed and for the advantages of the Masirah option to be fully exploited. The interest of the president was obviously a key factor in moving the yardsticks, but it came too late to allow a rescue option that would have the best possible prospects for success. Had he taken a greater interest at an earlier stage, the president would have understood the crucial importance of these issues to the planners and it is quite possible that he would have allowed the reconnaissance flight at an earlier date and would have given a higher priority to the Masirah option so that the ground refuelling operation in Iran could have been avoided altogether. As Shlomo Gazit, who played a key role in the planning for the successful Israeli rescue operation at Entebbe, points out in his critique of the US operation in Iran, personally involving the head of state right at the outset of the planning process in "constant dialogue" and "a system of positive feedback" with the senior military planners is essential if they are to "understand the constraints on each other" and thus develop the optimal rescue option (Gazit, 1981: 121). In the cases of comparable operations such as the Israeli rescue at Entebbe in 1976, the German rescue at Mogadishu in 1977 and the US rescue attempt during the *Mayaguez* incident in 1975, the heads of state were involved from the outset. While these operations were different from the one examined in this study in the sense that they were

mounted much more quickly and did not involve serious attempts to negotiate, the point is that they benefited enormously from the involvement of the head of state during the planning stages. Although he devoted so much of his time and energy to the hostage crisis, Carter clearly did not give the rescue option much thought until late March because, until the negotiations completely collapsed, he believed that ways could be found to make the strategy of negotiations and pressure work and he virtually ruled out the possibility of launching the rescue mission in anything but desperate circumstances. To have met periodically with the military planning group, perhaps with Vance present as well, would not have placed a great additional burden on him, but he chose not to do this. This lack of involvement by the president until the eleventh hour was a major factor in the way in which the plan developed and thus in its prospects for success on the night of 24-25 April.

The tight veil of secrecy placed over the planning process, which was continually reinforced by inputs from the political level, also had a significant impact on the rescue mission. Some of this energy came from the president himself; indeed, for the president and his inner circle of political advisers, discovery of the rescue planning would have been the "ultimate disaster" (Powell interview). The president was genuinely concerned that exposure of the planning process could have a negative impact on the negotiations and, perhaps, even on the safety of the hostages and, according to Brzezinski, had at the outset issued a clear instruction "to keep the tightest security on top of the plan, the tightest" (Brzezinski and Turner interviews). There is, however, no doubt that a great deal of this energy came from Brzezinski who, in Turner's words, "had a great penchant for secrecy," knew that the success of an Entebbe-like rescue would depend entirely on the element of surprise and, despite all the criticism about "excessive" security since the operation, still believes that less stringent measures "would probably have meant the whole thing would have been compromised" (Brzezinski, Turner and Newsom interviews).⁴¹

Obviously, tight security was essential, especially in light of the impressive intelligence gathering capabilities of the Soviet Union in the region and its ongoing efforts to monitor all US military activities at the time of the hostage crisis. There was also a very serious problem of leaks in the administration, especially in the White House. Given this context, as Pustay observes, the administration had become "almost paranoid about leaks," which was a major factor conditioning its reaction

to the rescue planning process (Pustay interview). This produced an environment in which unusually forceful inputs from the political level exaggerated the normal inclination of the military to establish tight security around an operation like this, resulting in a level of extreme concern about secrecy that "tended to dominate every aspect of mission planning, training, and execution" (JCLD 51; NSAD 67 and 102).

The practical result of this extraordinary emphasis on security at the political level was that the operation was set up, right from the start, as one which would have to be small and surgical and also one of the closest held secrets of all time. The kind of security precautions that had proven to be adequate in the past, that had seen the US military successfully through major operations like the invasion of Normandy and numerous smaller ones like the Sontay raid, were somehow now considered inadequate and insufficient (Ryan, 1985: 15).⁴² This led to the kind of off-line, ad hoc and highly compartmentalized approach which is a central theme running through accounts as diverse as those of Turner (1991) and Kyle (1990). The activities of the military planning group were kept so secretive that even the immediate staffs of the main participants had no knowledge of the meetings (Brzezinski, 1982: 29). The activities of the intelligence community were also compartmentalized and the number of people involved was kept to an absolute minimum (Turner interview). The State Department was shut completely out of the process despite the desire of planners like Kyle to draw upon its expertise in certain areas and the fact that their early assistance on staging bases might have changed the whole shape of the mission (Kyle, 1990: 33; Kyle interview). Moreover, despite his recommendation to the contrary, Beckwith was not allowed to take advantage of the effective network of international contacts that Delta Force had built up, including an offer of intelligence support from the German GSG-9 hostage rescue unit; no foreign national was to be included in the confidence of the planners (Beckwith, 1983: 223; Gast interview). In short, the priority that the president placed on ensuring that the rescue planning was not compromised, a priority that Brzezinski pursued with great emphasis and energy, was another factor that shaped the development of the rescue option and thus, ultimately, had a significant impact on its chances of success.

Thus, in four major areas, decision making at the political level had an impact on decision making at the operational level. Had the Oman issue been worked earlier, the plan would have been based on the more proven Sontay scenario; had the reconnaissance flight been approved

sooner, the Desert One scenario would have been more fully practiced; had the pressure to be ready been relaxed, better concepts and methods could have been developed; and had the level of secrecy been less extreme, a better organization, training program and review process could have been developed. While it is not possible to conclude that, without these impacts, the operation would have succeeded, it is possible to say that the risks would have been reduced and the plan would have had better prospects of success.

Given the way that the president delegated direct supervision of the rescue planning to Brzezinski, some responsibility for this impact clearly lies with Brzezinski. For example, the main driving force behind the pressure placed on the JTF to be ready at all times came from Brzezinski. On the other hand, in at least one area, the late approval of the reconnaissance flight to Desert One, the president was clearly responsible since Brzezinski pressed the president several times to authorize the flight before he finally did at the 22 March meeting. With respect to the tight veil of secrecy placed over the planning process, it is clear that both the president and Brzezinski played important roles, with the president insisting on tight security and Brzezinski putting pressure on everyone to ensure that the circle of people involved was kept to an absolute minimum. While the details of the way in which the Oman issue was handled have not been uncovered in this study, clearly it was either the president, Brzezinski or both who share responsibility for not resolving the issue until the eleventh hour. In short, decision making at the Carter-Brzezinski level in four specific areas touched and influenced decision making at the military-operational level during the planning stages for the rescue operation and contributed to the failure by determining the final shape of the mission and limiting its prospects for success.

Two final comments about the way in which decision making at the political and military-operational levels interacted should be made. First, one of the key symptoms of "groupthink," the absence of independent critical thinking, was an inextricable part of the highly compartmentalized and secretive decision-making process at the military-operational level. The military planning group, which until the 22 March meeting of the NSC provided the only interface between these two levels, not only supervised this extremely tight process, it actually encouraged it. Most significantly, the group did not bring in any high-level expertise from outside the group to take an independent look at its

activities and it did not insist on some sort of outside, independent review of the detailed operational plan; on the contrary, the group kept everyone else completely on the outside and watched from the sidelines as a "murder board" was established which included only individuals already inside the narrow loop of the JTF.⁴³ With no independent military review of the plan, with Brzezinski clearly in charge of the group and insisting on an extreme level of secrecy and with nobody outside ever allowed in, critical thinking during the planning process was more limited than it should have been. While, as argued earlier, the military planning group accurately represented the risks during the final decision-making process, it did not establish the best possible climate for minimizing the risks.⁴⁴ In this area, the influence of Brzezinski, who had taken on the role of providing the main political-level supervision of the planning process, was clearly a negative one.⁴⁵

Second, while it is clear from this analysis that decision making at the political level had a crucial influence on decision making at the military-operational level during the long period in which the rescue plan was developed, it is also clear from the evidence presented in previous chapters that, despite early criticism to the contrary, there were no significant inputs from the political level during the actual operation. Indeed, having agreed to a chain of command that, in Beckwith's words, was "clean, simple, direct" (Beckwith, 1983), the president allowed the military to implement the plan on the night of 24-25 April without interference; he was kept informed, but he did not seriously question the judgment of the commanders in the field (Jones, Pustay, Gast, Kyle, Beckwith and Odom interviews; NSAD 9, 10, 11, 12 and 67). His only significant intervention during the entire operation was, at Brzezinski's urging, to ensure that Beckwith agreed with the decision to abort (Brzezinski, 1983: 498; Carter, 1982: 516). In short, he allowed the JTF to implement the plan without making attempts to micromanage it from above; apparently sensitive to the pitfalls of interfering in an ongoing operation (Brzezinski, 1983: 495; Carter, 1982: 507; Jordan, 1982: 263; Turner, 1991: 113-114), he decided to leave the operation in the hands of the military. In short, although decision making at the political level had an enormous influence on the rescue operation during the planning phase, it did not have a significant influence during the actual operation.⁴⁶

Clearly then, a close look at the decision-making process related to the rescue operation shows that factors at both the political and

military-operational levels must be taken into account in developing an adequate explanation for the failure. From the analysis just provided, the main elements of this explanation are obvious and, when they are woven together, show a complex reality which challenges the conventional wisdom that the operation failed simply because of poor execution at the military-operational level, and not because of poor judgment or performance at the political level. Indeed, one of the central themes that emerges from the evidence presented in this study is that the operation failed because of serious shortcomings at both levels. As in the case of the decision, the basic explanation can be parsimoniously expressed and this will be done in the following few paragraphs.

Despite his immediate personal investment in finding a solution to the hostage crisis, after directing DoD to develop a workable rescue plan, Carter left the supervision of the rescue planning effort in Brzezinski's hands. During the following few months, under the watchful eye of the military planning group and the direct supervision of Jones, a special JTF was assembled and produced a rescue plan. From the outset, the planners had to overcome tremendous obstacles that were inherent in the situation, including the great distances involved and the lack of knowledge about the precise location of the hostages and circumstances under which they were being held. At the same time, the planners had to accept restrictions that were imposed upon them from the political level. First, the closest staging bases they were allowed to use in the plan were in Egypt and at Diego Garcia. Without bases closer to Iran, they simply could not develop their preferred scenario in which the helicopters would fly to their destination behind refuelling tankers. Second, they had to develop a credible plan as soon as possible and the JTF had to maintain its ability to deploy with whatever capability it had ready at all times and on extremely short notice. This pressure forced them to make day-to-day readiness their overriding criterion and to lock in their basic concept of operations early, to focus almost all of their time and energy on making the plan workable in the immediate sense and to make only incremental changes once the basic elements of the plan were in place. Third, they were under extreme pressure to impose an absolute veil of secrecy over the entire planning effort. This pressure resulted in efforts by the military that went well beyond the normal precautions for establishing tight security around a military operation, contributing to the off-line, ad hoc and compartmentalized planning process that was established.

Within this context, the planners worked hard to develop a workable plan and by mid-March had developed one which the military planning group justifiably believed had "a reasonably good chance of success." There were, however, several weaknesses in the plan which were directly related to decision making at the military-operational level. The most relevant in terms of their impact on the failure of the operation were that an inadequate number of helicopters were assigned to the mission and, due to security concerns, the JTF was organized and trained in an off-line, ad hoc and compartmentalized way, resulting in a compartmentalized flow of information, such as information about the suspended dust phenomenon, and questionable supervision of the training of the helicopter pilots. Meanwhile, the planners periodic requests to use staging bases closer to Iran and to conduct the reconnaissance flight to Desert One were consistently denied, the latter on four separate occasions by the president.

With the rescue mission taking shape and the negotiations in trouble, Carter received his first full briefing on the rescue plan on March 22 during which he finally approved the reconnaissance to Desert One. During the first week of April, following the reconnaissance flight, the use of Desert One was incorporated into the plan and the use of Oman as a staging base was also approved. However, at this point, it was too late to abandon plans for a ground refuelling operation in Iran and to conduct a full rehearsal of the Desert One scenario. With the nights rapidly getting shorter and the nighttime temperatures rapidly rising, these decisions were taken too close to the end of the existing window of opportunity. The die had been cast.

The mission itself failed at Desert One when the number of mission-capable helicopters fell below the required number of six. Besides the mechanical problems experienced with the helicopters, the most important factors contributing to the decision to abort were the unexpected poor visibility which was encountered en route; the weak performance of the helicopter pilots, particularly their conservative abort decisions and stubborn adherence to the plan to fly to Desert One at low altitude; and the ineffective way in which command and control were exercised by the JTF. Simply put, the rescue plan and the performance of the rescue force and its equipment were not good enough for the conditions they encountered in Iran on 24-25 April.

When one looks at the impact of decision making at the political level over the course of the previous five and a half months, it is

obvious that, without the political restrictions that were imposed, a better rescue plan could have been put together and that even the existing one could have been more practised and ready. As it was, political restrictions overarched the whole planning effort, with an enormous impact on the shape of the rescue mission and, ultimately, on its prospects for success. Sick's assertion that the rescue operation "was a failure of military execution, not of political judgment or command," in other words, simply does not hold up to the light of the evidence presented here. The rescue mission was without doubt a complete military failure and the performance of the military deserves harsh criticism in a number of areas. At the same time, however, it was more than that. It was also a failure of political judgment in the sense that Carter, who wanted so desperately to find a solution to the hostage crisis, eventually turned to a military option which could have been a much stronger one with better prospects for success if he had taken a greater interest in the planning process from the outset and had reduced the political restrictions placed on it. In this very real sense, it was the performance of the entire administration, not just the military, that resulted in the failure of Operation Eagle Claw.⁴⁷

The Explanations: A Critical Postscript

Having developed these explanations for the rescue decision and the failure of the operation, it is appropriate to conclude this chapter with a few critical comments about the explanations themselves and, given the unique application of the political process model to this case, the strengths and limitations of the model that are evident at this point. The model has clearly been useful in highlighting some important dimensions to the rescue attempt that have not been fully examined in the literature to date. At the same time, the limitations that were outlined in Chapter 2 have also been evident as these explanations were developed and it is important to remember them at this point in order to fully understand what these explanations have and have not done.

To the extent that one accepts the analysis presented in this study, the strengths of the model are readily apparent. More than anything else, the focus provided to this study by the political process model as it has been adapted for this study has enabled us to improve our understanding of the rescue decision and outcome by exposing the two-way, symbiotic nexus between decision making at the political and military-operational levels during the first five and a half months of the hostage crisis. It has

enabled us to identify and understand the ways in which decision making at the military-operational level influenced decision making at the political level, culminating in the president's decision to launch the mission; it has also enabled us to identify and understand the ways in which decision making at the military-operational level was, in turn, influenced by decision making at the political level, ultimately influencing the shape of the mission and limiting its prospects for success. In short, it has provided a focus which shows how decision making at these two levels moved concurrently, sometimes separately and sometimes together, ultimately interacting and combining to produce a decision and an outcome. As such, it has demonstrated the need to look to both levels in explaining decisions to use military force and the outcomes that result when military operations are launched as a result of these decisions.

The use of this particular model has also allowed the analysis to highlight the crucial role of the president in the decision-making process when the use of military force is being considered to achieve foreign policy objectives. Indeed, the analysis has been particularly effective in this area, highlighting some extremely important realities. In theoretical terms, it has made it clear that decisions of this nature can only be made by the president and that, in addition to the president's beliefs about the nature of situation, personal assessment of the risks of particular military operations and willingness to take such risks, the president's personal style of leadership and the processes set up to deal with a crisis can have an enormous impact on the way in which military options are developed, considered and chosen over time. In more practical terms, it has made it clear that decisions taken at the political level throughout the planning process for specific military options can have an enormous impact on both the shape of an eventual operation and on its prospects for success. It has shown, in other words, that Gazit's point about the importance of early involvement of the president in the planning process is an extremely relevant and important one.

The limitations of the model are also evident. First, given the basic epistemological orientation of the model, the evidence presented in this comprehensive analysis of an important foreign policy event cannot be applied in the scientific sense of validating specific nomological statements about how the political process works, adapting or overturning others as appropriate and, perhaps, even proposing some new ones. The model does not contain the kind of law-like statements needed for this kind of approach and therefore no such type of science is possible. It

would, of course, be possible to advance certain hypotheses based on the evidence presented in this study. One could, for example, suggest hypotheses like "the influence of national security advisers with independent advisory roles will increase over time" or "presidents who are willing to take greater risks in diplomacy will also be willing to take greater risks in military operations," but this would be to move beyond the model and beyond the scope of the present study. Rather, consistent with the spirit of the political process model and the epistemological orientation that underpins it, this study will claim the far more modest contribution of demonstrating the usefulness of this particular model in contributing to our understanding of cases where the president makes a decision to use military force.

Another limitation mentioned in Chapter 2 was that the model provided the analyst with no firm guidance on how to determine which factors were the most potent ones in any particular situation. Rather, with the focus on process that it generates, the model simply helps the analyst to identify the key factors and to make sensible judgments about their relative importance. In this study, the evidence was weighed carefully and judgments were made in developing the political process explanations for both the rescue decision and the failure of the operation. Obviously, some key judgments were made, such as the one concerning the relative unimportance to the president's decision of the pressures "to do something" that came from outside the administration and the relative importance to the outcome of the president's refusal to allow the reconnaissance mission to Desert One. Another analyst, even one applying the same model and examining the same evidence, might reach somewhat different conclusions by giving different weights to the factors identified in this chapter or by giving importance to other factors.

The model also does not offer very satisfying explanations about where the values and beliefs of the senior decision makers, including those of the president, came from. It takes their existing values and beliefs as the starting point for analysis and does not examine the deeper reasons for their very different beliefs about the use of force. It does not, for example, address Brzezinski's assertion that Vance was "the ultimate example of a good man who has been traumatized by his Vietnam experience" (Jordan, 1982: 264) or Vance's not-so-veiled reference to Brzezinski's "visceral anti-Sovietism" (Vance, 1983: 394). Similarly, it does not explain the fundamental change in Carter's beliefs about the nature of the Soviet Union which took place after the Soviet invasion of

Afghanistan. With respect to the rescue option itself, it does not expose the deeper reasons for the immediate range of options evoked by key decision makers beyond suggesting that the natural reference point for Brzezinski was Entebbe, for Vance it was Pueblo and for the military planners it was Sontay. Application of the model does not, in other words, result in deeper analysis in this area in the sense of probing the psychological and sociological processes involved with the evocation and initial consideration of options.

At a more practical level, it is clear that the model is not much help where there is a paucity of information. This limitation was most evident in the case of the decision-making process involving the military planner's desire to use Oman as a staging base. With the facts related to this issue still "sensitive," this study was not able to uncover the complete story in this area. While the most recent evidence clearly points to the importance of the Oman issue to the planners and therefore to the significance of the long delay before the use of Masirah was approved, the study was not able to examine the precise reasons for this delay, where senior decision makers stood on the issue and how the process played out during the November-March period. There were not, in other words, sufficient facts to make the model work very well.

Finally, the relatively narrow focus the model provides, which is at once its strength and its weakness, has left unaddressed some important issues about the broader context in which the rescue decision and operation took place. This study has therefore not examined questions at the level of the international system, such as the extent to which dissatisfaction with the bipolar, hierarchical nature of global politics was growing throughout the third world and may have contributed to the crisis, and questions at the level of US society, such as the extent to which cultural expectations about the special role of the US in the world and its right to use military power in the pursuit of its foreign policy objectives might have contributed to the views of decision makers. The study is what it is: an examination of decision making within the US government - at the obvious expense of other things.

Despite its limitations, on balance, the model has been a useful tool for helping us to understand the rescue decision and outcome. As mentioned in Chapter 2, it now needs to be applied in a rigorous and comprehensive way to a variety of situations so that the model can be refined and extended. This study has already demonstrated the value of one such adjustment. In order to explain both decisions in cases where

the use of military force is being considered and outcomes in cases where force is actually used, the "black box" of the decision making process needs to be opened up further than Hilsman opens it to include the planning activities within DoD. This needs to be done so that the analyst can see the decision-making process at the military-operational level and, most importantly, its interactions with the decision-making process at higher levels. Without an examination of this aspect, certain unanswered questions and puzzles will always remain in cases where presidents decide to use military force; with this kind of analysis more comprehensive and satisfying explanations will often be possible.

ENDNOTES - CHAPTER SEVEN

1. The bifurcated trend towards two types of analysis in the current literature on the rescue attempt, one focused on trying to explain the rescue decision at the political level and one on trying to explain the failure at the military-operational level, was described in detail in Chapter 1.
2. Beyond broad questions related to the concepts and process dynamics embodied in the political process model and specific questions about purely military-operational issues, Chapter 2 raised a number of questions related to the ways in which decision making at the political and military-operational levels might have interacted and combined: At what points did decision making at each of these two levels touch and influence each other? What effect did this have, at the political level, on the president's decision and, at the military-operational level, on the shape of the rescue mission and its chances for success? Was the president properly informed about the risks or did the planners put forward overly optimistic assessments of the probability of success? To what extent did bureaucratic momentum built up for the rescue option? Did the president receive poor advice and, if so, from whom and why? Was the president pressured into the decision by Brzezinski and others who favoured the rescue option? What pressures from political-level decision makers were placed on the planners? Were restrictions placed on the planners or did they receive all of the support they needed from the political level? Was there interference from the political level during the actual operation? What was the precise role of Brzezinski in all of this? Did the small planning group which he led and which was responsible for developing the military options play an improper role by leaving others out of the process? To what extent did he take advantage of his position to manipulate others and orchestrate a decision in favour of the rescue option he favoured? These are the kinds of questions that will be addressed in this chapter.
3. The explanations presented in this chapter will assume that the reader is familiar with the analysis in the previous chapters. Indeed, the whole purpose of the previous chapters was to lay the groundwork for these explanations.
4. In the final analysis, the use of an interpretive "conceptual lens" like the political process model cannot change the essential nature of developing a list of factors like this: it is fundamentally a hermeneutic task. As pointed out in Chapter 2, when one applies a model like this, the quality of the explanation is dependent on the accuracy and completeness of the data being used, the strength of the particular framework being applied and the skill with which the analyst is able to bring the two together. Having focused on the rescue decision through a political process lens, having examined the evidence, having considered the factors highlighted in published accounts, in the original documentation examined and in the interviews conducted with many of the key participants in the rescue decision and operation, and having critically reflected on the issue for over four years, these factors clearly stand out to the author as the most important ones contributing to Carter's decision to launch the rescue operation.
5. As the review of the US-Iran policy context in Chapter 4 makes clear, it was not just the president, but virtually the entire administration which misread and misunderstood many aspects of the situation in Iran. Bill's analysis of this is excellent (Bill, 1988: 216-315). In an unpublished essay entitled "The Iranian Revolution and the Changing Power Structure" sent "for Hedley Donovan's eyes only" to the White House in March 1980, Bill captured this theme very bluntly: "the US leadership," he stated, "does not understand Iran or Iranians and is severely handicapped by the difficulty of renouncing its serious policy mistakes of the past" (JCLD 3).

6. On 22 March, for example, the president received a letter from the "Family Action Liaison Group," which had been formed by the families of the hostages, expressed alarm and outrage at "news reports of the United States Government's involvement once again with the former shah in Panama and particularly with the fact that Hamilton Jordan, a member of the administration, is there" and threatened a strong and public protest if the shah were allowed into the US or access to a US military hospital (JCLD 10). As well, the president continued to correspond with individual families during this period and the increasing frustration of these families was evident in their letters (JCLD 16). On 27 March, for example, he wrote to encourage Barbara Timm, the mother of one of the hostages, not to go public with "a unilateral statement" (JCLD 17). Against the advice of the administration, Timm went to Iran to see her son in April.

7. During an interview conducted for this study, Powell also argued that domestic politics had been set aside during the final days leading up to the rescue decision, saying "I don't think that the fact that it was an election year had any role at all in either the decision to attempt the rescue mission or the timing of it" (Powell interview). Others have forcefully challenged such claims. Cogan, for example, after dismissing Carter's disavowal of any relationship between his rescue decision and domestic politics, states that "the fact is that the president, after literally months of tergiversations, plunged ahead, precipitously, through the last window of opportunity that remained open before the upcoming election" (Cogan, 1990: 427). Some, like Gartner, go even farther to argue that the decision can be explained solely in terms of domestic political considerations (Gartner, 1993). The point here is that, seen in the context of the frequent resistance of this particular president to political pressures, domestic politics may have reinforced his desire to find an early solution, but this factor was far from the only one involved. Gillon's biography of Mondale, for example, is replete with examples of the vice president's frustration with Carter's resistance to the immediate logic of domestic politics on both foreign policy issues, such as the grain embargo against the Soviet Union, and domestic policy issues, such as the fight against inflation. With respect to the hostage crisis, despite Mondale's frequent attempts during the first few months of 1980 to convince the president that the "Rose Garden strategy" would have a negative impact on his reelection campaign, the president continued this self-imposed isolation until after the rescue attempt (Gillon, 1992: 251-299).

8. An analysis of the degree to which this diminishing confidence was deserved is beyond the scope of this study. Such an analysis would, of course, have to take into account the entire dynamic within the administration including, for example, the ways in which the president's decisions and process preferences weakened the performance of Vance and his entire department. For purposes of the explanation being developed, consistent with the political process model, the focus here is the president's perception of the effectiveness of the State Department.

9. The president may have believed that the rescue option was more acceptable to Vance than other military options. Brzezinski notes that, at the 11 April NSC meeting, "In passing, the President remarked that Vance, prior to leaving for his vacation in Florida, had told the President that he opposed any military action but if a choice had to be made between a rescue and a wider blockade, he preferred the rescue" (Brzezinski, 1983: 493).

10. This assessment is consistent with the final report of the Holloway Group. Although it was highly critical of the rescue mission in many specific areas and made specific recommendations intended to improve future operations of this nature, the report concluded that, despite its weaknesses, the plan still had "a good chance of success." The report did find that in one specific component of the plan, the choice to use a remote area near a road as a staging base, "probably carried more risk than the JTF had assessed" but, having made this specific criticism, its

overall conclusion was that the plan still had been one which had "a good chance of success" (JCLD 51; NSAD 102).

11. It is, as Turner and Jones point out, virtually impossible to mathematically quantify the chances of success for a mission of this nature (Turner and Jones interviews). In light of the evidence presented in this study, the military planning group's characterization of the rescue mission as having "a reasonably good chance of success" was defensible and probably went as far as possible in doing what Turner calls "trying to quantify a non-quantifiable thing" (Turner interview). Since the rescue attempt, some analysts have claimed that the CIA produced a report which estimated that even a successful operation might result in a casualty rate of 60% among the hostages (Smith, 1984: 121; Waugh, 1990: 34). Turner, however, is emphatic that "the CIA made no official estimate of the mission's chances of success or of the likelihood of casualties" (Vandenbroucke, 1993: 217). In an interview for this study, he acknowledged that there may have been a "mathematically modelled exercise that someone was experimenting with" based on "a methodology that some guy at Princeton or someplace had developed" which produced estimates of casualties in this order of magnitude, but he stressed that "it was an experimental thing" and not the kind of thing that could be used in the decision-making process (Turner interview). In any case, as Kyle points out, the JTF would not have recommended the rescue operation if it had believed it was one "with such poor odds of success" (Kyle, 1990: 199). The real issue becomes whether the professional judgments of Turner, representing the CIA, Jones, representing the Joint Chiefs, and Vaught, representing the JTF, accurately characterized the risks when they argued that it had a "reasonable chance of success" (Vaught's words at the briefing to the president on 16 April were "damn good chance of success"). In the judgment of the author, this characterization is still defensible in light of the evidence, including the report of the Holloway Group which concluded that the mission "had a good chance of success" (JCLD 51; NSAD 102; Vandenbroucke, 1993: 135).

12. Whatever wishful thinking went on at the political level, Vance certainly was not a part of it. As he made clear all along, he considered that the risks involved with this kind of military action were not worth taking unless the hostages were actually being harmed (Vance, Turner and Brzezinski interviews).

13. As Sick notes in his account of the 11 April NSC meeting, "Once one accepted the necessity of action, the selection of the rescue mission quickly asserted itself as a logical inevitability" (Sick, 1985: 292).

14. Seen in historical perspective, the incompatible views of Vance and Brzezinski and the process itself were major problems which greatly reduced the effectiveness of the Carter administration. The case that, despite Carter's views to the contrary, the administration was divided and weak at this key moment in its history will be made in the following chapter.

15. "Groupthink" was, as will be argued shortly, a more significant issue in terms of its impact on the operational plan because this small, closed group did not call upon outside expertise and allowed a "murder board" process to be established which did not provide for an independent review of the concept of operations or the details of the plan.

16. It is interesting to note that Vance still believes that things "might have been different" if he had been at the 11 April meeting. In an interview for this study, he remarked that "once a decision is made, it's very hard to change it" (Vance interview). However, the consensus at this point was so strong that it is unlikely that Vance could have done better on 11 April than he did on 15 April. In any case, that is the view of some of the key decision makers who best knew the president and Vance (Brzezinski, Powell, Jones, Turner and Newsom interviews).

17. Turner, for example, is highly critical of some of the senior military commanders involved in the operation, arguing that Beckwith, for example, "was the wrong man to lead the operation" and that Vaught "organized the total force poorly." Kyle, on the other hand, focuses his anger and frustration on the helicopter pilots who he believes did not have "the guts to try" when they encountered problems in the desert (Turner, 1991: 132-145; Kyle, 1990: 326-340).

18. As was the case for the decision, the use of an interpretive "conceptual lens" like the political process model cannot change the essential nature of the task of developing this list of factors: it is essentially a hermeneutic one. Moreover, the author of this study has been a member of the Canadian Forces since 1967 and the analysis contained in this section is therefore based on some professional military judgments as well as academic ones.

19. The Holloway Group noted that, as the planning for the rescue mission matured, "the number of helicopters perceived necessary to execute the mission grew from four, to six, to seven and eventually to eight." This was due to the growth in the size of the rescue force (personnel and equipment) believed necessary to ensure an acceptable probability of success during the assault phase of the operation and the loss in the lift capacity of individual helicopters as a result of rising seasonal temperatures in the areas of operation. The group argued that, without increasing the size of the C-130 operation at Desert One, sufficient fuel would have been available to refuel 10 helicopters. Based on this, it argued that additional helicopters should have been made available on the *Nimitz* and argued that 11 should have been launched, with one turning back before its fuel state reached the point where it could no longer return to the *Nimitz* and the other 10 carrying on to Desert One (JCLD 51; NSAD 102). Given that the *Nimitz* could hold only 12 RH-53D helicopters below deck (Ryan, 1985: 38-41), that the probability of detection of the rescue force in Iran increased with each addition to the size of the force, that the risk of compromise to the mission before it reached Iran also increased with each addition to the size of the force as a result of an increased level of activity throughout the training, deployment and immediate pre-execution continuum (JCLD 51), this recommendation certainly appears to balance the relevant factors, including the critical need for enough helicopters. It is, however, important to understand that it would have been necessary to take the decision to increase the helicopter force size above eight at a fairly early stage, since it would have required some lead time to place the additional helicopters aboard the *Nimitz* and, even more significantly, to train more helicopter crews (Kyle interview). When the decision was taken to launch all eight helicopters in early April (NSAD 19, 101, 102, 124; Brzezinski, 1983: 495; Pustay interview), in other words, the JTF did not have the option to increase the size of the helicopter force further because there was insufficient lead time to take these steps before the window of opportunity for the mission to take place closed at the end of the month.

20. The classified version of the Holloway Report includes an annex with detailed statistical analysis which shows some weaknesses in the methodology used by the planners. Based on more rigorous statistical inference, the report concludes that eight helicopters provided only a .65 probability of meeting the needs of the rescue force, including six mission-capable ones at Desert One, under "peacetime" criteria and a .90 probability under "combat" criteria (NSAD 102). A larger fleet size would have increased these probabilities. A fleet size of 10, for example, would have increased the probability of having the required number of helicopters at each stage to .97 under "combat" criteria. The Holloway Group concluded that 10-12 helicopters should have been used, with 10 actually landing at Desert One. This conclusion was based on holding other key variables constant: the amount of fuel available at Desert One, storage space on the *Nimitz* and at the night one hideout site and the number of trained pilots (JCLD 51; NSAD 102). To be fair to the JTF, in all but two of the rehearsals, which were flown over similar distances and the expected meteorological conditions, all of the

helicopters flew the full route for nights one and two without encountering major mechanical difficulties and, on the other two occasions, only one helicopter dropped out. This experience obviously reinforced the expectations of the planners that eight helicopters were sufficient (NSAD 56).

21. The Holloway Group attributes this breakdown to the way in which, to enhance the security of the mission, weather information was passed to the pilots by intelligence officers rather than meteorologists. As mentioned in Chapter 6, the suspended dust condition, or "haboob," is caused by downward currents of air, associated with thunderstorms but occurring several hours later and about 100 miles away, which forces a fine powder into the air where it hangs for several hours. Not only was this condition impossible to forecast, it was not detectable with satellite sensors and there were no operational weather stations along the route providing current weather information. Had they known that suspended dust was a possible situation they could encounter without warning, the helicopter flight would have been able to develop contingency plans to deal with it. The most logical response would have been to abort the mission, return to the *Nimitz* and launch the mission again later. Kyle recalls being told about suspended dust at a briefing on 11 April, but he was not concerned because he believed that it could be forecast and the mission would be delayed if such a condition existed because it was to be launched only if the forecast was for visual flight conditions. Given that a condition of suspended dust could not be forecasted, the case that the Holloway Group makes for both a weather reconnaissance mission just prior to the operation and having at least some of the C-130 fleet act as pathfinders (flying in front of the helicopters and leading the way to Desert One) is quite compelling (Kyle, 1990: 178, 248-249, 260 and 327-329; Ryan, 1985: 32 and 72; JCLD 51; NSAD 102).

22. When the BIM (Blade Inspection Method) warning light came on in the cockpit, the procedure was to land and check the mechanical rotor blade fault indicators on each of the blades. Taken together, these two warnings indicate a loss of nitrogen pressure in the blade, which can be caused by a crack, defective seal or leaky filler valve. Unless there was visible evidence of a crack on the blade, the Navy's procedure was to complete a combat mission since Sikorsky, the manufacturer of the RH-53D, had conducted extensive tests on rotor blades following BIM warnings and had found that even cracked blades retained structural integrity for about 30 hours at the average speeds planned for the route and even longer at slower speeds (at the point where helicopter number 6 aborted it would have taken only five more hours to complete the insertion phase of the operation). The detection system on the RH-53 was much better than that on the CH-53 and the RH-53 had aluminum rotor blades whereas the CH-53 had titanium ones. The Navy had never experienced a crash associated with BIM warnings; indeed, after 230,000 blade hours of operation with the RH-53 to the end of 1979, it had not experienced a single crack. The Marines, on the other hand, had experienced many spar cracks and three crashes of the CH-53 and automatically interpreted the BIM warning as an indication that there was a crack which could expand quickly. Unfortunately for the fate of the mission, despite two BIM incidents during training, the pilot of helicopter number six was not familiar with the Navy's experience and procedures. Given the post-mission analysis that has been done, there is little doubt that, as Kyle asserts, helicopter number six would never have aborted if the pilot "had known then what he knows now about the Navy BIM system" (JCLD 51; NSAD 102; Kyle, 1990: 115, 249-250, 333-334; Martin and Walcott, 1988: 34).

23. The key consideration for the pilot of helicopter number five was that, having lost visual contact with the main formation, he felt he did not have the equipment necessary to find Desert One in the low-visibility conditions he was experiencing. Had he known that he would have been out of the area of suspended dust shortly and that the visibility at Desert One was good, this would have changed his calculations. During the subsequent investigation, he told the Holloway

Group that, had he known the visibility conditions ahead of him, he would probably have carried on. Kyle reports that, even without this information, the copilot did not agree with the decision to return to the Nimitz, arguing "We must go on ... this is the Super Bowl." Clearly, once again, it came down to a matter of judgment and the point here is that a very conservative decision was taken (Kyle, 1990: 269-271).

24. The helicopters carried critical parts with them, but no spare hydraulic pump was taken because the maintenance required to replace the pump was extensive and would not have been possible at Desert One. To fly the RH-53D with only one hydraulic system, certain precautions would have to be taken, the most important of which would be to avoid heavy manoeuvring. If the remaining system failed or was overloaded, control of the aircraft would have been lost immediately, so the risks of flying with one system were obviously greater, especially at the heavy weights at which the mission aircraft were operating. However, other pilots have chosen to launch with only one system when the mission was crucial, such as during search and rescue missions. In a situation like this, it obviously came down to a matter of judgment and thus the difference of opinion between the pilot of helicopter number two and the flight leader (Kyle, 1990: 287 and 336-337; Turner, 1991: 136-137; JCLD 51).

25. After their landing and the subsequent decision of the flight leader to continue the mission, helicopter numbers one and two did climb to higher altitudes on a couple of occasions, but this was the only exception (Kyle, 1990: 265 and 267). In his book, Kyle says that these "absurd tactics restrictions" made the flight to Desert One "far more difficult to fly than it should have been." In an interview for this study, he was even more categorical, calling the tactics used by the helicopter pilots "the kamikaze approach to low level" and calling them "crazy, just absolutely crazy" (Kyle, 1990: 337-338; Kyle interview).

26. In a comment that revealed his mental state shortly after his arrival at Desert One, Major Jim Schaefer, the pilot of helicopter number three which was involved in the subsequent crash, stated that "These are the hairiest conditions I have ever flown in, and I think we should abort - I mean get on the C-130s and get out of here." When he arrived about a half hour later, the flight leader, Lieutenant Colonel Ed Seiffert, made a similar comment: "That was the worst sandstorm I've ever flown through. We ought to call this off. Leave the helicopters and get out of here" (Kyle, 1990: 280 and 285). Clearly the ordeal of flying through the suspended dust had taken its toll. As Kyle says, this experience "just drained them, by the time they got to Desert One, they weren't mentally capable of going on" (Kyle interview).

27. As Kyle concludes after talking with electronics intelligence experts during the research for his book, "short cryptic transmissions" using the satellite communications system between the helicopter flight and the command posts at Desert One and in Egypt and between the helicopters using UHF radios could have been made "with minimal danger of compromising the mission" (Kyle, 1990: 331).

28. While drawing this conclusion, the Holloway Group made it clear that, of the 23 issues it had addressed and made judgments on, it found this one involved its "most difficult judgment." Nevertheless, while emphasizing the fact that "the level of security practised by the JTF did preserve secrecy" and acknowledging the reality that even a slight reduction in this level would be at the expense of "some increased probability of operational compromise," the Group concluded that the JTF had taken such a rigorous approach to guarding the secrecy of the operation that it did not do things that "could have been done to enhance mission success ... without an adverse OPSEC [Operations Security] impact" (JCLD 51).

29. Following the president's tentative decision on 11 April to launch the rescue mission, the status of the key players was clarified when Vaught officially appointed Gast as his deputy commander, Pitman as commander of the helicopter force and Kyle as overall commander at

Desert One. Prior to this time, Gast's official status had been that of "consultant on Iran," Kyle's had been "Deputy COMJTF/Air Component Commander" and Pitman's had been "advisor to COMJTF regarding helicopter operations," although he had never been officially appointed to the JTF. Given Sieffert's supervision of the daily training of the helicopter force at its location in Arizona and the heavy informal involvement of Gast and Pitman, Kyle's role had, in practice, evolved into that of "supervising and coordinating the C-130 training" (JCLD 51; NSAD 102; Ryan, 1985: 21-28). The result was that there was never any effective coordination of the air assets in the rescue force by a single commander.

30. The special operations capabilities of the US military had declined rapidly following the Vietnam War (Kyle, 1990: 23-24). From the perspective of those involved in Operation Eagle Claw, the most positive result of the experience was that a higher priority was thereafter given to special operations; indeed, the capabilities to conduct special operations have improved steadily since that time. In 1983, having identified a year earlier the need for "a measured expansion of special operations forces," the JCS established a new joint command whose sole responsibility was for special operations, Joint Special Operations Command (Ryan, 1985: 144-145). Had this command existed on 4 November 1979, the JCS would have quickly tasked it to develop the rescue plan, thus avoiding many of the problems of organization and training described here.

31. Ryan reports that "Air Force officers later admitted that once they had landed at Desert One, they had seen immediately that the operation had taken on complexities which had not been envisioned during the training stage" (Ryan, 1985: 81). The combination of the deafening noise from the C-130 and RH-53D engines and the swirling sand made it extremely difficult to communicate, observe the area and even, at times, to recognize other members of the rescue force in close proximity. To make matters worse, Kyle had no direct radio communications with Beckwith, the C-130 and helicopter pilots or the roadblock teams (JCLD 51; Kyle, 1990: 283-306; Beckwith, 1983, 267-280). The loose sand on the north side of the road where the accident occurred was about two inches deep, that on the south side of the road about one inch deep. There was very little sand on the desert surface at the location in California where the final practice took place and the helicopter pilots expected similar conditions at Desert One (Kyle, 1990: 174, 189 and 279; Vandenbroucke, 1993: 146).

32. Kyle's summary of the difficulties experienced with the communications equipment is the most comprehensive (Kyle, 1990: 329-330). While his analysis makes it clear that valid criticisms can be made about the selection of communications equipment for the mission and the procedures for its use, effective command and control would still have been possible if the commanders had been willing to assert themselves more aggressively once the serious problems developed. In other words, as important as Kyle's analysis is in terms of "lessons to be learned," the equipment difficulties did not affect the outcome of the mission because effective command and control was still possible.

33. Although Desert One was the only site in the desert suitable for C-130s that the JTF was able to locate, its location near a well-used road implied risks. Five vehicles had driven by during the time that the reconnaissance flight was on the ground a few weeks earlier and the Desert One force included two roadblock teams with elaborate plans to stop any vehicles that showed up on the night of 24-25 April and to evacuate the occupants (Kyle, 1990: 173 and 261-264; Turner, 1991: 110). However, the abandoned vehicles of any Iranians that had to be flown out of Iran at this point or any rescue force aircraft that had to be left behind might draw attention to the area and lead to the compromise of the mission. Considering the risks of compromise in the aftermath of the incredibly bad-luck scenario that played out at Desert One within minutes of the arrival of the lead C-130, the Holloway Group concluded that not only had these vehicle incidents "significantly increased the

chances of the Iranians' identifying the intent and timing of the operation," but that the plan had probably involved "more risk than the JTF assessed" (JCLD 51). That said, the on-site assessment at Desert One, concurred with at all levels of the command structure, was that the mission should be continued despite the vehicle encounters, so these incidents were not a factor in the subsequent decision to abort the mission. They could, of course, have played a factor in the outcome if the mission had continued and been compromised before the assault on the embassy. Undoubtedly the risk of compromise at later stages went up as a result of the vehicle incidents, but it is still quite possible that the element of surprise could have been achieved the next evening, since all of the Iranians detained at Desert One would have been evacuated and the two who had fled the scene had not seen the operation and would probably not have reported it right away if they were running contraband as Beckwith suspected (which seems probable given their tactics when they were stopped). Had the mission been compromised despite this, the intense electronic surveillance effort by the National Security Agency over Iran during the mission would likely have detected the compromise and the rescue force would have been withdrawn prior to the assault phase of the operation.

34. The issue of whether Marine pilots should ever have been assigned to the mission has been the source of one of the most lively debates over the years. Given the way that things turned out, some of those who participated in the operation, particularly Beckwith and Kyle, have been extremely hard on the helicopter pilots, arguing that they were not up to the task at hand. Clearly there were early problems in this area, since most of the initial cadre of Navy pilots, although current on the RH-53D, did not have the skills required to perform the mission and had to be replaced by Marine pilots who had to convert to the RH-53D. Some of these Marines, in turn, had to be replaced near the end of December when they too did not progress well in their training. At this point, Kyle argued forcefully for bringing in Air Force pilots who had more experience than the Marines in low-level night flying, but was overruled (Kyle, 1990: 119-123). The final helicopter pilot cadre included one Air Force pilot and two Navy pilots. The Holloway Group's assessment of this is fair and balanced. Although it noted that "learning new and vastly different complex mission skills is far more difficult than transitioning to an aircraft of similar design and performance characteristics" and agreed that USAF pilots "would probably have progressed more rapidly," it concluded that, by the time the mission took place on 24 April, "there is nothing to suggest that any other combination of aircrews could or would have performed the mission better than those who flew it" (JCLD 51; NSAD 102).

35. Due to the mechanical problems experienced during the operation, there has been considerable criticism of the way that the helicopters were flown and maintained on the Nimitz. Until the final few weeks before the mission was launched, there were clearly very serious problems and Vaught is still critical of the Navy's performance in this area (Kyle, 1990: 133, 137, 155 and 167; NSAD 39, 75 and 105; Kyle interview). However, a final push to get all of the helicopters into top shape was successful and the weight of the evidence is that all of the helicopters were in excellent mechanical condition when they launched on the night of 24 April; one indication of this is that "the hanger queen" (the helicopter which had flown the least during its time on the Nimitz because of recurring technical problems) was one of the ones that made it to Desert One in a mission-ready condition (NSAD 19; Ryan, 1985: 51-59).

36. Despite the criticisms of some of those involved, especially Vaught, the Holloway Group concluded that, although it got off to a slow start, "intelligence support was adequate" by 24 April. The valid criticism is that this support was slow to develop. With its only officers in Tehran taken as hostages, the CIA had to start essentially from scratch and infiltrate new officers into Tehran. The intelligence effort came to fruition only in April, when DoD sent its own personnel into Tehran and the CIA was able to determine the precise location of the hostages at

both the embassy and foreign ministry (JCLD 51; NSAD 102; Vandenbroucke, 1993: 126-128; Turner, 1990: 99-118).

37. Although not directly related to the failure of the mission, the criticisms about the night two plan is, of course, related to the issue of risk. While the performance of the helicopter force had been the JTF's greatest concern all along and proved inadequate, other elements of the plan, such as the assaults on the two locations where the hostages were being held, involved risks of their own. Had the operation continued on from Desert One, it could have failed at a later stage. It is therefore not surprising that criticisms of the night two plan have focused on virtually every aspect of it, including the plan to enter the city, the assault plans at the two locations where the hostages were being held and the extraction plan. Since these stages of the operation were never reached, critics simply make the same kind of judgments about them that were made in 1980. In light of the evidence presented in this study, particularly the fact that the elaborate effort to prevent compromise of the mission, especially to Soviet intelligence, had been successful; that DoD and CIA personnel on the ground, who were moving freely around the Tehran area, were confident that the rescue force could reach the two locations with the element of surprise; that the lax security situation at the embassy had been confirmed; and that the precise location of the hostages had been determined and the operation could therefore be completed in a minimum of time, there is no reason to doubt the Holloway Group's assessment that, from a military-operational perspective, the overall concept of the mission was valid, the plan was feasible and the operation had a good chance of success (JCLD 51). Put another way, the chances of getting most of the hostages out of Iran on night two of the operation were reasonably good, albeit not without the certain loss of a significant number of Iranian lives, including innocent people, and the probable loss of some American lives.

38. The other key member of the military planning group, Turner, continued to have reservations about the use of Nain and it was only with the switch from Nain to Desert One that his confidence in the rescue option increased to the level of the others (Turner, 1991: 88 and 106; Turner interview). The Holloway Group took a similar view, saying that it was the end of March before "the first realistic capability to successfully accomplish the rescue of the hostages was reached" (JCLD 51; NSAD 102)

39. Vaught, who was used to exercising "hands-on" leadership, intended to be the on-scene commander at Nain so that he could personally supervise the seizure of the airfield there and preferred to be the commander at Desert One as well, but once the shift to Desert One was made, Jones asked him to remain in Egypt until night two when he would command the rescue force from Manzariyeh (Turner, 1991: 113 and 140). Although it was a small, remote airfield, the refuelling at Nain would have taken place on a hard surface and it was likely that any sand problem that was encountered would not be a serious one (Kyle, 1990: 124-130).

40. Turner believes that the president would never have approved the Nain option because of the higher risks of compromise involved. As he noted in an interview conducted for this study, "If Carter had been in this all along instead of just saying 'I don't want to do it,' I think they [the JTF] would have understood this earlier" (Turner interview). Even more importantly, if the president would have heard the case for the switch to Desert One and therefore the logic of the reconnaissance mission to confirm the suitability of this location, he might have authorized the mission much earlier.

41. In an interview for this study, Turner not only stated that Brzezinski had this "great penchant for secrecy," but that he used secrecy as "a way of exercising power" (Turner interview).

42. As Ryan points out, the natural starting point for military planners is to "assume that a mission will succeed only if all hands are fully acquainted, on a need-to-know basis, with the roles of their fellow

units and with the overall objective." It is only then that "individuals can use their initiative and make effective decisions if things go wrong." As he points out, "these conditions did not prevail in the rescue operation" (Ryan, 1985: 15). The veil of secrecy was so tight, in other words, that it resulted in the extreme compartmentalization of individual efforts and inhibited the synergy that military units normally experience during their planning and training for a specific mission.

43. The Holloway Group noted that the decision not to conduct an evaluation of the plan by independent observers and monitors was driven by concern about preserving operational security. The extent to which the military planning group was actively involved in this decision is not clear from the record. At the very least, the decision would have been taken by the JTF in the context of the enormous pressure that it was under from the military planning group, most notably from Brzezinski, to limit the circle of those with access to the plan as tight as possible and the military planning group would have known about this and would have had a chance to challenge this approach. Although it acknowledged that the "exposure of additional individuals to the plan might have increased the risk of security leaks," the Holloway Group concluded that "the inclusion of several additional individuals, properly qualified to handle the plans review function on a continuing basis, would have facilitated the planning process without necessarily degrading security" (JCLD 51).

44. An independent review process might have reduced the risks by challenging the JTF's thinking on issues ranging from the number of helicopters to be used to procedures for command, control and communications. For example, two alternatives suggested by the Holloway Group, the use of a weather reconnaissance flight in advance of the penetration of Iranian airspace by the main rescue force or the use of C-130 "pathfinders" to escort the helicopter force, might have been given more serious consideration if the JTF's assumptions about the weather possibilities en route had been challenged more forcefully (JCLD 51; NSAD 102).

45. There was, of course, one other political-level decision maker on the military planning group, Harold Brown. As mentioned earlier, however, Brown limited his role to a supporting one, leaving Brzezinski firmly in charge of the planning process and serving as the main channel of communication to the president. Since he played such a leading role, the criticism here is directed at Brzezinski, but it should be understood that, had he chosen to, Brown could have played a more significant role. For this reason, the criticism here reflects on Brown as well.

46. One of the reasons that Carter was determined not to interfere in the operation was that he was aware that interference by Kennedy had been a major problem during the Bay of Pigs operation, an error which he did not want to repeat (Brzezinski, 1983: 495).

47. Even well after he left office, Carter still thought that the rescue plan "was the best we could evolve" (Middleton, 1981: 106). He was still unaware of the way in which decision making at the political level had shaped the rescue plan.

CHAPTER EIGHT - THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION IN RETROSPECT

The failure of the hostage rescue attempt was an enormous political setback for the Carter administration. On the international stage, despite the immediate efforts of the president and his senior foreign and defence policy advisers to minimize the damage, the failure was a severe blow to the international reputation of both the US military and the administration; and, on the domestic stage, despite the determined efforts of the president and his key political advisers to limit the political fallout, the failure fuelled criticisms that the administration was incompetent and was simply groping its way through the hostage crisis. In both cases, the main problem was that the failure was not seen in isolation. Rather, it was generally taken, by both the international and domestic audiences, as another example of the kind of inept performance that had plagued the administration from the outset. The powerful images of the disaster at Desert One, in other words, were all too consistent with the image of "a failing presidency" that had emerged as the main obstacle to Carter's bid for reelection.

On 4 November 1980, six months after the failed hostage rescue attempt, the American public rejected Carter's bid for a second term. Instead, by a decisive margin, voters placed their hopes on Ronald Reagan to lead the nation's efforts to revitalize the stalled economy and to reassert US power and recapture US prestige on the global stage. While the tough economic circumstances of 1980, the lack of unity within the Democratic Party and Reagan's highly successful campaign were clearly important factors as well, the inability of the administration to find a solution to the hostage crisis was one of the most important ones that led to its defeat at the polls.

Seen in historical perspective, the themes that emerge from this in-depth examination of the rescue decision and operation are important ones to consider in the context of the recent debates about the Carter years. This comprehensive look at the decision-making process during the period from the seizure of the embassy on 4 November 1979 until the rescue mission failed on 24-25 April 1980 not only highlights some very fundamental characteristics of the administration's approach to decision-making that are important in explaining both the rescue decision and outcome; it also highlights some key themes that deserve a central place in any serious critique of the administration itself. As such, this study of the rescue attempt has something important to contribute to our overall

understanding of this administration at a time when another round of assessment and debate, based on clearer historical perspective and greater access to the actual record, is just beginning to take shape (Reichard, 1990: 603-617; Rozell, 1993: 317-328; Kaufman, 1993: 1-3 and 211-214).

This chapter will begin by taking a brief look at the last nine months of the Carter administration, including the negotiated settlement to the hostage crisis. It will then draw upon and extend the analysis developed in earlier chapters to make some broader points relevant to the recent debates about the Carter years. Given that the hostage rescue decision and operation marked such a crucial moment for this administration, perhaps even a defining one, this concluding chapter will, in other words, apply the evidence presented in this study to address some key issues in the ongoing debates about Carter's rightful place in history.

Immediate Aftermath, Electoral Defeat and Return of the Hostages

In the immediate aftermath of the failed rescue operation, the administration moved quickly to try to limit the damage. In order to ensure that neither Iran nor the Soviet Union misunderstood the nature of the operation, at 1:00 AM on 25 April, the White House released a short statement that the president had ordered "the cancellation of an operation in Iran which was underway to prepare for a rescue of our hostages ... because of equipment failure." The statement also explained that eight military personnel had been killed in a collision between two US aircraft during the withdrawal phase after the mission had been cancelled and indicated that the president accepted "full responsibility for the decision to attempt the rescue" (JCLD 46).'

At 7:00 AM Carter went on national television with a fuller statement. Calling the operation "a humanitarian mission" and "a necessity and a duty," he explained his decision to launch it in terms of "the steady unravelling of authority in Iran and the mounting dangers that were posed to the safety of the hostages themselves and the growing realization that their early release was highly unlikely." Acknowledging that he knew the operation was "certain to be difficult" and "certain to be dangerous," he made a forceful statement on responsibility, saying that "It was my decision to attempt the rescue operation. It was my decision to cancel it when problems developed ... The responsibility is fully my own" (JCLD 44). At noon that same day, accompanied by Jones, Brown held a press conference in which he provided a fuller explanation of the rescue

plan to the point where the mission had been cancelled and of the difficulties that had been encountered in implementing it.² While admitting that "the mission was complex and difficult," Brown emphasized several times that, when the decision was made to launch the operation, the president and his senior defence advisers, including the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had considerable confidence in the plan and in those who had been tasked to implement it. It was a credible performance which put the best possible face on an operation that had clearly been a total failure (JCLD 49).

Over the course of the next few weeks, DoD conducted an extremely well-organized effort to deal with the many questions that arose from the media and public (NSAD 1, 61, 67, 76-78, 86, 91-94, 111-117; JCLD 4, 5, 48, 49). DoD also managed very carefully the appearances before congressional committees of those who had planned and led the operation to portray their actions in the most favourable light possible (NSAD 14, 40, 41, 55, 63, 66, 67, 71, 72, 106). Despite these efforts, it was obvious by mid-May that a number of troubling questions about the planning and execution of the mission were being raised which could only be credibly addressed by some sort of independent inquiry. It was in this context that Jones appointed former Chief of Naval Operations Admiral James L. Holloway III, who had retired in 1978, to chair a special review group to examine "the planning, organization, coordination, direction, and control of the Iranian hostage rescue mission, as a basis for recommending improvement in these areas for the future" (JCLD 51; NSAD 102). As Holloway made clear when he presented the unclassified version of his report, the group was "not chartered to produce a white paper examining the Iranian hostage crisis at the national level." Rather, its "focus was within the Department of Defense and primarily on military issues" (JCLD 50). The report, which was made public in August 1980, stated that the operation had been feasible and the decision to execute it had been justified; moreover, it found "not a shred of evidence of culpable neglect or incompetence." That said, it did identify 11 major factors that influenced the outcome of the mission and made several criticisms and recommendations (JCLD 51). Given its narrow mandate and highly specific criticisms of the way the mission had been planned and executed, the overall effect of the Holloway report was to focus criticism for the failure of the operation on the military.³

In order to minimize criticism that he had not conformed to the War Powers Resolution of 1973, the president moved quickly to provide Congress

with an official notification of the operation, informing both the Senate and the House of his decisions to launch the rescue mission and then to cancel it. Calling the operation a "humanitarian mission," the president stated that the way it had been ordered and conducted was consistent with his powers under the US Constitution as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, with the War Powers Resolution, and with the UN Charter (JCLD 9, 18 and 23). Ten days later, on 6 May, Brown provided Congress with a much fuller explanation of events leading up to the cancellation of the operation (JCLD 39; NSAD 101). After conducting both public and in-camera hearings for about two weeks, the congressional committees essentially abandoned their investigations without having reached any consensus or conclusions, leaving the issue in the hands of Holloway's review group. The president's authority to have made the decision to launch the mission without having informed Congress in advance was never seriously challenged.⁴

In an attempt to minimize the political damage, the president and his key foreign policy advisers, including the new secretary of state, worked hard to portray a president who had been justified and courageous in making the decision to launch the rescue mission, as well as one who was willing to take full responsibility for the decision without searching for scapegoats (JCLD 1, 4 and 5).⁵ To this end, on 27 April, Brzezinski and Brown gave forceful interviews on national television (JCLD 4 and 5) and, on 29 April, Brown held a second press conference with Jones during which Jones made it clear that the Joint Chiefs had not only provided their assessment that a rescue operation was "militarily feasible" and "had a very good chance of success," but had actually "recommended it" to the president as their preferred course of action (NSAD 116). On the international stage, the administration made an immediate effort to hold together support for sanctions on 17 May by persuading key allies that, despite the rescue attempt, it considered international cooperation to tighten the economic and political pressure on Iran to be preferable to additional military actions. Also, in an effort to minimize the political impact of Vance's resignation on both the international and domestic audiences, the president quickly selected Senator Edmund Muskie, one of the most respected Democrats in Congress, as his next secretary of state (Carter, 1982: 519-520).

Despite these focused and well-orchestrated efforts, the political consequences of the abortive attempt to rescue the hostages were profoundly negative for Carter. Within the US, given the general mood of

impatience with the crisis, the way in which the operation had taken almost everyone by surprise and the loss of life that had occurred, the immediate reaction of most people to the news, including political opponents, was one of dismay and disappointment, coupled with a degree of sympathy for the president. Criticism from abroad was also remarkably restrained (Vinocur, 1980: A10). However, within days, as more information about what had actually taken place became available, criticism of the operation mounted.⁶ While the specific charges ranged from accusations that the whole idea had been a "reckless roll of the dice" to accusations that the mission might have succeeded if it had not been for the "half-hearted, second-best" approach by the president, the real issue soon became the overall competency and consistency of his entire foreign policy. As *Time* noted in its account of the "Debacle in the Desert," the basic problem for the president was that "his image as inept had been renewed" (Rozell, 1989: 164-166).

These powerful images of failure at Desert One, coupled with the administration's inability to solve the problem in some other way before the election, ensured that the hostage rescue attempt would not be forgotten when voters went to the polls in November. In terms of public support, after rising a few percentage points as in the short term as a result of some obvious "rally-around-the-flag" sentiment, the president's approval rating continued its slide. By June it was once again hovering around the 30% mark, the level that it had been when the hostage crisis began in late 1979 (Edwards, 1990: 86-89; Callaghan and Virtanen, 1993: 756-763; JCLD 26).⁷ While Kaufman's judgment that "the failure of the rescue attempt probably did more to undercut the Carter presidency than any other single event" (Kaufman, 1993: 175) may be somewhat overstated, it is clear that, at the very least, the failure was an enormous political setback. Put another way, had the rescue attempt succeeded or had he found another way to solve the hostage problem, it is entirely possible that the November 1980 election might have ended in another victory for Carter.

After the failure of the April rescue attempt, it became clear that launching another rescue operation was not a realistic option. The next day, "on the instructions of the President," Brzezinski held a meeting to begin planning for another mission (Brzezinski, 1983: 499; Turner, 1991: 146). With Vaught still serving as commander, a larger task force was quickly assembled to plan another operation based on the insertion of a large force into Mehrabad Airport on the west side of Tehran. From there,

the force would fight its way to the locations where the hostages were being held, rescue the hostages and then fight its way back to Mehrabad. Whatever the possibilities that such an operation might have some chance of rescuing the hostages had their locations been known, it had no chance to do so once the hostages were dispersed to unknown locations throughout Iran as they were within hours of the rescue attempt (Turner, 1991: 146-147).⁸ The second rescue plan was developed and practiced over the course of the next few months but, in light of the uncertainty about the locations of the hostages, implementing it was never seriously considered (Brzezinski, Turner and Pustay interviews: NSAD 14, 34, 51, 97, 98 and 99).

Having failed to find the quick solution that it had hoped for and having no realistic possibility of getting one, the administration had little choice but to return to the strategy of pressure and negotiations that it had pursued during the first five months of the crisis. As the furore over the rescue attempt subsided during the following weeks, the president and his key advisers realized that only one avenue was left open to them: the one that Vance had recommended all along, namely to continue to try to isolate Iran and wait until the revolutionary leadership was ready to negotiate in earnest.⁹ Unfortunately, another four and a half months would pass before this was the case. The only encouraging news during this period was the release in July of Richard Queen, whose health had taken a sudden turn for the worse.¹⁰ For an incumbent president whose basic approach over the previous three and a half years had been an active problem-solving one, whose efforts to find a solution to this particular problem had left no stone unturned and whose popularity lagged that of his main opponent in his bid for reelection, this stalemate was difficult and, given the way in which the hostage problem had gripped the nation for almost a year, impossible to ignore. As Carter noted just two days after he had handed over the reins of the presidency to Reagan, "1980 was pure hell - the Kennedy challenge, Afghanistan, having to put the SALT Treaty on the shelf, the recession, Ronald Reagan, and the hostages ... always the hostages" (Jordan, 1982: 7).

While it may have been his most vexing and persistent problem, the hostage crisis was not, of course, the only one that plagued the president during this period; indeed, the weak performance of the economy was another problem which became a major factor in the election campaign. Beginning in May, the annual rate of inflation began to decline rapidly from a first quarter average of 18 percent and interest rates began to

drop almost as quickly as they had increased from an April peak of 20 percent but, at the same time, the unemployment rate began to rise sharply and the economy entered a recession. By July, as the unemployment rate reached eight percent and continued to rise, it was clear that unemployment had replaced inflation as the most serious economic problem facing the nation. Despite the election calendar and the pleas of key economic advisers such as Eizenstat, Schultze, McIntyre and Mondale, Carter stubbornly clung to his policy of "austerity, pain and sacrifice," refusing to endorse the kind of spending increases or tax cuts which might have undermined support for Kennedy and preempted the Republican campaign. It was only in July, when inflationary pressures had fallen and the recession proved to be deeper than he had anticipated, that the president, in his third "recovery program" of 1980, endorsed a new package to stimulate the economy, one which focused on encouraging business investment rather than on cutting taxes. It was not until October, however, that the economy began to show the first signs that it might be pulling out of recession. Thus, as election day approached, the Republican charge that the economic policies of the administration were "too little, too late, too political" appeared to be a credible one in the eyes of many Americans (Kaufman, 1993: 176-179, 183-184 and 197-200).

Carter's struggle with Congress also continued. The administration was successful in getting the Energy Security Act and legislation permitting a windfall profits tax on oil through Congress, but these were the president's only substantial successes before the election and were overshadowed by rejection of his proposal to create an Energy Mobilization Board and his attempt to impose a surcharge on imported oil.¹¹ The latter issue, which was eventually settled when Congress overrode the president's veto of legislation killing the surcharge,¹² was opposed by the vast majority of lawmakers since it involved a new and unpopular tax during an election year. Despite this political context and his already strained relations with Congress, Carter pressed forward with this initiative as an essential element of his effort to balance the budget. Still seeing himself as the trustee of the public interest, he indignantly noted in his diary that he considered the entire episode to be "a new low in performance for the Congress" (Carter, 1982: 529). This struggle undermined his credibility, however, since it was obvious to voters that the president had once again been decisively rebuked by a Congress dominated by his own party. The harsh reaction of Democrats when he denounced the budget bill passed by Congress for fiscal year 1981 further

added to the perception of an embattled president who could not work effectively with either Congress or his own party (Kaufman, 1993: 177-179).

In addition to the hostage crisis, several other foreign policy problems also plagued the administration in the months leading up to the November election. Within the Atlantic alliance, the administration continued to face serious challenges as key member states remained at odds over what the appropriate response should be to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and to the efforts of the Soviet Union to modernize its military capability, including its nuclear forces, in Eastern Europe and elsewhere. The tensions resulting from these policy differences were increased by continued strains in Carter's personal relationships with several other leaders, most notably West German Chancellor Schmidt and French President Giscard d'Estaing. The administration's approaches to other issues, such as the hostage crisis in Iran and oil import policy, also remained sources of frequent tension with a number of key allies, including Japan. Meanwhile, the administration's relationship with the Soviet Union remained poisoned by the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. The president who, just three years earlier, had claimed that it was time to give up the "inordinate fear of communism" which had plagued previous administrations, now emphasized realpolitik, including a new emphasis on military-strategic initiatives such as the Carter Doctrine, which defined the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean as an area of vital interest, and Presidential Directive 59, which formally sanctioned the targeting of Soviet military installations as well as population centres with nuclear warheads (Kaufman, 1993: 184-187 and 191-192).

Even in an area that represented what was widely regarded as the president's finest foreign policy achievement, the Camp David accords, some fundamental weaknesses were exposed as Begin's Likud coalition rejected the administration's request that Israel suspend construction of new settlements in the occupied territories and passed a law which declared an "undivided Jerusalem" to be the capital of Israel and, in light of apparently irreconcilable differences with Begin over such key terms such as "autonomy," "security," "Palestinian rights" and "West Bank," Sadat broke off negotiations with Israel just two weeks before the deadline for an agreement on Palestinian self-rule in the West Bank and Gaza strip (Kaufman, 1993: 187-189). As the election approached, it was clear that much of the momentum of the peace process launched at Camp

David had been lost. Even in this area, the foreign policy record of the administration was now highly vulnerable to criticism.

Shortly after the failed rescue attempt, Carter abandoned the "Rose Garden strategy" and returned to the campaign trail. By early May, he had accumulated most of the votes needed to secure the nomination of the Democratic Party but his campaign was not able to build the momentum needed to ensure a united party. During the "Super Tuesday" voting on 3 June, which finally gave the Carter campaign enough committed delegates to be assured of the nomination, Kennedy carried five of the eight states conducting elections, including California. Given this growing trend towards repudiation of the president by voters from his own party, Kennedy refused to withdraw from the race, opting instead to press the case for an "open convention" in which delegates would be allowed to vote for the candidate of their choice rather than be held to the commitments they had made during the primaries and caucuses. In the weeks leading up to the convention, racial violence sparked by the bleak economic circumstances of blacks in several major cities and the controversy generated when the media discovered that the president's brother, Billy Carter, was acting as an agent of the Libyan government added to the president's difficulties (Kaufman, 1993: 181-183 and 189-191).¹³

Kennedy took his case for an "open convention" to the floor of the convention in New York in mid-August along with economic policies which he wanted adopted in the party platform. Although the president's supporters defeated the motion to free the delegates from their pre-convention commitments, the Kennedy campaign was successful in having several key provisions, which Carter opposed, inserted into the economic platform. The highlight of the convention was a powerful speech by Kennedy which challenged the party not to abandon its traditional liberal values. Once the Carter-Mondale ticket had been nominated, Kennedy made only a token gesture of party unity. The result of all of this was that the convention created an impression of confrontation and serious divisions within the party, not one of party solidarity (Kaufman, 1993: 193-195).

Following the convention, the presidential race was initially a three-way one between Carter, Republican nominee Ronald Reagan and independent candidate John Anderson, but Anderson's campaign soon stalled and the main event was the Reagan-Carter contest. The key people involved in the president's campaign were the same as those involved in his 1976 one, with Jordan again responsible for the overall strategy. The campaign attempted to portray the president as the more experienced candidate, the

one with the more realistic understanding of complex problems and the only one capable of uniting the country; at the same time, it attempted to portray the Republican challenger as one who lacked experience, advocated simplistic solutions and held views that would inevitably serve to divide the nation and increase the risk of war. The Reagan campaign, on the other hand, tried to stress the need for change and to portray the president as a man whose foreign and defence policies had weakened the US and whose pessimistic views and economic policies were a prescription for failure (Evenson, 1983: 81-87).

Despite his commitment to the campaign and heavy travel schedule, Carter remained involved in every aspect of the hostage crisis. Besides encouraging other countries to adopt more stringent sanctions, however, there was not much that he could do until the revolutionary leadership in Iran indicated that it was ready to negotiate a settlement. The first indication of this came in mid-September when Iranians with close ties to Khomeini made a high-level demarche through the German government, indicating that the Iranian government was willing to reopen negotiations. Shortly thereafter, Khomeini announced that Iran would be prepared to release the hostages if four conditions were met: the release of all frozen Iranian assets, the cancellation of all financial claims by Americans against Iran, the return of the Shah's wealth and a promise not to interfere in the internal affairs of Iran. Significantly, his earlier insistence on an apology from the US was no longer one of his conditions. Although the administration quickly dispatched Christopher to Bonn to meet with Sadegh Tabatabai, a relative and representative of Khomeini, and the climate for negotiations was clearly favourable, the priorities of the Iranian government shifted following the eruption of full-scale war with Iraq in late September and it was only on 2 November, two days before the US election, that the Majlis finally approved, with some qualifications, the conditions Khomeini had announced seven weeks earlier for a final settlement (Kaufman, 1993: 203-206; Turner, 1991: 146-151; Smith, 1986: 206).

The electorate was constantly reminded of the hostage crisis during the final weeks of the campaign. First, there was frequent speculation in the media that Carter was planning an "October Surprise" to improve his prospects for reelection, in the form of either an invasion or some sort of last-minute arms-for-hostages deal, which kept the visibility of the issue high in the weeks leading up to election day.¹⁴ Harboursing genuine concerns that either some form of military action or eleventh-hour

breakthrough would work in Carter's favour, the Reagan campaign cautioned voters to watch for any form of "political manipulation" of the hostage crisis. Second, election day coincided with the anniversary of the seizure of the embassy and, as it approached, the media presented a barrage of stories which reviewed the entire sequence of events over the previous twelve months. Then, only two days before the election, in reaction to the endorsement by the Majlis of Khomeini's terms for a settlement, the president broke off his campaign, returned to Washington and went on national television to inform Americans that the resolution passed in the Majlis offered "a positive basis" for resolving the crisis. As Kaufman notes in his excellent analysis of this, many Americans were highly suspicious of the president's motives. Moreover, "his televised message highlighted his inability to secure the hostages' release before this" and the realization that the crisis was still far from over "left many Americans with a sense of futility and impotence for which they blamed Carter" (Kaufman, 1993: 205-206; Turner, 1991: 151-153; Carter, 1983: 565-567).

Having trailed Reagan following the Republican convention in mid-July by nearly 30 percent, Carter had gained ground during the early weeks of the campaign, closing the gap to within a few percentage points by the end of September and maintaining that position throughout most of October. However, during the last week of the campaign, a rather dramatic shift away from the president took place following a one-on-one debate with Reagan. Most political observers agreed that Carter handled himself well during the debate, projected himself as a thoughtful decision maker who was well-versed in the complexities of the issues and, in terms of substance, was the winner. On the other hand, in terms of image and style, most agreed that Reagan was the obvious winner and all of the public opinion polls taken following the debate gave him a clear margin of victory. By appearing well prepared on the issues and more personable and relaxed than the president (effectively using, for example, "there you go again" and "aw shucks" to counter some of Carter's debating points), Reagan clearly helped overcome the lingering suspicions of many voters that he might not be up to the job of president. In a moment which struck an extremely responsive chord for many voters, Reagan used his concluding statement to return to the issues of the economy and the place of the US in the world by asking the American people "are you better off than you were four years ago?" If the answer was "no," he argued, then the obvious choice was to vote for a new president. With the humiliation of the

hostage crisis still a visible part of their daily lives and the economy still struggling to pull out of recession, the majority of the large number of voters who had not yet made their final decision responded by placing their hopes for the future on Ronald Reagan. Many others, particularly from among groups that traditionally supported Democratic candidates, simply decided to stay home in the lowest voter turnout in over 30 years (Kaufman, 1993: 197-208).

On 4 November 1980, Ronald Reagan was elected as the fortieth president, receiving 51 percent of the vote to Carter's 41 percent (Anderson received 7 percent) and 489 electoral votes to Carter's 49. A reversal of fortunes for the Democratic Party also took place in Congress, with the Republicans gaining control of the Senate for the first time in nearly three decades and making significant gains in the House. As the early returns were counted, it became clear that the repudiation of Carter and his party would be decisive and the president conceded defeat even before the polls on the West Coast had closed (Kaufman, 1993: 206-208).

Although his defeat at the polls was a devastating one, Carter continued his quest for a solution to the hostage crisis during his final ten weeks in office with renewed energy and enthusiasm. With the approval by the Majlis on 2 November of Khomeini's terms for the negotiation of a final settlement, the path which would eventually result in the release of the hostages had been set. Within days of the election, an American delegation, led by Christopher, departed for Algiers to begin to negotiate the terms of an agreement, with the Algerian government acting as an intermediary between the American and Iranian negotiating teams. Over the course of the next ten weeks, the Christopher-led delegation shuttled between Washington and Algiers several times as the various cycles of offer and counteroffer were completed and the details of an agreement were slowly worked out (Kaufman, 1993: 203-206; Smith, 1986: 206; JCLD 2).

During his final weeks in office, securing the safe release of the hostages remained the top priority of the president; indeed, his desire to resolve the issue before turning the White House over to Reagan had, in his own words, "almost become an obsession with me" (Carter, 1982: 594). True to the philosophy he had maintained throughout his presidency, he was energized during the transition period by his desire to make a final vital contribution as the trustee of the public and national interest: bringing the hostages home under honourable terms. Consistent with his issue-oriented, problem-solving management style of leadership, he became deeply engaged in the effort to negotiate an acceptable agreement with the

Iranians, personally supervising and directing the final effort to close the deal from the White House (Carter, 1982: 3-13; Jordan, 1982: 388-406).

The negotiations that led to the release of the hostages on 20 January were extremely complex, involving three governments, 4 central banks, 12 commercial banks and hundreds of officials and lawyers in Washington, New York, London, Algiers and Tehran. On the Iranian side, the process involved the Majlis as well as Khomeini and the executive and, on the US side, it involved the Treasury and Justice Departments as well as the State Department and the White House. On 20 November, the administration accepted the Iranian terms as "a basis for resolution of the crisis." Only one condition, a promise not to interfere in the internal affairs of Iran, could easily be disposed of since the administration had no access to the shah's wealth or legal basis for preventing American individuals and companies from making claims against Iran and the problem of releasing frozen Iranian assets involved what Smith calls "an almost indescribable labyrinth of disagreement over how many dollars were involved, fluctuations in the value of currencies, the status of loans, the payment of interest on frozen accounts, the banking laws of other countries where some of the funds were located, and hundreds of interlocking claims" (Smith, 1986: 206; Congressional Quarterly Almanac, 1981: 353).

The final agreement, "the Declaration of Algiers," was based on the basic principle that the release of the hostages and restoration by the US of the November 1979 financial status quo "insofar as practical" would take place simultaneously. The agreement covered the disposition of over \$11 billion in frozen Iranian assets, including \$8 billion in gold, securities and other liquid assets which was placed in escrow in the Bank of England in London on the morning of 20 January. Once the hostages had departed Iranian airspace that afternoon, \$3.7 billion of these liquid assets was applied to pay off Iranian loans to US banks and another \$2.8 billion released to Iran. The remaining \$1.4 of the \$8 billion was held in escrow to secure payment for economic claims against Iran submitted for arbitration to the US-Iran claims tribunal provided for in the agreement. All US claims on the frozen non-liquid assets, which valued more than \$3 billion, were dissolved and these assets were released to Iran. The agreement also provided for US assistance to Iran should it decide "to initiate litigation in US courts to recover assets of the former shah and his family alleged to belong to Iran" in the form of freezing these assets

and requiring status reports from holders of them during the litigation process (JCLD 2).

Carter's singular dedication to his objective of obtaining the release of the hostages before his term expired at noon on 20 January was a key factor in bringing the negotiations to a successful conclusion, especially during the last few days when the outcome was still very much in doubt. As the efforts of the US negotiating team zeroed in on closing the deal during the last few days of his presidency, he gave virtually all of his time and energy to this single issue, personally managing the final stages of the negotiations and, once an agreement was reached, the implementation of the various elements of it. During his final evening in the White House on 19-20 January, with the entire closing of the settlement hanging in the balance in the face of Iran's refusal to sign an annex to the escrow agreement (one of fifteen documents containing detailed instructions for the necessary financial transfers), the president stayed up all night, personally supervising the effort to address the complex technical problems. By energizing the team assembled in his office that evening, making key personal interventions with the US central bank and adding his own problem-solving abilities and willpower to the equation, the president made an important contribution to the effort to overcome the final hurdles (Carter, 1982: 3-13; Jordan, 1982: 388-406; JCLD 2). Indeed, this was Jimmy Carter at his problem-solving best. Having by this time mastered the complex technical details involved with this complex and unprecedented international agreement, the president focused completely and stubbornly on the task, bringing his intellectual skills to bear on the one problem that he wanted so desperately to solve before he left office.¹⁵

Although he succeeded in getting an agreement with Iran to release the hostages, Carter was denied the satisfaction of having the hostages released while he was still president as the Iranians deliberately delayed the departure of the Algerian aircraft with the 52 hostages on board until a few minutes after Ronald Reagan was sworn in as the fortieth president. It was only when he was on the way to Andrews Air Force Base, where Air Force One was waiting to take him to Georgia, that ex-President Carter was informed that the hostages had finally left Tehran. Seven hours later, the Algerian foreign minister turned over the hostages to former Deputy Secretary of State Christopher in Algiers (Carter, 1982: 13-14; Jordan, 1982: 395-406; JCLD 2). After 444 days of captivity, the hostages were finally free. As he returned to private life in Georgia, the ex-president

could take satisfaction in the knowledge that he had finally solved the most unique and perplexing problem he had faced during his four years in the Oval Office. On the other hand, he also knew that, despite his obvious dedication to the task, he had paid an enormous political price for his inability, during the year-long period between the seizure of the embassy and the 1980 election, to find a way to either solve the problem or reduce the sense of humiliation and frustration felt by so many Americans.

The Roots of Carter's Demise: Some Concluding Comments

Another round of debate about the Carter administration's rightful place in history is now in full swing as historians, political scientists, journalists and others examine the record in greater detail and with better historical perspective across a broad spectrum of issue areas and activities. Although its main objective is to provide an in-depth analysis of the decision-making process leading to one particular decision and to one particular outcome, this study is relevant to these recent debates. This is not only because the hostage rescue attempt turned out to be such a crucial moment for the administration, but also because the study reveals serious problems within the administration that are obviously relevant to the development of a broader understanding of the Carter years taken as a whole.

The current debates about the Carter years are taking place in a context which tends to be far more sympathetic than the one that existed when he left office fifteen years ago. Indeed, given his overall record and the way in which he was decisively rejected at the polls in his bid for reelection, the rehabilitation of his reputation during this period has been nothing less than remarkable. A Gallup poll taken in 1992, for example, found that 50 percent of Americans approved of the way that Carter had handled the job of president, compared with the 34 percent who had thought so in late 1980 (Clymer, 1993). Similarly, the negative image in the media that Carter suffered from when he left office has been gradually transformed into a far more positive one and scholarly analysis has undergone a considerable degree of revisionism. These revisionist accounts tend to give more credit to Carter for achievements such as the Panama Canal treaties, the Camp David Accords and energy legislation; to place more importance on the ways in which his powers to address many of the problems facing the nation during his years in office were limited, especially in light of the post-Vietnam, post-Watergate mood in Congress;

to be more sympathetic to the complex and intractable nature of some of these problems, including the hostage crisis; and to be more appreciative of his intellectual capacity, integrity, good intentions and willingness to ignore short-term political consequences to achieve his ends (Reichard, 1990: 603-617; Rozell, 1993: 317-328; Rozell, 1994: 421-434; Hockman, 1994: 411-420; Dumbrell, 1993: 8-17; Strauss, 1994: 449-453). Thus, as Kaufman points out, while a strong consensus was shared by most analysts in the early 1980s that the Carter presidency had been "at least a failure if not a tragedy," there has been a trend in the more recent literature "to look more kindly on the former president and his conduct of affairs while he was in the Oval Office" (Kaufman, 1993: 1-3).

Unfortunately, this revisionist tendency to give a more sympathetic reading to the Carter years has been fuelled by two factors not relevant to a simple, logical assessment of the substantive accomplishments and failures of the administration itself. As Rozell points out, both comparisons with the Reagan administration and Carter's activities as ex-president have had a considerable influence in shaping the recent revisionism. Carter's reputation has clearly benefited from increasingly harsher view that has been taken in recent years of Reagan's leadership style and of the some of the scandals, particularly the Iran-Contra one, that took place during his time in office. As the lax ethical standards within the Reagan administration have been exposed and widely attributed to Reagan's hands-off style of leadership and his delegation of a great deal of authority to his subordinates, Carter's intense devotion to principle, attention to detail and issue-oriented, problem-solving, hands-on style has begun to look much better in comparison. Moreover, as an ex-president, Carter's involvement in a wide variety of problem-solving activities in the areas of international conflict and poverty, ranging from supervising elections and mediating disputes, such as those on the Korean peninsula, in Haiti and in Bosnia, to building homes for the homeless, has been genuinely selfless. Indeed, in comparison to other modern presidents, his performance as an ex-president has been impressive (Rozell, 1993: 323-326; Brock, 1994). Among other things, it has demonstrated that Carter's commitment to justice, peace, altruism and rectitude is genuine and real. Thus, in a highly personal way, his recent activities have helped to highlight his best personal qualities and to foster understanding of his most laudable aspirations.

From a broader historical perspective, however, neither the subsequent problems of the Reagan administration nor Carter's involvement

in commendable activities as an ex-president can change the hard evidence from the Carter years; and it is hard evidence which should inform the current debates. Essentially then, the real issue is whether the early critiques of the Carter administration, which tended to be extremely harsh, now deserve to be revised in light of new evidence and greater historical detachment. The issue, in other words, is whether there is adequate justification for the kinds of revisionist accounts of the Carter years which have appeared recently, giving the president and his inner circle of advisers more credit for their accomplishments and more sympathy for their failures. The substantive evidence presented in this study lends support to the case that such revisionism is not justified. Indeed, one of the key conclusions that one is forced to draw from this study is that, at one of the most crucial moments in its history, the Carter administration was divided and weak.

First of all, it is clear from the evidence presented in this study that there was an unusually high level of unresolved conflict at the highest level of foreign policy decision making in the Carter administration. When one takes a close look at the period between the seizure of the embassy and the rescue attempt, the unresolved conflict between the president's two key foreign policy advisers and, indeed, within the president's mind comes into sharp focus. Perhaps, as Smith points out with respect to the Vance-Brzezinski relationship, their differences were "too profound to be contained indefinitely" (Smith, 1986: 43). Whatever the inevitability of eventual dysfunction, it is clear that the combination of the hostage crisis and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan resulted in a fundamental shift in the president's thinking about the global circumstances facing the US, with profound implications for the already problematic Vance-Brzezinski relationship and the relationships that Carter had with each of them. Indeed, from the evidence presented here, it is simply not possible to argue that, in the final analysis, the Vance-Brzezinski conflict produced some sort of creative tension; on the contrary, on a key issue of great importance to US interests abroad, to the lives of 53 American hostages being held in Iran and to the political future of the administration, the relationship completely broke down, culminating in the isolation and the resignation of Vance. An administration could hardly have been more divided.

Part of the problem was the process. The president knew that the views of Vance and Brzezinski were often irreconcilable, but he increasingly turned to Brzezinski for policy advice. With Brzezinski not

only taking on the role of advocate, but also taking full advantage of the complete range of process tools at his disposal to set the agenda, to build support for his preferred policy options and to engage the president on his own terms, the increasing isolation of Vance was almost inevitable. This process, in other words, which was fully understood and endorsed by the president, clearly contained some of the seeds of its own destruction. Simply put, as Clifford points out, despite his "deficiency and lack of experience in world affairs," Carter assumed full responsibility for foreign policy decision making, but the selection of Vance and Brzezinski as his key advisers and the way in which he used them played on his weakness in this area. "By appointing two men with very different approaches - both operationally and ideologically," Clifford goes on, "Carter found himself confronted with contradictory advice that in the end produced only vacillation and paralysis" (Clifford, 1994: 12). In the final analysis, in other words, the president was simply incapable of managing the relationship he had set up between Vance, Brzezinski and himself.

Another key element in the breakdown of this relationship was, of course, the profound and rapid volte-face in Carter's thinking about global issues that took place during the early months of the hostage crisis. Even before the hostage crisis began, the centre of gravity had already begun to shift towards the White House in the area of foreign policy as well as domestic policy but, for the most part at least, the thinking of the president was still more compatible with that of Vance than of Brzezinski on most issues. With the fundamental change in the president's attitude which came with the twin crises of Iran and Afghanistan in late 1979 and early 1980, however, all of this changed. For a president who thought about international politics in terms of specific problems to be solved and had no well-developed conceptual framework of his own, Brzezinski's image of the world suddenly made more sense than Vance's. Given his visceral aversion to the use of force, the strategy of negotiations and pressure was still his first choice of ways to deal with the hostage crisis but, once the negotiations collapsed completely, his conversion to an image of global politics compatible with Brzezinski's meant that he was far more receptive to the logic of arguments for the use of military force.

The strategy of patience, negotiations and pressure that Vance and his colleagues in the State Department continued to advocate and the military operation that Brzezinski and other senior decision makers wanted

to launch in April 1980 were fundamentally incompatible. Once the decision to attempt the rescue had been made, Vance and the entire approach to international politics which he represented, one which had been shared by the president for more than three years, were the clear losers. The president, who still saw himself as a "policy premier" standing at the centre of the decision-making process and making decisions only after receiving "separate streams of advice," had to make a clear choice. The divisions which had caused tensions on so many occasions up to this point could no longer be contained and the entire system that he had set up could no longer be sustained. The pressure of events, in other words, had led the president to the point where he was prepared to attempt to solve his most difficult foreign policy problem in a way that was completely unacceptable to the person he had chosen to lead his foreign policy institution. The team he had hoped would give rise to creative tensions and provide him with "as many points of view as possible" had reached its limits; it could not survive the rescue decision. Vance's resignation simply showed that the strain had exceeded the elastic limit of the administration.

This close examination of the rescue attempt shows that the administration was not only divided; it was also weak in the sense that, although it eventually launched a rescue operation, the two-way interaction between the political and military-operational decision-making processes had shaped the rescue plan in a way that did not maximize its chances of success. When the president turned to the rescue plan in mid-April, in other words, he was turning to a plan that had a higher level of risk than would have been the case if he had taken the rescue option more seriously from the start. As the evidence presented here demonstrates, the plan could have been better and the failure of the operation must therefore be understood as a failure of the administration to develop the best possible plan for a military option that it eventually chose to implement, as well as a failure of the plan to meet the test of the conditions the rescue force encountered in Iran. It must be seen, in other words, as a failure of political leadership as well as a failure of military execution.

Seen in historical perspective, the rescue decision was unique in the sense that it was the only time that Carter decided to use military force to solve a foreign policy problem during his four years in office. In many other respects, however, the decision was entirely consistent with the way that he approached key issues, relating to both foreign and

domestic policy. Seeing himself as the trustee of the human and national interests at stake, he had taken complete responsibility for the fate of the hostages from the outset, becoming deeply engaged and vested in the attempt to find a solution to this particular problem in the same personal, issue-oriented, problem-solving, time-consuming way that he had taken on many others. Seeing himself as "the policy premier" who stood at the centre of the decision-making process, he was comfortable with the highly compartmentalized approach that emerged, with the efforts to pursue a strategy of negotiations and pressure going ahead at the same time that planning for a rescue operation was taking place. Indeed, given what he perceived was a very real possibility that the hostages might be harmed, he saw these two tracks as complementary; a rescue operation might be needed as a last resort measure if the situation deteriorated to the point where the captors actually began to physically harm the hostages or such action appeared imminent.

Although he established two separate tracks of activity, the president himself devoted his problem-solving energies to the negotiations and pressure track, leaving responsibility for supervising the contingency planning for a rescue operation to Brzezinski. This approach, as the evidence presented in this study shows, resulted in a rescue plan that was not as good as it could have been because of the restrictions that the military planners were forced to accept until early April. As pointed out in the previous chapter, some of the responsibility for this clearly lies with Brzezinski who, as leader of the military planning group and as the person to whom the president had delegated this responsibility, served as the main link between the political and military-operational levels of the decision making process until the president was fully engaged beginning on 22 March. At the same time, part of the responsibility lies with the president himself who, from the outset, wanted a rescue option available if the situation deteriorated to the point where hostages were being physically harmed, but then directed his attention elsewhere, setting the stage for the highly compartmentalized and extremely secretive planning process that took place and the continued imposition of major restrictions on the military planners with respect to the selection of staging bases for the operation until the eleventh hour.

The reality was therefore not one of a president closely monitoring two separate tracks of concurrent activity in a balanced way, but one of a president who was so committed to one track that he did not allow the other to mature in an optimal way. As Shlomo Gazit, who played a key role

in the planning for the successful Israeli rescue operation at Entebbe, points out in his critique of the US operation in Iran, personally involving the head of state right at the outset of the planning process in a "constant dialogue" and "system of positive feedback" with the senior military planners is essential if they are to understand the unique constraints on each other and develop the optimal rescue option (Gazit, 1981: 121). The first full briefing that Carter received from Jones on the rescue option was on 22 March, four and a half months after the planning and training had begun. Thus, by the time that the president became fully engaged, the hours of darkness in Iran were rapidly shortening and the temperatures were rapidly increasing, so there was insufficient time to make major adjustments to the basic plan. In the final analysis, an assessment of the rescue attempt must therefore include a harsh judgment of the president's weak performance in this area.

Carter's abrupt move towards serious consideration of the rescue option as a way to solve the hostage problem following the collapse of the negotiations track was consistent with his direct, personal, problem-solving style of leadership. At this point, still stymied in his attempt to find a solution and having given so much of his time and energy to the attempts to find a negotiated one, the attraction of the rescue attempt became irresistible. While there were clearly risks, the rescue option offered him a possible solution to his number one problem. Indeed, it offered him hope that the crisis could be brought to an immediate and satisfying conclusion. He knew that his key foreign policy advisers were split on the issue, but his foremost concern was to make the decision which would best serve what he considered to be the public and national interest. He was a problem solver without a solution and, since he cared more about finding a solution than he cared about anything else, he simply subjugated whatever priority he might otherwise have given to maintaining a consistent approach, avoiding the use of military force or sustaining the integrity of his foreign policy team to his overwhelming desire to find that solution.¹⁶

Given the way that events unfolded in Iran, the development of the rescue plan to the point where members of the military planning group believed it had a reasonable chance of success and Carter's issue-oriented, problem-solving style of leadership, his decision to launch the operation following the collapse of the negotiations may very well have been inevitable. As Sick points out, referring to the direct, personal, activist, high-profile and politically-risky approach that Carter took

during his entire handling of the hostage crisis, he was probably incapable of doing otherwise because this way of dealing with problems "was simply the nature of the man" (Sick, 1985: 223). Once he was completely stymied on the negotiations track, it may have been virtually certain that he would turn to the only other track available to him. The rescue attempt was not an aberration, in other words, it was vintage Jimmy Carter.

The rescue attempt thus involved much more than a failure of military implementation. It also involved the failure of the president to give high priority to the development of a military plan he eventually chose to implement and to build a team and decision-making process that could survive the hostage crisis. The evidence presented in this study shows the performance of the administration was weak in developing a rescue option with the best possible chance of success and the decision-making team was irreconcilably divided. On both counts, Carter's activist, problem-solving approach and the people and processes he put in place to manage foreign policy failed him.

The overall verdict that emerges from this in-depth study of the rescue decision and outcome is therefore a harsh one. Carter was an intelligent, committed and decent president, but his administration was divided and weak at a crucial moment and the president himself was at the very root of these problems. Moreover, seen in the context of the approach he took to decision-making and the problems that arose as a result of it, the rescue experience can be seen as one example, albeit a dramatic one, of the substantive divisions and process problems that plagued his administration throughout his four years in office. No amount of revisionism can change this reality. In the final analysis, this study thus lends support to the harsh initial assessments of the Carter presidency. The evidence presented here, in other words, does not lend support to the case for a more sympathetic, revisionist assessment of the Carter administration.

ENDNOTES - CHAPTER EIGHT

1. Following cancellation of the mission and the subsequent collision at Desert One, the president and his key advisers had two conflicting factors to consider in determining the timing of the announcement. First, given that the mission had been compromised with the release of the bus passengers and abandoned aircraft at Desert One, they wanted to clarify the purpose of the operation as soon as possible so that the Iranians would not misinterpret it and harm the hostages or the Soviets misinterpret it and decide on a military response; and second, especially given that classified material had been left on the helicopters which would place US personnel and agents in Iran in danger, they wanted to give these people as much time as possible to hide or get out of the country. After Turner argued forcefully for at least a few hours to warn those in Iran of the danger to them and give them a chance to react, an announcement was originally set for 6:00 AM. However, when signals intelligence sources indicated, around midnight Washington time (0930 AM in Iran) that the Iranian authorities were already aware that an incident had taken place in the area of Desert One, the time for the announcement was moved up to 1:00 AM (Turner, 1991: 121-122; Carter, 1982: 517-518; Brzezinski, 1983: 499).

2. On the instructions of Brown and Jones, the details of the plan beyond the portion actually carried out were not revealed during interviews and congressional testimony (Beckwith, 1983: 289-290; JCLD 49).

3. It would, of course, be unrealistic to have expected a broader inquiry into the decision-making process, given the reality that and any criticism of the political decision-making process would have been another blow to a president whose reelection campaign was already in difficulty.

4. The War Powers Resolution states that "in every possible instance" the president is obliged to consult with Congress before and after military forces are involved in hostilities or are sent to areas where involvement in hostilities is imminent. However, in this particular case, the key legal argument used by the administration was that total surprise was essential to the success of the rescue operation, and it was therefore not possible to consult prior to the operation (JCLD 9).

5. During an interview on ABC's "Issues and Answers," for example, Brzezinski stated that "After the full weighing of this, after many exercises, after many tests, after weeks of meticulous planning, after extensive discussions in the National Security Council, in which all of the president's advisers took part, the president took the right decision, took the courageous decision" (JCLD 5).

6. Typical of this move from initial restraint to criticism were the comments of Ronald Reagan. Having initially emphasized that it was "a time for us, as a nation and as a people, to stand united" (New York Times, 26 April 1980: 11), he was, within days, offering a new critical twist to his comments: "I support the president in his attempt to rescue our people in Iran. As a matter of fact, I would have supported it six months ago" (Turner, 1991: 145).

7. This brief rise in support is consistent with what has become conventional wisdom about the effect of the "rally-around-the-flag" phenomena. Over the years, research has generally shown that public support for the president normally increases immediately following the use of military force abroad, but that the increase is normally a short-term one. Over the longer term, support for a particular military action is more dependent on the way it is perceived to have been a success or failure (Richard *et al.*, 1993: 504-529). This conventional wisdom has recently been challenged by Lian and Oneal who, after studying 102 cases of "major uses of force" in the period of 1949-1984, conclude that changes in the president's popularity immediately following the use of force are insignificant. At the same time, they conclude that the rally effect is greater when there is a crisis, the

action is predominantly reported in the media (they operationalize this as the front page of the New York Times), the president's popularity is low, the US is not at war or fatigued by war and the president enjoys bipartisan support (Lian and Oneal, 1993: 227-300). Clearly, most of these conditions applied in the case of the hostage rescue attempt.

8. Over time, the students claimed that they had dispersed to 16 different cities in Iran. While the actual number was significantly less, in the absence of solid intelligence, the rescue force never really had a workable plan until very near the end of the crisis, when all of the hostages were brought back to Tehran. Although Brzezinski and Brown pushed him hard to get intelligence, Turner and the CIA did not take this second effort to develop a rescue plan very seriously and never did obtain reliable enough intelligence upon which to base a rescue plan (Turner, 1991: 146-147; Turner, Pustay, Gast and Brzezinski interviews).

9. In pointing this out, Turner states that "We never discussed this explicitly ... because none of us would admit that the United States could be stymied by a theocracy run by a group of extremist clerics. And we certainly did not want to acknowledge our impotence before the American public" (Turner, 1991: 148).

10. Queen had multiple sclerosis and, uncertain of the precise nature of his illness, the students had released him to ensure that they did not have his death on their hands (Turner, 1991: 149).

11. The administration was also successful in getting two pieces of environmental legislation through during an unusual session shortly after the election, one creating a toxic waste superfund and another establishing new national parks in Alaska and designating more than a third of the state as wilderness excluded from development (Kaufman, 1993: 208-210).

12. This was the first time in nearly thirty years that Congress had overridden the veto of a president when the majority party in both the House and the Senate was the party of the president (Kaufman, 1993: 178).

13. The issues in the controversy were whether Billy Carter had violated federal law by not registering as a federal agent with the Justice Department until after he had accepted money from the Libyan government and was forced to do so by the Justice Department and whether the White House had interceded inappropriately in Billy's Libyan activities or in the Justice Department's inquiry into them. Following release of a statement by the president on the issue on 22 July, some apparent inconsistencies and omissions in the statement and Billy's early attempt to use his Libyan connections as a possible channel to negotiate the release of the hostages had to be explained over the course of the following few weeks, placing the president on the defensive and creating an image of amateurishness and incompetence in the weeks leading up to the election. Although "Billygate" was diffused as a campaign issue once the Senate committee looking into the allegations issued its report, the affair undermined the president's credibility at a crucial time on the election calendar (Kaufman, 1993: 189-191 and 199-200).

14. Allegations that the Reagan campaign made its own deal with Iranians close to Khomeini to delay the release of the hostages until after the election, which have periodically been made in the years since the 1980 election, have received more serious attention since the publication of Sick's 1991 book on the subject (Sick, 1991). After a ten-month investigation into these allegations, the bipartisan House "October Surprise Task Force" concluded that there was "no credible evidence" to support allegations that the Reagan campaign had communicated with the Government of Iran let alone allegations that it tried to delay the release of the hostages (Hamilton, 1993). Nevertheless, these allegations persist (Sick, 1993; Bani-Sadr, 1991). Clearly, if there is any substance to these allegations, the activities of the Reagan campaign were a factor in the timing of the release of the hostages.

15. During the final weeks leading to the settlement, the forthcoming inauguration of Ronald Reagan may have contributed to the desire on the part of the Iranian negotiators to conclude a deal before Carter left office. Reagan was publicly taking a hard line. In January, for example, commenting on the deal that was emerging, he said, "I don't think you pay ransom for people that have been kidnapped by barbarians" (Turner, 1991: 153).

16. Almost a year and a half before the rescue operation, referring to Carter in a very perceptive commentary on the administration's foreign policy as it approached mid-term, Coral Bell wrote that "le style c'est l'homme meme." Even at this stage, Bell recognized that "both in substance and in manner" the administration's policy was Carter's, not Vance's or Brzezinski's (Bell, 1978: 559). Indeed, throughout the entire four years, Carter was firmly in charge and it was therefore, as Clifford concludes, "the Carter foreign policy that was generated." Unfortunately, as Clifford goes on to observe, "it was a foreign policy little understood by our friends, our adversaries, and our own people" (Clifford, 1994: 12). Given that Carter was firmly in charge, was aware of the differences between the approaches of Brzezinski and Vance, fully supported an advocacy role for Brzezinski, slowly lost confidence in the policy prescriptions of Vance and, particularly after Afghanistan, increasingly followed those of Brzezinski, the president himself should be the central focus of explanations for this policy disarray.

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- OUTLINE: A. Interviews with Key Decision Makers
 B. Theoretical References
 C. Historical References: The Carter administration,
 The Hostage Crisis and Operation Eagle Claw
 D. Newspaper and Newsmagazine References: Operation
 Eagle Claw
 E. Material from Jimmy Carter Library
 F. Material from National Security Archive

A. Interviews with Key Decision Makers

Author's Note: All interviews were taped. At the request of Pustay, Odom and Newsom, the recorder was turned off at select points in those interviews and, also at their request, the information provided during those periods has been used to guide further research and has not been attributed to them. Interviews averaged an hour and a half in length and were generally focused on the way in which the political and military decision-making processes interacted.

Charles Beckwith, United States Army Colonel who was responsible for the assault on the American Embassy in Teheran during the planning for Operation Eagle Claw and Delta Force Commander during the mission, a private consultant on security issues in Austin, Texas until his death earlier this year, telephone interview, Ottawa-Austin, 19 July 1991.

Zbigniew Brzezinski, National Security Adviser in the Carter administration, chaired meetings of the Military Planning Group, currently Counsellor at the Center for Strategic and International Studies and Professor of American Foreign Policy at the Paul Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, The Johns Hopkins University, personal interview at Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, 18 June 1991.

Philip Gast, United States Air Force Lieutenant General who was Deputy Joint Task Force Commander during the planning for and execution of Operation Eagle Claw, currently Vice President of International Programs at Burdeshaw Associates, a private consulting firm in the Washington area, personal interview at Burdeshaw Associates, Bethesda, Maryland, 24 February 1993.

David Jones, United States Air Force General who was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the Carter administration and personally supervised the planning for and execution of Operation Eagle Claw, one of six members of the Military Planning Group, currently retired in the Washington area, telephone interview in Washington, 21 June 1991.

James Kyle, United States Air Force Colonel who was responsible for airlift operations during the planning for Operation Eagle Claw and was the On-Scene Commander at Desert One, currently retired in Hawaii, telephone interview Ottawa-Honolulu, 16 July 1991.

David Newsom, Under Secretary of State in the Carter administration, currently Professor in the Department of Government and Foreign Affairs at the University of Virginia, personal interview at Georgetown University in Washington, 20 June 1991.

William Odom, United States Army Colonel who was Military Assistant to the National Security Adviser during the Carter administration, one of six members of the Military Planning Group, currently Director of National Security Studies at the Hudson Institute and Adjunct

Professor of Political Science at Yale University, personal interview at Hudson Institute in Washington, 25 November 1992.

Jody Powell, White House Press Secretary in the Carter administration and close political adviser to the President, currently Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Powell Tate, a public relations firm in Washington, personal interview at Powell Tate in Washington, 27 August 1992.

John Pustay, United States Air Force Lieutenant General who was Assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the hostage crisis and one of six members of the Military Planning Group, currently Vice President of The Analytic Services Corporation and member of the Council on Foreign Relations, personal interview at The Analytic Services Corporation in Arlington, Virginia, 21 June 1991.

Stansfield Turner, United States Navy Admiral who was Director of Central Intelligence during the Carter administration, one of six members of The Military Planning Group, currently lecturer, writer and member of several boards of directors, personal interview at his residence in McLean, Virginia, 17 June 1991.

Cyrus Vance, Secretary of State during the Carter administration, currently senior partner with Simpson, Thacher and Bartlett and recently Special Envoy of the Secretary General of the United Nations to the former Yugoslavia, personal interview at Simpson, Thacher and Bartlett in New York, 10 June 1991.

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E. Materials from Jimmy Carter Library

Author's Note: Research for this dissertation included a visit to the Carter Library in Atlanta (February 1991). Unfortunately, despite the positive way in which the Carter Library is being promoted for academic research by key members of the Carter Administration (Carter, 1990: 16) and the academic community (Reichard, 1990: 603-603), almost all of the key documents on national security issues have not yet been released. According to Martin Elzy, Assistant Director of the Carter Library, it will be at least another decade before serious consideration is given to reviewing these files for declassification. Nevertheless, several thousand pages of documentation were reviewed from the White House Central Files and White House Staff Files and some of this material provided unique information and insights. The following documents, copies of which were obtained from the Carter Library, were drawn upon in this study, either directly or as important background information. These documents are numbered here sequentially as Jimmy Carter Library Documents (JCLDs) for ease of reference in both the text and the notes at the end of each chapter.

Background Briefing on Rescue Attempt (JCLD 1), with covering note from Jody Powell to President Carter, 25 April 1980, White House Staff Files - Powell, Box 62.

Declaration of Algiers (JCLD 2), 21 January 1980, White House Central Files, Box CO-31.

Essay by James Bill (JCLD 3), Acting Director of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, University of Texas, with covering Memo from Philip Bobbitt to Lloyd Cutler, Counsel to the President, 3 June 1980, White House Staff Files - Cutler, Box 92.

Interview Transcript - Harold Brown (JCLD 4), Interview on CBS's Face the Nation, 27 April 1980, White House Staff Files - Powell, Box 62.

Interview Transcript - Zbigniew Brzezinski (JCLD 5), Interview on ABC's Issues and Answers, 27 April 1980, White House Staff Files - Powell, Box 62.

Interview Transcript - President Carter (JCLD 6), Interview at the Oval Office, 1 April 1980, White House Staff Files - Graham, Box 75.

Interview Transcript - Sadegh Ghotbzadeh (JCLD 7), Interview on ABC's Issues and Answers, 30 March 1980, White House Staff Files - Graham, Box 75.

Interview Transcript - Henry Kissinger (JCLD 8), Interview on ABC's The Today Program, 29 November 1979, White House Staff Files - Powell, Box 61.

Legal Opinion on War Powers (JCLD 9), Unsigned Analysis of the Rescue Attempt and the War Powers Resolution of 1973, White House Staff Files - Cutler, Box 92.

Letter from Family Liaison Action Group (JCLD 10), Letter to President Carter, 22 March 1980, White House Staff Files - Jordan, Box 34.

Letter from John Kenneth Galbraith (JCLD 11), Professor at Harvard University, Letter to Zbigniew Brzezinski, 26 November 1979, White House Central Files, Box CO-33.

Letter from Austin Murphy (JCLD 12), Member of House of Representatives, to Frank Moore, Special Assistant to the President for Congressional Liaison, 18 March 1980, White House Central Files, Box ND-45.

Letter from Cyrus Vance (JCLD 13), Letter of Resignation to President Carter, 21 April 1980, White House Staff Files - Powell, Box 62.

- Letter from President Carter (JCLD 14), Letter to Cyrus Vance Accepting His Letter of Resignation, 28 April 1980, White House Staff Files - Powell, Box 62.
- Letter from President Carter (JCLD 15), Letter to Penne Laingen, 17 December 1980, White House Central Files, Judicial-Legal, Box JL-13.
- Letter from President Carter (JCLD 16), Letter to Vivian Homeyer, 25 March 1980, White House Central Files, Judicial-Legal, Box JL-12.
- Letter from President Carter (JCLD 17), Letter to Barbara Timm, 27 March 1980, White House Central Files, Judicial-Legal, Box JL-12.
- Letter from President Carter (JCLD 18), Letter to the President Pro Tempore of the Senate, Report on Rescue Mission, 26 April 1980, White House Central Files - Graham, Box 75.
- Letter from President Carter (JCLD 19), Letter to the Congress of the United States, Blocking Property and Property Interests of the Government of Iran, 14 November 1979, White House Central Files, Juridical-Legal, Box JL-12.
- Letter from President Carter (JCLD 20), Letter to the Congress of the United States, Trade, Financial and other Measures, 4 April 1980, White House Central Files, Box CO-31.
- Letter from President Carter (JCLD 21), Letter to the Congress of the United States, Further Prohibitions on Transactions with Iran, 17 April 1980, White House Central Files, Box CO-31.
- Letter from President Carter (JCLD 22), Letter to the Congress of the United States, Report on Measures Taken Against Iran, 4 December 1980, White House Central Files, Box CO-31.
- Letter from President Carter (JCLD 23), Letter to Thomas O'Neill, Speaker of the House of Representatives, Report on War Powers, 26 April 1980, White House Central Files, Box CO-1.
- Letter from President Carter (JCLD 24), Letter to the Senate of the United States on the International Convention Against the Taking of Hostages, 4 August 1980, White House Central Files, Judicial-Legal, Box JL-13.
- Letters from Wayne Smith (JCLD 25), President, The Friendship Force, to President Carter, 10 January and 28 February 1980 (with marginal notes written by Carter), White House Central Files, Box ND-45.
- Memorandum from Hugh Carter (JCLD 26), Memorandum to Walter Mondale and Hamilton Jordan, Tally Sheet on Calls to White House, 25 April 1980, White House Central File, National Security and Defence, Box ND-44.
- Memorandum from Gary Sick (JCLD 27), Memorandum to Jody Powell, "The Militants vs. the Government - Who Leads Whom?", 8 January 1980, White House Staff Files - Powell, Box 63.
- Memorandum from Hamilton Jordan and Al McDonald (JCLD 28), Memorandum to White House Senior Staff, Cabinet Members and Agency Heads, Demands on President's Time, White House Staff Files - Powell, Box 63.
- Memorandum from Anne Wexler (JCLD 29), Memorandum to Hamilton Jordan and Jody Powell with covering letter from Robert Colodzin, Vice President, Champion International Corporation, White House Staff Files - Powell, Box 63.
- Memorandum from Len Lefkow (JCLD 30), Memorandum to David Aaron, Deputy National Security Adviser, Embargoed Statement by Khomeini, 31 March 1980, White House Staff Files - Powell, Box 62.

Memorandum from Lincoln Bloomfield (JCLD 31), Memorandum to Zbigniew Brzezinski, Role of T.V. in Tehran, 3 December 1979, White House Central Files, Box CO-31.

Message from President Carter to the Pope (JCLD 32), 7 November 1979, White House Central Files, Judicial-Legal, Box JL-12.

News Message Associated Press (JCLD 33): Chronology of Events in Iran, 24 August 1980, White House Staff Files - Graham, Box 75.

News Message Reuters (JCLD 34): Comments by Bani-Sadr on Carter's 1 April Statement, 1 April 1980, White House Staff Files - Graham, Box 75.

News Messages Reuters (JCLD 35): Iran Claims that Carter Communicated with Khomeini and White House Denial, 29 March 1980, White House Staff Files - Graham, Box 75.

News Message UPI (JCLD 36): Speculation on US Plans for Shah, 22 March 1980, White House Staff Files - Graham, Box 75.

Prepared Question and Answers (JCLD 37), Notes for President Carter for Use Following Comments at State Department, 7 December 1979, White House Staff Files - Graham, Box 75.

Public Opinion Survey (JCLD 38), ABC News-Harris Survey Released on 7 January 1980, White House Staff Files - Powell, Box 63.

Report from David Jones (JCLD 39), Report on Rescue Mission, with covering letters from Jones to Secretary Brown and from Brown to Melvin Price, Chairman of the House Committee on Armed Services, 6 May 1980, White House Staff Files - Powell, Box 62.

Transcript of Article in New York Daily News (JCLD 40), Article by Lars-Erik Nelson, "US Steps Into Shah's Surgery Fight", 21 March 1980, White House Staff Files - Graham, Box 75.

Transcript of Daily Press Briefing (JCLD 41), Department of State, 25 April 1980, White House Staff Files - Powell, Box 62.

Transcript of Statement by President Carter (JCLD 42), Statement to State Department Employees, 7 December 1979, White House Staff Files - Graham, Box 75.

Transcript of Statement by President Carter (JCLD 43), Statement to Representatives of University Faculties in Islamic Studies, 7 February 1980, White House Staff Files - Donovan, Box 2.

Transcript of Statement by President Carter (JCLD 44), Statement on the Hostage Rescue Attempt, 25 April 1980, White House Staff Files - Cutler, Box 92.

Transcript of Statement by President Carter (JCLD 45), Statement on Breaking Diplomatic Relations and Imposing Sanctions on Iran, 7 April 1980, White House Staff Files - Powell, Box 62.

Transcript of Statement by White House (JCLD 46), Press Release on Rescue Mission, 25 April 1980, White House Staff Files - Powell, Box 62.

Transcript of Statement by Senator Muskie (JCLD 47), Statement at White House, 25 April 1980, White House Staff Files - Powell, Box 62.

Transcript of Statement By Secretary Brown (JCLD 48), Statement and Answers to Questions, 25 April 1980, White House Staff Files - Powell, Box 62.

Transcript of Statement by Secretary Brown (JCLD 49), Statement and Answers to Questions by Brown and Jones, 25 April 1980, White House Staff Files - Cutler, Box 92.

Transcript of Statement by Admiral Holloway (JCLD 50), Chairman of the Special Operations Review Group, August 1980, White House Staff Offices - Cutler, Box 92.

Unclassified Rescue Mission Report (JCLD 51), Washington: Government Printing Office, August 1980.

Unpublished Paper by James Bill (JCLD 52), Professor of Middle East Studies at University of Texas, Prepared for International Symposium on The Islamic Republic of Iran in Bonn, Germany, 19-21 March 1980, White House Central Files - Donovan, Box 2.

F. Material From National Security Archive

Author's Note: Research for this dissertation involved four visits to the National Security Archive in Washington during 1991-1993. During that period, the Archive was involved in litigation which forced the Department of Defense to review "some 2000 documents totalling more than 14,000 pages and constituting the actual working files for the planning and review of the rescue mission on 24 April 1980, as well as ... intelligence efforts to determine the location of the hostages and monitor the political efforts to obtain their release" (wording taken from judgment in Civil Action No. 84-3400-LFO filed on 30 May 1991 in the US District Court for the District of Columbia). Although the Department of Defence was able to protect parts of many of these documents under specific provisions outlined in the Freedom of Information Act, the information released has been extremely useful during this study. The last of this documentation was received by the Archive in December 1992. All of it was reviewed during the course of this study and copies were obtained of over 1300 pages. The following documents were drawn upon directly, either as source material for the text or to help assess the accuracy and completeness of the evidence from published accounts and interviews. These documents are numbered here sequentially as National Security Archive Documents (NSADs) for ease of reference in both the text and the notes at the end of each chapter.

Briefing Notes for Lieutenant General Pustay (NSAD 1), 28 April 1980 (Top Secret), Preparation for Background Briefing to Press, Rescue Mission Files, Document A-50.

Briefing on Options for Hostage Rescue (NSAD 2), Undated (Top Secret), Rescue Mission Files, Document I-229.

Briefing on Operation Snowbird (NSAD 3), 26 April 1980 (Top Secret), Status of Rescue Capability Following Failed Operation, Rescue Mission Files, Document J-85.

Communications Plan (NSAD 4), 24 April 1980 (Top Secret), Outline of Command Communications Networks, Rescue Mission Files, Document B-44.

Communications Tapes: Overview of Procedures (NSAD 5), 28 August 1980 (Confidential), Description of Recording Procedures Used for Command Network and White House Tapes During Operation Eagle Claw, Rescue Mission Files, Document L-10.

Communications Tapes: Command Network Tapes 1-3 (NSAD 6), 24-25 April 1980 (Top Secret - Sensitive), Tapes of Chairman Jones and Joint Task Force Commander, Rescue Mission Files, Documents L-2 and L-8.

Communications Tapes: Command Network Tape 4 (NSAD 7), 24-25 April 1980 (Top Secret - Sensitive), Tape of Chairman Jones and Secretary Brown, Rescue Mission Files, Document L-17.

Communications Tapes: Command Network Tape 5 (NSAD 8), 24-25 April 1980 (Top Secret - Sensitive), Tape of Chairman Jones and Secretary Brown, Rescue Mission Files, Document L-18.

Communications Tapes: White House Tape 1 (NSAD 9), 24-25 April 1980 (Top Secret - Sensitive), Tape of President Carter, Secretary Brown and Chairman Jones, Rescue Mission Files, Document L-19.

Communications Tapes: White House Tape 1 Continued (NSAD 10), 24-25 April 1980 (Top Secret - Sensitive), Tape of President Carter, Vice President Mondale, Secretary Brown and Chairman Jones, Rescue Mission Files, Document L-14.

Communications Tapes: White House Tape 2 (NSAD 11), 24-25 April 1980 (Top Secret - Sensitive), Tape of President Carter and Chairman Jones, Rescue Mission Files, Document L-15.

Communications Tapes: White House Tape 3 (NSAD 12), 24-25 April 1980 (Top Secret - Sensitive), Tape of President Carter, Vice President Mondale, Secretary Brown and Chairman Jones, Rescue Mission Files, Document L-16.

Communications Tapes: Jones - Beckwith (NSAD 13), 30 April 1980 (Top Secret - Sensitive), Tape of Telephone Conversation Between Chairman Jones and Colonel Beckwith, Delta Force Commander, Rescue Mission Files, Document L-6.

Control Sheet (NSAD 14), Undated (Confidential), Status of Actions and Issues For Congressional Hearings on Rescue Mission, Rescue Mission Files, Document A-46.

Fact Sheet (NSAD 15), Undated (Confidential), RH-53D Helicopter Capability, Rescue Mission Files, Document J-60.

Fact Sheet (NSAD 16), 5 May 1980 (Unclassified), Environmental Factors Affecting Hostage Rescue Effort, Rescue Mission Files, Document Not Numbered.

Fact Sheet (NSAD 17), 6 May 1980 (Secret), Factors Contributing to Failure of Navigation Systems Aboard Helicopter Number 5, Rescue Mission Files, Document Not Numbered.

Information Paper (NSAD 18), Undated (Secret), Summary of Rescue Mission, Rescue Mission Files, Document I-115.

Information Paper (NSAD 19), Undated (Secret), Paper from Rear Admiral Cassidy to Chairman Jones, Facts on Rescue Mission, Rescue Mission Files, Document I-116.

Instruction on Awards (NSAD 20), 1 May 1981 (Secret), Rice Bowl and Snowbird Awards, Rescue Mission Files, Document F-131.

Intelligence Message (NSAD 21), 27 November 1979 (Top Secret), Situation in Iran, Rescue Mission Files, Document G-598.

Intelligence Message (NSAD 22), 3 January 1980 (Top Secret), Assessment of Nain Airfield, Rescue Mission Files, Document H-199.

Intelligence Message (NSAD 23), 19 March 1980 (Top Secret), Situation in Iran, Rescue Mission Files, Document H-68.

Intelligence Message (NSAD 24), 24 March 1980 (Top Secret), Activities of Clerics in Teheran, Rescue Mission Files, Document H-61.

Intelligence Message (NSAD 25), 24 March 1980 (Top Secret), Situation in Iran, Rescue Mission Files, Document H-63.

Intelligence Message (NSAD 26), 9 April 1980 (Top Secret), Situation in Iran, Rescue Mission Files, Document G-102.

Intelligence Message (NSAD 27), 10 April 1980 (Top Secret), Situation in Iran, Rescue Mission Files, Document G-108.

Intelligence Message (NSAD 28), 20 April 1980 (Top Secret), Situation in Iran, Rescue Mission Files, Document G-175.

Intelligence Message (NSAD 29), 21 April 1980 (Top Secret), Situation in Iran, Rescue Mission Files, Document G-182.

Intelligence Message (NSAD 30), 21 April 1980 (Top Secret), Soviet Naval Activity in Persian Gulf Region, Rescue Mission Files, Document I-232.

Intelligence Message (NSAD 31), 22 April 1980 (Top Secret), Situation in Iran, Rescue Mission Files, Document G-187.

Intelligence Message (NSAD 32), 23 April 1980 (Top Secret), Situation in Iran, Rescue Mission Files, Document G-188.

Intelligence Message (NSAD 33), 23 April 1980 (Secret), Iranian News Report on CIA Plan to Kidnap Hostages, Rescue Mission Files, Document B-57.

Intelligence Message (NSAD 34), 28 April 1980 (Top Secret), Situation in Iran, Rescue Mission Files, Document G-210.

Intelligence Report (NSAD 35), 7 April 1980 (Confidential), Analysis of Why Khomeini Blocking Transfer of the Hostages, Rescue Mission Files, Document B-157.

Intelligence Report (NSAD 36), 24 April 1980 (Top Secret), Situation in Iran, Rescue Mission Files, Document B-28.

Intelligence Report (NSAD 37), September 1980 (Secret), AWACS Capabilities for Special Operations, Rescue Mission Files, Document J-80.

Intelligence Report (NSAD 38), 24 April 1980 (Top Secret), Suspected Hostage Locations, Rescue Mission Files, Document B-32.

Intelligence Review (NSAD 39), 1 October 1981 (Top Secret), Review of Intelligence Operations During the Hostage Crisis, Rescue Mission Files, Document B-269.

Letter to Congressman Price (NSAD 40), Chairman of House Armed Services Committee, Letter from Harold Brown (with related internal Department of Defense correspondence), 23 July 1989 (Unclassified), Response to Questions Posed by Congressman Price, Rescue Mission Files, Document A-337.

List of Congressional Hearings (NSAD 41), Undated (Confidential), Appearances on Rescue Attempt, Rescue Mission Files, Document A-45.

Log of Joint Task Force Duty Offices (NSAD 42), 22 April 1980 - 25 April 1980 (Top Secret), Rescue Mission Files, Document I-376.

Log of Rescue Operation (NSAD 43) (Handwritten), 27 April 1980 (Top Secret), Rescue Mission Files, Document A-13.

Map of Rescue Operation (NSAD 44), Undated (Top Secret), Rescue Mission Files, Document A-361.

Memorandum for Record (NSAD 45), Memorandum from Director of Operations, Joint Chiefs of Staff, 16 April 1980 (Top Secret), Options for Use of SR-71, Rescue Mission Files, Document B-9.

Memorandum for Record (NSAD 46), Memorandum from Chairman Jones, 14 April 1981 (Secret), Appointment of Joint Task Force Commander, Rescue Mission Files, Document F-136.

Memorandum for Record (NSAD 47), Memorandum from Colonel Miller, Office of the Secretary of Defence, 19 May 1980 (Confidential), Rescue Mission Files, No Document Number.

Memorandum to Chairman Jones (NSAD 48), Memorandum from Lieutenant General Gast, Deputy Joint Task Force Commander, 30 May 1980 (Top Secret), Assessment of the Rescue Mission, Rescue Mission Files, Document I-30.

Memorandum to Chairman Jones (NSAD 49), Memorandum from Major General Vaught, Joint Task Force Commander, 20 February 1980 (Top Secret), Assessment Regarding the Likelihood of Peaceful Transfer of the Hostages, Rescue Mission Files, Document B-187.

Memorandum to Chairman Jones (NSAD 50), Memorandum from Major General Vaught, 29 February 1980 (Top Secret), Reintroduction of Media into Iran, Rescue Mission Files, Document B-228.

Memorandum to Chairman Jones (NSAD 51), Memorandum from Major General Vaught, 5 August 1980 (Secret), Training and Preparation for Special Operations, Rescue Mission Files, Document B-268.

Memorandum to Chairman Jones (NSAD 52), Memorandum from Lieutenant General Shutler, Director of Operations, United States Marine Corps, 28 January 1980 (Top Secret), Conditions for Hostage Rescue Attempt, Rescue Mission Files, Document I-107.

Memorandum to Chairman Jones (NSAD 53), 24 April 1980 (Top Secret), Threat to Rescue Operation Posed by Reconnaissance and Surveillance Capabilities of Soviets, Iranians and Others, Rescue Mission Files, Document, B-30.

Memorandum to Chairman Jones (NSAD 54), Memorandum from Major General Dyke, Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 27 May 1980 (Secret-Sensitive), Nose Wheel Problems on Helicopters, Rescue Mission Files, Document A-53.

Memorandum to Colonel Miller (NSAD 55), Legal Adviser and Legislative Assistant to Chairman Jones, Memorandum from Major General Dyke, Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 7 May 1980 (Secret), Response to Congressional Queries, Rescue Mission Files, Document A-383.

Memorandum to Colonel Miller (NSAD 56), Memorandum from Major General Dyke (Includes Fact Sheet), 8 May 1980 (Confidential), Helicopter Performance During Training, Rescue Mission Files, Document A-69.

Memorandum to Colonel Miller (NSAD 57), Memorandum from Major General Dyke, 7 May 1980 (Confidential), Response to Queries, Rescue Mission Files, Document 172.

Memorandum to Colonel Miller (NSAD 58), Memorandum from Major General Dyke (includes attached inserts, 9 June 1980 (Unclassified), Testimony and Inserts for the Record on hearings before House Appropriations Committee, Rescue Mission Files, Document A-455.

Memorandum to Director of Joint Staff (NSAD 59), Memorandum from Major General Vaught, Joint Task Force Commander, 26 November 1979 (Top Secret), Funding for Task Force, Rescue Mission Files, Document F-247.

Memorandum to Joint Task Force Staff (NSAD 60), 4 May 1980 (Secret), Joint Task Force Activities 4-13 May 1980, Rescue Mission Files, Document J-84.

Memorandum to Lieutenant General Gast (NSAD 61), Deputy Joint Task Force Commander, Memorandum from Thomas Ross, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, 18 June 1980 (Confidential), Responses to Questions from Dave Martin, Rescue Mission Files, Document A-223.

Memorandum to Lieutenant General Pustay (NSAD 62), Assistant to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Memorandum from Major General Vaught, Joint Task Force Commander, 24 June 1980 (Top Secret), Hostage Rescue Mission (Operation Snowbird), Rescue Mission Files, Document J-102.

Memorandum to Lieutenant General Pustay (NSAD 63), Assistant to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, 30 July 1980 (Unclassified), Query from Congressman Aspin's Office, Rescue Mission Files, Document A-339.

Memorandum to Major General Vaught (NSAD 64), Joint Task Force Commander, Undated (Secret), Operations Security Violation, Rescue Mission Files, Document H-308.

Memorandum to Major General Vaught (NSAD 65), Joint Task Force Commander, Memorandum from Major General Dyke, Organization of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 8 May 1980, Cost Estimate of Rescue Attempt, Rescue Mission Files, Document A-413.

Memorandum to Major General Vaught (NSAD 66), Memorandum from Major General Dyke, 20 May 1980 (Confidential), Congressional Request for Information, Rescue Mission Files, Document A-437.

Memorandum to Major General Vaught (NSAD 67), Memorandum from Major General Dyke (includes opening statement), 12 May 1980 (Secret), Preparation for Congressional Hearings, Rescue Mission Files, Document A-200.

Memorandum to Major General Vaught (NSAD 68), 21 July 1980 (Top Secret), Rescue Capability Status, Rescue Mission Files, Document J-85.

Memorandum to Major General Vaught (NSAD 69), 18 September 1980 (Top Secret), After Action Report on Rescue Attempt, Rescue Mission Files, Document I-765.

Memorandum to Major General Vaught (NSAD 70), 7 October 1980 (Top Secret), Operation Tinhorn: Practice Penetration of Iranian Airspace, Rescue Mission Files, Document J-81.

Memorandum to Major General Dyke (NSAD 71), 22 May 1980 (Unclassified), Congressional Request for Information, Rescue Mission Files, Document A-373.

Memorandum to Major General Dyke (NSAD 72), 6 June 1980 (Unclassified), Congressional Request for Information, Rescue Mission Files, Document A-316.

Memorandum to President Carter (NSAD 73), Memorandum from Stansfield Turner, 19 November 1992 (Security Classification Excised), Analysis of Implications of Shah Leaving the United States, Rescue Mission Files, Document B-215.

Memorandum to Rangers (NSAD 74), Memorandum from Joint Test Directors, Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 29 October 1980 (Secret), AWACS in Rapid Deployment and Special Operations, Rescue Mission Files, Document J-75.

Memorandum to Reader from Major General Vaught (NSAD 75), Joint Task Force Commander, Undated (Secret), Comments on Intelligence Support to Rescue Effort, Rescue Mission Files, Document D-41.

Memorandum to Special Assistant to Chairman Jones for Public Affairs (NSAD 76), 6 May 1980 (Unclassified), Suggested Responses to Questions, Rescue Mission Files, Document A-400.

Memorandum to Special Assistant to Chairman Jones (NSAD 77), Memorandum from Lieutenant General Gast, Deputy Joint Task Force Commander, 17 May 1980 (Unclassified), Suggested Responses to Questions from Washington Star, Rescue Mission Files, Document A-138.

Memorandum to Thomas Ross (NSAD 78), Assistant Secretary of Defence for Public Affairs, Memorandum from Major General Dyke, Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 6 May 1980 (Secret), Suggested Comments on Article in New York Times by Richard Burt, Rescue Mission Files, Document A-74.

Message from Nimitz to Joint Task Force (NSAD 79), 23 April 1980 (Top Secret), Helicopter Status, Document I-597.

Message from Joint Chiefs of Staff to Joint Task Force (NSAD 80), 22 April 1980 (Top Secret), Threat to Rescue Operation Posed by Reconnaissance and Surveillance Capabilities of the Soviets, the Iranians and Others, Rescue Mission Files, Document B-162.

Message from Joint Task Force to Joint Chiefs of Staff (NSAD 81), 24 April 1980 (Secret), Aircraft Status, Document I-415.

Message from Joint Task Force to Joint Chiefs of Staff (NSAD 82), 25 April 1980 (Top Secret), Situation Report on Rescue Mission, Rescue Mission Files, Document F-100.

Message from Joint Task Force to Nimitz (NSAD 83), 24 April 1980 (Secret), Weather Report and Forecast for Rescue Mission, Rescue Mission Files, Document I-381.

Message on Exercise Storm Cloud (NSAD 84), 17 November 1980 (Secret), Exercise Instructions for Rapid Reaction Forces, Rescue Mission Files, Document J-127.

Message on Operation Snowbird (NSAD 85), 3 September 1980 (Top Secret), Assessment of Soviet Reaction to U.S. Military Intervention in Iran, Rescue Mission Files, Document B-219.

News Release from Department of Defense (NSAD 86), 28 April 1980 (Unclassified), Casualties from Rescue Operation in Iran, Rescue Mission Files, Document A-270.

Operations Plan for Joint Task Force (NSAD 87), 26 February 1980 (Top Secret), Detailed Plan for Rescue Operation, Rescue Mission Files, Document J-89.

Organization Charts for Joint Task Force (NSAD 88), Undated (Secret), Rescue Mission Files, Document J-62.

Post Mission Summary of Problems with RH-53D Helicopter (NSAD 89), with Covering Memorandum from Major General Dyke to Colonel Miller, 12 May 1980 (Top Secret), Summary of Maintenance and Materiel Record, Rescue Mission Files, Document I-735.

Public Affairs Guidance (NSAD 90), Undated (Secret), Response to Article in Army Times, Rescue Mission Files, Document A-193.

Public Affairs Guidance (NSAD 91), 2 May 1980 (Unclassified), Questions and Responses on Rescue Attempt, Rescue Mission Files, Document A-280.

Public Affairs Guidance (NSAD 92), 5 May 1980 (Unclassified), Questions and Responses on Rescue Attempt, Rescue Mission Files, Document A-281.

Public Affairs Guidance (NSAD 93), 6 May 1980 (Unclassified), Questions and Responses on Rescue Attempt, Rescue Mission Files, Document A-400.

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Report by Special Operations Division (NSAD 96), Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, October 1980 (Secret), Project Star - A Psychological-Political Analysis of Iran, Rescue Mission Files, Document K-121.

Report on Initial Debriefing of Hostages (NSAD 97), 22-24 January 1981 (Secret), Rescue Mission Files, Document K-5.

Report on Damage from Security Compromises (NSAD 98), 2 May 1980. (Top Secret), Security Assessment of Damage Caused by Operation Eagle Claw, Rescue Mission Files, Document L-15.

Report on Damage from Security Compromises (NSAD 99), with Covering Memorandum to Chairman Jones from Lieutenant General Pustay, 15 May 1980 (Top Secret), Summary of Damage Caused by Security Problems During Rescue Attempt, Rescue Mission Files, Document B-212.

Report on Rescue Mission (NSAD 100), 28 April 1980 (Secret), Internal Department of Defense Analysis of Rescue Mission, Rescue Mission Files, Document A-18.

Report to Chairman of Senate Armed Services Committee (NSAD 101), with Covering Letters from Secretary Brown and Chairman Jones, 6 May 1980 (Unclassified), Report on Hostage Rescue Mission, Rescue Mission Files, Document A-110.

Rescue Mission Report (NSAD 102), August 1980 (Secret), Final Report of Special Operations Review Group, Rescue Mission Files, Document D-7.

Report on Rescue Plan (NSAD 103), Undated (Top Secret), Explanation of Major Elements of the Rescue Plan Following Desert One, Rescue Mission Files, Document L-7.

Report on Rescue Operation (NSAD 104), Undated (Confidential), Detailed History of Key Aspects of the Preparation for the Rescue Operation and Events During the Mission, Rescue Mission Files, Document L-12.

Review of Joint Task Force Capability (NSAD 105), by Major General Vaught, Joint Task Force Commander, 11 May 1981 (Top Secret), Rescue Mission Files, Document D-1.

Routing and Transmittal Slips (NSAD 106), 4 May 1980 (Secret), Requests for Information to Prepare Joint Task Force Commander for Congressional Testimony, Rescue Mission Files, Document A-93.

Situation Report by Iran Working Group (NSAD 107), 6 March 1980 (Confidential), Rescue Mission Files, Document B-224.

Situation Report by Iran Working Group (NSAD 108), 27 April 1980 (Confidential), Rescue Mission Files, Document G-205.

Termination Statement (NSAD 109), 5 February 1980 (Confidential), Oath to Protect Secrecy of Rescue Operation, Rescue Mission Files, Document F-90.

Transcript of Address by Admiral Thomas Hayward (NSAD 110), Chief of Naval Operations, 1 May 1980 (Unclassified), Address to Society of Naval Engineers, Rescue Mission Files, Document A-279.

Transcript of Interview of Secretary Brown on Capitol Hill (NSAD 111), 8 May 1980 (Unclassified), Rescue Mission Files, Document A-180.

Transcript of News Briefing by Major Flocks (NSAD 112), Directorate for Defense Information, Press Division, 6 May 1980 (Unclassified), Rescue Mission Files, Document A-283.

Transcript of News Briefing by Thomas Ross (NSAD 113), Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, 1 May 1980 (Unclassified), Rescue Mission Files, Document A-277.

Transcript of News Briefing by Thomas Ross (NSAD 114), 6 May 1980 (Unclassified), Rescue Mission Files, Document A-282.

Transcript of News Briefing by Thomas Ross (NSAD 115), 8 May 1980 (Unclassified), Rescue Mission Files, Document A-36.

Transcript of News Conference by Secretary Brown and Chairman Jones (NSAD 116), 29 April 1980 (Unclassified), Rescue Mission Files, Document A-275.

Transcript of Press Conference by Charlie Beckwith (NSAD 117), Delta Force Commander for Rescue Mission, 1 May 1980 (Unclassified), Rescue Mission Files, Document A-94.

Weather Chart (NSAD 118), Undated (Confidential), Rescue Mission Files, Document G-362.

Working Paper by Joint Task Force (NSAD 119), 23 November 1980 (Top Secret), Assessment of Public Perceptions of Planning for Rescue Operation, Rescue Mission Files, Document B-164.

Working Paper by Joint Task Force (NSAD 120), Undated (Top Secret), Briefing for the President on Rescue Mission, Rescue Mission Files, Document I-370.

Working Paper by Joint Task Force (NSAD 121), 24 April 1980 (Top Secret), Iran Situation Report, Rescue Mission Files, Document B-28.

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Working Paper by Joint Task Force (NSAD 123), 24 April 1980 (Top Secret), Guard Force Distribution, Rescue Mission Files, Document B-59.

Working Paper by Joint Task Force (NSAD 124), 24 April 1980 (Top Secret), Overall Concept of Operations for Rescue Operation, Rescue Mission Files, Document B-30.

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Working Paper by Joint Task Force (NSAD 128), Undated (Top Secret), Assessment of Options for Military Action Against Iran, Rescue Mission Files, Document L-3.

Working Paper by Joint Task Force (NSAD 129), 26 April 1980 (Top Secret), Iran Situation Report, Rescue Mission Files, Document B-32.

Working Paper by Joint Task Force (NSAD 130), Undated (Top Secret), Status of Recommendations Outlined in Joint Task Force Capability Review, Rescue Mission Files, Document J-41.

Working Paper by Joint Task Force (NSAD 131), 12 July 1980 (Top Secret), Study of Leaflet Drop to Promote Release of Hostages, Rescue Mission Files, Document I-13.

Working Paper by Joint Task Force (NSAD 132), 25 July 1980 (Top Secret), Study of Teheran-Mehrabad Layout and Planning Considerations, Rescue Mission Files, Document B-210.