

Iranian Hostage Crisis: Iranian JCC Background 11/16/14

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Background

The overwhelming desire to destroy foreign control has always taken a central role for the people of Iran. Drawing influences from the Greeks, Egyptians, Indians, and Persians, Iran is one of the world's oldest and most splendid nations. From the construction of the Imam Mosque to the grandeur of the capital of Isfahan, Iranians have developed an inane sense of national identity. But, with the decline of the Persian Empire and with the influence of corrupt leaders, foreign nations have long imposed their influence over the authority of the Iranian people. Countries such as Britain, Russia, and the United States have all had their fair share in dabbling with the politics and control of Iran at one point or another.

Starting in 1872, the Imperial Tobacco Corporation of Persia (a British company) bought the exclusive right to run Persia's industries, irrigate its farmland, exploit its mineral resources, develop its railway and streetcar lines, establish its national bank, and print its currency.¹ This marked the first episode of public outrage by the Iranian people which eventually led to a temporary British withdrawal. But even with severe public discontent, foreign nations never stopped to progress their own personal gains off the welfare of the Iranian nation.

In 1891, the first uprising to shape modern Iranian nationalism occurred after the British Imperial Tobacco Company took complete control of Iran's tobacco industry. Tobacco was an integral part of the Iranian people's lifestyle. Thus the Iranian people were devastated by the new laws imposed by the British tobacco company, which resulted in a national boycott of tobacco. The British company's rights to the Iranian tobacco industry disappeared after additional demonstrations. Iranians had endured the foreign intervention in their country 20 years and this was the first time

they stood up in opposition.

The 1891 revolt revealed the outrage that had been lying dormant in the hearts of the Iranian people for more than a century. During the Constitutional Revolution of 1906, establishing a parliament and a national electoral system paved the way for a democratic form of government. Britain and Russia still treated Iran like a colony; they signed a treaty in 1907 that essentially divided Iran between the two of them.

Civil unrest brewing in Russia led to Russia's loss of control and Britain's complete control of Iran. In 1919, Britain took control over Iran's army, treasury, transportation system, and communications network through the Anglo-Persian Agreement. This was in part the result of the Cold War between Britain and Russia, in which Britain sought to take control in order to prevent the spread of communism. But this Anglo-Persian Agreement did not benefit Iran, but rather ended Iran's status as an independent state. This was the root cause of a second uprising in 1921.

Following the uprising of 1921, Reza Shah came to power. He eventually gained the respect of the Iranian people due to his progressive measures, even though he employed brutal tactics and made use of the Savak, his secret police. He was the only head figure thus far in Iranian history who was able to fight foreign control. Reza Shah's rule formed the modern ideals of the Iranian people. He formed ties with Germany to rival against Britain and Russia proving that despite all that Reza Shah accomplished, Iran was still very weak. The British took control of Iran's rich oil industry and thereby leaving the Iranian people in poverty.

This imbalance of power led to the next Iranian revolution that, for the most part, was peaceful but highly influential. In 1951, Mohammed Mossadegh, one of the most highly educated men in the entire country, was chosen as the prime minister. Mossadegh's campaign was to nationalize the oil industry and wrestle back control from foreign influence. He proposed a nationalization law that was unanimously passed in both houses of parliament, but was clearly

rejected by the British. The British then withdrew their technicians and blockaded Iran's ports from exporting oil and asked the UN to order Iran to withdraw their nationalization plan.

Mossadegh's actions instantly brought him fame on an international level. Though the Iranian people praised him, this appraisal was not shared by the Americans. The Americans claimed that Mossadegh's efforts to protect the welfare and health of his people was defying international law and threatening the flow of oil to the free world. They described Mossadegh as a "defiant scorned."ⁱⁱ The enormous struggle to control the oil industry changed Iran's nationalistic ideals into a real movement. Iran had hoped the United States would become their ally after all of their previous support with teachers, nurses, and missionaries but their views changed in the summer of 1953.

Since British Prime Minister Winston Churchill was unable to persuade Mossadegh from forfeiting his nationalization plan, Churchill plotted to overthrow Mossadegh's government. He was foiled when Mossadegh expelled all British diplomats from Iran. Desperate for resources, Churchill accused Mossadegh of leading Iran towards terrorism and was able to fool President Eisenhower and his Secretary of State John Foster Dulles. With Cold War tensions on the rise, Dulles and Eisenhower were eager to strike back against the Communist influence that was growing worldwide. However Mossadegh despised Marxist ideas and did not support Communist beliefs.

The United States, vying for control in the Cold War, decided to send in a team of Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) agents to overthrow Mossadegh. Utilizing tactics such as bribing newspapers and organizing riots, the CIA was able to create an impression that Iran was heading down the path to destruction. On August 19th, the CIA's Iranian agents led a mob that sieged Mossadegh's complex for two hours until he finally fled. Mossadegh was eventually arrested, tried for high treason, and put on house arrest for life, where he died in 1967.

The 1953 coup eliminated the possibility of democratic rule in Iran. The CIA arranged for the former Reza Shah to be reinstated. This time, however, Reza Shah ruled with even more

repression by using his secret police to torture opposition figures. Reza Shah had forbidden any independent institutions from forming during his entire rule. The Iranian people began to see the United States as the country that stole their democracy and set up a brutal dictator as their leader. The new generation that formed as a result of the 1953 coup saw the United States as imperialist and neo-colonialist.ⁱⁱⁱ Reza Shah, drawing from the wealth of Iran's oil industry, began to transform Iran into a regional military power by buying billions of dollars in United States military equipment. The United States was able to profit immensely off the arms trade and control of Iran's oil industry.

Iran's final modern revolution in 1979 was the culmination of the anger at the United States military presence in Iran and Reza Shah's brutal rule. This was similar to previous uprisings as it was a rebellion against a regime that had lost its control to a foreign power. Nearly every major group in Iranian society sided with the anti-Shah rebellion. The Shah was overthrown and forced to flee his seat of power on January 16, 1979.^{iv} After the Shah was deposed, he was offered medical asylum in the United States for cancer treatment. To the people of Iran, it looked as if providing the Shah with medical asylum was foretelling a potential plan to reinstate the Shah. The Shah made full use of his secret police to brutalize the Iranian people and win more favor with the United States. By giving away control of 80% of the Iranian oil industry to the United States, the Shah crippled Iran's economy. The root cause of the issue was a result of the United States strong hand in the Iranian economy.

The elimination of our greatest leader, Mohammed Mossadegh, was a blow that will never be forgotten by the Iranian people. The coup of 1953 imprisoned the entire country of Iran under the iron rule of the Shah. The Shah, backed by the United States, was only a figurehead. The Americans have no regret in ravaging the country of Iran and figuratively holding its people prisoner, so why should the people of Iran? The culmination of all these years of foreign control over Iran has led the once magnificent state to a breaking point. No longer will the foreign powers

be in control of the beloved state of Iran and no longer will Iran's resources be exploited and taken from their grasp. Under the leadership of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Iran will begin its rise into the world's superpowers and compete with countries that always looked down about it.

Where Things Stand

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, a revolutionary Islamist, has gained support by showing that he can break from foreign control and take back Iran for its people. After Reza Shah fled the throne, Khomeini installed a militant Islamist government in place. Due to the United States' actions regarding Reza Shah's asylum, a group of militant Islamist students attacked the United States embassy in Tehran and took 66 people hostage. The starting date of this committee is November 4th, 1979, and we are now in a very delicate position. The Iranian people are seeking vengeance on the oppression caused by the 1953 coup in which they lost their entire system of democratic government. We hold the power over the United States now and can make demands in order to replenish our great country back to the way it was before the 1953 coup. The demands need to be decided as soon as possible and voted on through the committee. We must keep in mind that the United States can fully utilize their intelligence services to disrupt our negotiation process and potentially plan a rescue mission. In order to ensure that our demands are met, we will also need to plan to intercept any possible intrusions by the United States intelligence agencies.

Questions to Consider

1. Is the best course of action to conduct peaceful negotiations with a nation that has had a history against our wellbeing?
2. What kinds of demands would benefit the Iranian people the most?
 - a. Are they plausible?

3. How should the hostages be treated? Keep in mind this easily can reflect the actions of the U.S.
4. How can we prevent international forces from storming the embassy and retaking the hostages?
5. If the negotiations were to not end peacefully, what would be the next best course of action?
 - a. Are there enough people to support a military action against the United States?
6. If military action is pursued, what are the consequences and potential costs of these actions?
What is the strategy?
7. How did the coup of 1953 shape our view on foreign control over Iran?

People To Know

1. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini – the religious leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979. He worked to remove the Shah from power and sought to end connections with the West. He wrote an Islamic constitution for Iran and was widely recognized as the leader of Iran long before the Shah fled the state. Once Khomeini was in power, however, his attitude towards the opposing political party was no different from the former Shah's opposition towards Khomeini's views.
2. Sadeq Ghotbzadeh – helped Khomeini overthrow the monarchy of Reza Shah. He was appointed foreign minister during the time of the Iranian Hostage Crisis and attempted to resolve the situation diplomatically. His actions sometimes angered the country's leading clerics. He had a major role in some of the negotiations with the United States during the crisis.
3. Abolhassan Banisadr – served as the minister of foreign affairs during the crisis. He joined Khomeini early on in Khomeini's rise to power and became one of his closest advisors. Although he was close to Khomeini, Banisadr was never a cleric himself.
4. Sadeq Tabatabai – was a professor at the University of Tehran and eventually became a minister and government spokesman as well as the Iranian ambassador to Germany. Tabatabai

was able to maintain close ties with Khomeini due to his sister being married to Khomeini's son Ahmed. Tabatabai also accompanied Khomeini in Khomeini's exile in Paris.

5. Ahmad Khomeini – the son of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini who helped his father in his actions. He became a member of Iran's Supreme National Security Council and was given the opportunity to serve on his father's chief of staff.
6. Ebrahim Asgharzadeh –a student at the Sharif University of Technology in Tehran, known as the leader of the embassy assault. He led a group called the Muslim Student Followers of the Imam's Line. His takeover in part was to demonstrate support for Ayatollah and the student's outrage at the asylum of the ex-Shah.
7. Mohammed Mousavi Khomeiniha – an Iranian cleric who became one of the aides of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Khomeiniha represented Khomeini at Iran's Council of National Radio and TV and was the spiritual leader of the Muslim Student Followers of Imam's Line who led the taking of hostages at the American embassy.
8. Mohsen Mirdamadi – also an organizer in the Iran hostage crisis. Mirdamadi was part of the leadership council of the hostage takers and made important decisions regarding what to do with the hostages themselves.

ⁱ Kinzer, Stephen. "Inside Iran's Fury." In *Smithsonian*, 1-5. Accessed August 22, 2014. <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/people-places/inside-irans-fury-11823881/?page=2>.

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} Ibid.

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Final Note

Be sure to research each and every facet of this topic closely as the committee will be fast paced and highly interactive so I expect all delegates to be on their toes! Please realize that when the committee is set in a historical time period, events that occur in the future cannot be brought up in committee for debate. Also keep in mind that what really happened in the situation is not necessarily the only outcome to a JCC historical committee. Any result can come of your debate and interaction with the other committee. Being well prepared for all situations in a JCC is very crucial to your success!