

# **GUESTS OF THE AYATOLLAH: JIMMY CARTER'S CABINET AND THE IRAN HOSTAGE CRISIS**



**TUMUN X**

**February 27, 2026**

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**March 1, 2026**

**Crisis Director:  
Reece Christian**

**Chair:  
Gabby Romm**

## Table of Contents:

<u>Letter from the Director</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>    Accuracy, Sensitivity, and Technology Policies</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>Background</u>	<u>5</u>
<u>    The Qajar Dynasty</u>	<u>5</u>
<u>    The Pahlavi Dynasty</u>	<u>6</u>
<u>    The Democratic Era and the 1953 Coup</u>	<u>9</u>
<u>    The Iranian Revolution</u>	<u>12</u>
<u>    The Hostage Crisis and Current Situation</u>	<u>14</u>
<u>    Culture and Religion</u>	<u>15</u>
<u>Questions To Consider</u>	<u>17</u>
<u>Roles</u>	<u>18</u>
<u>Resource for Delegates</u>	<u>22</u>
<u>References:</u>	<u>23</u>

## Letter from the Director

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to TUMUN X and to the committee *Guests of the Ayatollah*. The committee is heavily based on Mark Bowden's book of the same name, which sparked my interest in Iran and its political history last year. I subsequently took a course in Iranian foreign relations while studying abroad in Amsterdam this past fall, and have come to appreciate the unique and misunderstood dynamics of the country.

My name is Reece Christian, I am a junior at Tufts originally from Denver, Colorado, and majoring in International Relations and Economics. This is my third year in Tufts Model UN, where I also serve as vice president for the club, and my second year as a CD for TUMUN.

The secondary title of Bowden's book is *America's First Battle in the War with Militant Islam*, and it's hard to overstate how accurate that assessment is. News of dozens of American diplomats taken hostage in Tehran was many Americans' first impression of both Iran and Islam as a whole. Many of the complex dynamics that the US manages with Iran today can be traced back to the hostage crisis and the distrust it created between the two countries. Beyond that, the crisis politically ended Jimmy Carter's presidency, and ushered in the dramatic economic and societal changes of the Reagan era.

Can you create a different outcome, both for the crisis, and for the trajectory of American foreign and domestic policy? I hope you are as excited as I am to dive into this topic, please feel free to contact me if you have any questions, and see you in February!

Best,

Reece Christian

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## **Accuracy, Sensitivity, and Technology Policies**

As the committee is based on real-life events, I've tried my best to make the contents of this background guide historically accurate. Delegates are permitted and encouraged to bring in additional information from the historical record or their own creativity to advance the committee. Please note that the background guide only reflects the historical record through the events of November 4, 1979. Any real-life events after that date may or may not occur in committee depending on your actions. In the event that minor details from the historical record contradict information contained in this background guide, I will default to the background guide, in order to ensure delegates are on a level playing field. Any mistakes in the guide are of course fully my responsibility. Also note that many Persian names are often Anglicized with differing spellings (Mossadegh vs Mossadeq for example). In these cases, I have picked one spelling and chosen to be internally consistent with it, though I apologize if it is not the most commonly accepted spelling.

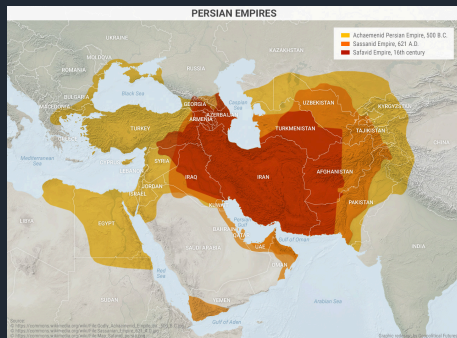
Iran is one of the most controversial subjects in modern American foreign policy. For that reason, I would like to particularly emphasize the importance of sensitivity in how you approach your roles in this committee. While certain figures did encourage military action against Iran for example, and you are permitted to do the same, please be mindful of how your actions in committee may be interpreted by others. Actions which intentionally target civilians, cater to harmful stereotypes of Iranians or Muslims more generally, or otherwise are in bad taste, are not permitted. Remember that the hostage crisis was a real, traumatic event, undergone by real life people, many of whom are still alive today. Please use common sense and if you have any doubts about something don't hesitate to ask myself or the chair.

Because the committee takes place in 1979, there will be a no technology policy during committee. Crisis notes will be written on notepads, and external research is only permitted outside of committee sessions. Minor fact checking may be done during unmoderated caucuses, subject to discretion of the chair.



# Background

Iran is perhaps the most unique country in the modern world, certainly in the Middle East. While many Middle Eastern countries' borders are a result of the remnants of decolonization, Iran's approximate current borders have remained under control of its native people (Persians) for more than 2500 years.



*Persian Imperial Borders over time (darker colors more recent)*

Because of this, Iran was known as Persia for much of its history, though it will be referred to by its modern name in this guide for simplicity. Iran is the only Shia-Islam majority country in the Middle East, and the only non-Arabic speaking country in the Middle East besides Israel and Turkey, speaking Farsi (also called Persian). Because of this, and contrary to popular belief, Iran is not part of the Arab World.

## *The Qajar Dynasty*

The modern history of Iran begins with the Qajar dynasty, which consolidated control of loosely affiliated tribes into a somewhat more cohesive national state. The first Qajar ruler, Naser al-Din Shah Qajar (Shah being Persian for King, and the general term for the ruler of Iran until the 1979 Revolution) ruled for almost 50 years from 1848 to 1896, and oversaw two relevant shifts in Iranian history.



*Naser al-Din Shah Qajar*

The first was the intrusion of imperial powers into Iran's domestic affairs. Russia and Britain were two of the most dominant colonial powers in the 19th century, and both saw Iran as a key region where they

could assert influence. Naser al-Din Shah granted numerous “concessions” to the two powers, agreements which ceded control of Iranian domestic industry to foreign powers, in exchange for (often minor) financial compensation. These were necessary because local tribes operated rather distinctly from the central state, meaning tax collection and thus national government revenue were sparse. However, the very idea of concessions enraged citizens who began to detest foreign intrusion in their affairs, a theme which would only strengthen over time. The second related development was the increasing role of religious leaders, who collected taxes independently and shared authority over some legal matters with the central government. The interplay of these two issues became more pronounced after Naser al-Din Shah’s assassination in 1896 and his successor’s substantial concessions surrounding tobacco and oil. A number of provocative actions by Europeans sent to collect their concession revenues (including the circulation of one image of a Belgian dressed as an Iranian religious leader as a joke) outraged the

Iranian people and turned them against the Qajars, and led to the popular uprising known as the Constitutional Revolution in 1905. The Revolution was notable for the role of clerics, who threatened to suspend religious services if democratic reforms were not granted, marking the first time religious leaders journeyed into the field of revolutionary politics, though not the last. In a highly religious society like Iran (see *Culture and Religion*), this threat played a large role in forcing the formation of a constitution and elected parliament (the latter known as the *Majles*). However, lack of cohesion among pro-democracy forces, along with continued intrusion by Britain and Russia, led to a functionally weak democratic system until after World War 2.

### ***The Pahlavi Dynasty***

During World War 1, famine, disease, and expansive British occupation led to misery throughout Iran. During the war, the British attempted to negotiate the Anglo-Persian Agreement, which would have essentially transferred control over Iran’s government administration to

British officials. Britain sought to consolidate control over Iran's large oil reserves, and secure the country as a strategic position in defense of Britain's then-colony India. The Agreement proved enormously unpopular with the Iranian population, and nationalist sentiment grew, with some regions of Iran experimenting with secession (to little success). Thus, Britain went for a far subtler move, backing a young military officer named Reza Pahlavi. Britain still sought to undermine Russian (now Soviet) influence, and believed a strong military-style leader with sympathies to the Western world would ensure this. Thus, Reza worked his way into the role of prime minister, and later overthrew Ahmad Shah Qajar, ending the Qajar dynasty and establishing the last dynasty of Shahs in Iran, the Pahlavis.



#### *Reza Shah Pahlavi*

Reza Shah was sympathetic to the West, but also felt deep ties to the long history of Persian culture, especially pre-Islam. He sought to modernize the Iranian state, establishing the strongest police, military, tax collection, and bureaucratic systems yet seen in the country. The *Majles*, while still existent, served as a rubber stamp for Reza Shah's projects. Reza Shah also sought to reduce the religious character of Iran, in part to reduce the influence of religious leaders to consolidate his own control of the country. Reza Shah imposed some restrictions on head coverings for women and enacted western-style dress codes for men.



*Common male dress before (above) and after (below)  
Reza Shah's reforms*



He also drastically expanded Iran's infrastructure, investing in industry and transportation projects, and opening the first university in Iran. Much of these economic projects only benefitted the urban and upper classes. This created a dynamic which would endure for decades - the upper classes became more secular and westernized, while the lower classes remained religious and traditional. All in all, Reza Shah acted to establish Iran as a modern, secular, conformist, nation-state, though opened substantial inequalities that fermented class conflicts later in history. In 1933, Reza Shah also extended oil concessions for an additional 60 years to the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, the British company created in 1901 to extract oil in Iran under the terms of Iranian concessions (today the company is known as British Petroleum).



*Abadan Oil Refinery, the main site for oil extraction by the APOC during the oil concession*

This created greater nationalist anger over continued foreign influence which would erupt after World War 2. Reza Shah also sought to move the country closer to Nazi Germany, renaming the country to evoke his people's historic connections to the (rather arbitrarily defined) Aryan race - Iran. Naturally, once World War 2 broke out the country was occupied by the Allies, and Reza was ousted for his German sympathies.

### ***The Democratic Era and the 1953 Coup***

After the war, Britain believed that a somewhat more liberal society still led by the Pahlavis would ensure their oil interests were protected and



shield the country from Soviet influence. Thus, Reza's son, Muhammed Reza Pahlavi, was allowed to take the throne as the next (and as it turned out, the last) Shah of Iran. Muhammed Reza Shah allowed for relatively more free *Majles* elections, and new political movements emerged to take advantage of the new electoral landscape. The social divides of the Reza Shah era emerged in this landscape. The secular, educated, higher class backed the Tudeh party, Iran's communist party which received some material support from the Soviets. The traditional, religious, lower classes backed the National Front, which was less focused on domestic economic justice and more on the continued intrusion of foreign powers. Tudeh promoted ideas of mass participation that helped catalyze the new, more free Iranian democracy, but they were weakened by their connection to the still distrusted Soviets, as well as their support to separatist groups. When the Soviets tried to negotiate an unpopular oil concession in northern Iran, it served the dual purpose of permanently politically alienating Tudeh from the population, and

drawing attention to the continued British oil extraction in southern Iran, which became the trademark issue for the National Front. The National Front, with its anti-foreign power messaging, created a coalition of middle class workers, merchants, and religious leaders. A new leader emerged in Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadeq, a former pro-constitution leader who became the public face of Iranian nationalism.



*Mossadeq addressing the UN Security Council on oil nationalization*

He ran on a platform of nationalising the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, which would nullify the 1933 concession and allow Iran to receive all profits from oil extraction in its borders. Upon his election he fulfilled that promise, outraging the British government who pursued international legal action and heavily

sanctioned Iran. Ironically, while British sanctions damaged the Iranian economy, they also united the Iranian people around Mossadeq, solidifying the dispute as an existential matter of Iran against the foreign power that had exploited it for over a century. When he resigned in protest in 1952 over a dispute with the Shah, the protests were so overwhelming that the Shah was forced to reinstate him. However, the incident did splinter the National Front, causing the remnants of Tudeh to begin to organize and creating fears that they may be seeking to bring Iran under the Soviet umbrella. Consequently, religious leaders and merchants who had allied with Mossadeq and feared foreign influence above all, began to support plots to overthrow Mossadeq before Tudeh could do the same. These plots were led by Iranians, but heavily supported by the British who were still fighting the nationalization movement. When this support was uncovered, diplomatic connections were severed and British representatives were ousted from Iran. Britain thus turned to the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The CIA had already been active in Iran to undermine

Tudeh as part of its global 'containment' strategy against communism. With Britain exiled from the country, they sought CIA support to overthrow Mossadeq, and President Eisenhower's cabinet (especially the brothers, CIA director Allen Dulles and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles) persuaded him to support covert action against Mossadeq. It's unclear why the US foreign relations apparatus supported the coup. Some argue they had a sincere fear that Iran could turn communist if a stronger leader was not installed. Others point to the favorable oil contracts American companies received after the coup. There's even an argument that Iran simply served to make an example for other developing states looking to nationalize their industries that were controlled by foreign powers. Regardless of the intent, the result was the most miserable years in Iran since the occupation. Though Mossadeq was beginning to come under fire for attempting to take more authority, it was the intervention of the US that led to his ousting. On August 19, 1953, the CIA's Operation Ajax was put into place, with hundreds of Iranians paid by the CIA to protest

against Mossadeq, while others were paid to express support for Tudeh and create fears of communist takeover. The CIA operator on the ground, Kermit Roosevelt (relative of Teddy), solicited two decrees from the Shah, which ordered Mossadeq to step down from the Prime Ministership, and installed a General, Fazlollah Zahedi, as the new Prime Minister. The contrived riots in the streets prompted the police to turn on Mossadeq, and he was arrested and later tried for treason.

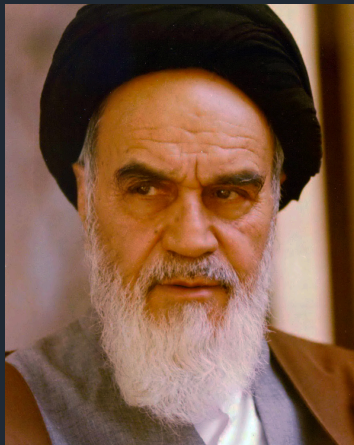


*The 1953 Coup*

In exchange for his support of the coup, Muhammed Reza Shah was drawn in closely into the orbit of the US and was granted far more power than during the preceding years of relatively free elections, once again turning the *Majles* and Prime Minister into a rubber stamp for the Shah's policies. Muhammed Reza became paranoid about losing

power, and obsessively purchased weapons from the US, prevented strong leaders from obtaining key positions and seizing power (fearing a coup just as his father had orchestrated), and created SAVAK, the Iranian secret police who would later become infamous for their use of torture towards dissidents. US support was focused on creating a strong state which would deter communist influence, so they made no attempt to push the Shah towards democracy. Some modernization of the economy occurred, and in some ways life did improve, but just like under his father economic growth was highly unequal. Muhammed Reza also imitated his father in trying to spread western-style secularism to weaken the role of the clergy. The Shah made a noteworthy attempt to ally himself with the impoverished with the 1963 White Revolution, which attempted to alter the structure of land ownership to benefit peasants. The Revolution reduced the influence of major landowners, including religious land holders. Around this same time, bills in the *Majles* to grant the US favorable loans and full diplomatic immunity. The sum of these

conditions was to create a highly revolutionized clergy, which resented the secularization, westernization, and disenfranchisement that they faced from the Shah. The most vocal opponent at this time became Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, whose protests against the Shah got him arrested and exiled.



*Ayatollah Khomeini*

A bounty of oil revenue for the Shah in the 1970s created a difficult economic situation, where the rich were prospering more than ever from the income, but prices rose for the poor. Education improved but intellectual ideas were restricted and traded in secret. Above all, the traditional classes that had historically backed the National Front, including the clergy and merchants, resented the modernized economy which was squeezing them out of their influence. In 1976, the Shah abolished the Islamic

calendar, and just as in revolutions past, this blatant insult to the deeply religious character of Iran, catalyzed into a revolutionary situation.

### ***The Iranian Revolution***

The role of different actors in Iran in bringing about the revolution is complex, but the very brief summary of the revolution is as follows. The high oil prices which had supported the Iranian economy collapsed in 1975, causing a spike in inflation and unemployment. Intellectual groups began to organize protests, and various classes which were economically and socially disenfranchised by the Shah began to join in throughout 1977. Just as during the Constitutional Revolution, religious leaders played a key role, this time by directly expressing anti-government views during religious services. In January 1978, an article in a popular Iranian state newspaper appeared which heavily criticized Khomeini. Writing from outside Iran, Khomeini had been promoting a sort of Islamic populist message which resonated deeply with many disaffected Iranians. Angered by the insult to the Ayatollah, protests exploded and were violently suppressed. An Islamic mourning ritual holds that 'martyrs' (those who die in service to a



cause) are mourned every 40 days. Consequently, the very first protesters killed by the government incited a 40 day cycle of widespread demonstrations, which often created more martyrs in the process. Throughout the summer of 1978, the economy slumped further, and the government became more violent against protesters, which only incited more anger. In September 1978, 'Black Friday' occurred, where roughly 100 civilians were killed protesting the government, marking a point of no return for reconciliation with the Shah. General strikes by workers led to suspended oil production, which crippled the government's ability to function. By December, the Shah had fled Iran, and on February 1, 1979, Ruhollah Khomeini returned to Iran. When the last forces loyal to the Shah fell that same month, there was no doubt who would seize control of the revolutionary government.



*Khomeini speaking to a crowd on the day of his return to Iran*

Khomeini appointed a provisional government, with Prime Minister Mehdi Barzagan, and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ebrahim Yazdi. Barzagan and Yazdi represent the remnants of the National Front, desiring a democratic republic with relatively secular characteristics. Their appointment is an appeal by Khomeini to reassure the remnants of the Shah's state bureaucracy (a bureaucracy that at one point contained half of working Iranians in its employ) that their positions are secure, as well as to ideologically cater to secular intellectuals that helped spark the revolution. However, Khomeini maintains ideological control over the revolution as a whole, and practically controls more of the government than the provisional leaders. A new constitution drafted by disciples of Khomeini gave him the role of supreme leader, allowing him to appoint most officials and mandating that laws are in coherence with Islamic Sharia law. Some individual rights were enshrined to satisfy the non-Islamic groups that had backed the revolution, but the constitution was still clearly Islamic above all else. Barzagan wrote a more secular constitution that he attempted to put up for public referendum, but he was sidetracked by the events of November 1979.

## ***The Hostage Crisis and Current Situation***

In February 1979, the US embassy was briefly seized by Iranian communists, however Yazdi negotiated an end to the seizure. This created concerns for the security of the embassy, but American government officials believed that the new Iranian government, eager for international recognition, would protect American diplomats as they did in negotiating an end to the February crisis. In October 1979, the exiled Shah of Iran was admitted into the US for medical treatment, prompting outrage by Iranians who believed they had the right to prosecute Muhammed Reza for his crimes against the Iranian people.

On November 4, 1979, a deadly confluence of events created massive protests outside the embassy. It was the one year anniversary of a deadly student protest against the Shah, the 15 year anniversary of Khomeini's exile from Iran, and only a few weeks into the Shah's stay in the US being made public. Protests against the US grew outside the embassy, and the front gates of the compound were broken into on the morning of November 4. Broadcasts of American diplomats being blindfolded

and paraded around the embassy compound have outraged Americans everywhere.



*Iranian protesters breaching the US embassy*

Foreign Minister Yazdi promised that the government condemned the actions of the protesters, however a public statement by Khomeini backed the hostagetakers, and local reporting has identified the protesters as part of a group called the "Muslim Student Followers of the Imam's Line", implying they are loyal to Khomeini. It is currently the evening of November 4, 1979, and here is what you know:

- There are 72 Americans who were believed to be in the embassy compound when it was seized. This includes diplomats, Marines guarding the embassy, administrative workers, and three CIA representatives
- There are no reports of fatalities currently, but not every American has been accounted for or identified

- Yazdi and Barzagan appear to desire a quick end to the crisis, but Khomeini appears to view the students protesters as allies, and potentially an opportunity to consolidate control over the future of the government
- The only identifiable demand of the students has appeared to be a return of the Shah to Iran, though they have also made accusations regarding 'spying' and 'undermining the revolution', a clear holdover of paranoia from the 1953 coup and US support for the Shah since then

As President Carter's cabinet, it is up to you to decide how to proceed. Carter has typically pursued a more idealist and diplomatic foreign policy in his administration. He has negotiated arms treaties with the Soviets, facilitated the normalization of relations between Egypt and Israel at Camp David, and ended support to dictators that prior administrations had backed to ward off the Soviets. However he has shown a certain naivety towards Iran. In December 1977, immediately before the high point of the Iranian Revolution, Carter praised the Shah for making Iran an "island of stability" in the Middle

East. This marked Carter as an enemy of the revolution in the eyes of Khomeini and his allies. With the 1980 election fast approaching, the Cold War still very much alive, potential disruptions to Iran's contribution to the global oil market, and newsclips of Americans taken hostage in a country most have never heard of circulating in every household in the nation, all eyes are on you to respond to this unprecedented event.

### ***Culture and Religion***

As mentioned earlier, Iran is the only Shia Islam majority country in the Middle East, as compared to most countries' Sunni majority. To summarize, Shia and Sunni Muslims disagree on who the proper inheritor of the Prophet Muhammad's divine authority should be.

Sunnis support the elected leaders who led the Caliphate (Islamic empire) throughout the 600s. Shias support the authority of Ali, who was a blood descendant of Muhammad and (according to Shia reading of historic texts) was directly imbued with Muhammad's authority. Ali was assassinated in 661, leading to the creation of a new Caliphate under the leadership of Mu'awiya, whose successors formed the basis of Islamic

power in the Middle East and whose followers evolved into modern day Sunnis. Meanwhile, blood descendants of Ali became the 'Imams' of Shia Islam, the 12 hereditary descendants of the Prophet who are to provide guidance to Shias.

This difference has two key implications for Iranian culture. Ali's assassination is mourned annually in Iran, as he is considered the most important 'martyr' to the cause of proper Islam. Thus, the role of martyrdom is considered highly important in Shia, as seen by the Islamic government inflating protester death numbers during the revolution by factors of ten. The second implication is in how Khomeini has shaped his political philosophy. While Khomeini savvily focused on anti-Shah, anti-American, and populist rhetoric in the public eye, he also circulated his principle of "velayat-e-faqih", meaning "governor of the jurist", to his more loyal religious followers.

Essentially, Twelveist Shias (most of Iran's Muslims) believe that the Twelfth Imam was born into hiding in the 9th century, and has continued to live in hiding since then. According to Shia belief, the Twelfth Imam will return at the end of days to bring peace and justice to the Earth. Until that point, the

highest authority in Shia serves as acting Imam and provides his own guidance on Islamic law. Khomeini's philosophy was essentially that the acting Imam (conveniently, himself), ought to give guidance not only on religious life, but on all operations of a proper Islamic state. Under this framework, Khomeini has the right to rule Iran for life to ensure all laws and citizens fall under proper Sharia law and Islamic life.

Khomeini's philosophy was possible because religious life in Iran is critically important to many people. Public participation in weekly prayers is common, and during the revolution was a source of propaganda for the religious factions of the anti-Shah movement. For many decades in Iran prior to the Pahlavis, religious leaders shared authority over their local communities with the Shah, collected their own taxes, and held responsibility for part of the judicial system, making the religious leaders now forming the new government a longstanding integral part of Iranian society.

On the American side, most of these concepts are entirely foreign. For most Americans, "Islam" has been understood as connected to African-American civil rights leaders, like Malcolm X,



Muhammad Ali, and Louis Farrakhan. Many Americans are woefully undereducated on their nation's involvement in the Middle East, and doubly so for Iran. For many, this crisis is the first they are hearing of the nation, and of a large population of people who view their country as "The Great Satan". Iranians hold great anger towards the US for the 1953 coup, and for backing the Shah during his most brutal and despotic days. Bridging this gap in understanding between the two cultures may be necessary if the crisis is to be resolved peacefully.

## Questions To Consider

- How will you get the hostages home? With 72 worried families, how will you negotiate the hostages' return to America, and ensure none of them are harmed by the angry students in the process? Will you use diplomacy, force, or some combination of the two?
- How will you communicate with the American public? Good policy isn't enough, you need to be able to telegraph to the American people why you're taking the steps you aim to take, and educate them on the situation in Iran as it develops. With the 1980 presidential election looming, Carter's handling of this crisis may shape the fate of his administration.
- How will you manage relations with Khomeini and Barzagan? Will you permit Khomeini to enter into the mainstream global community with his unorthodox regime, or will you try and strengthen the secular factions in Iran? Barzagan and Yazdi are likely to be more sympathetic to the US, but meddling in Iranian domestic politics yet again may yield more problems than benefits in the long run.

## Roles

### **Vice President Walter Mondale:**

Mondale is a Democrat from Minnesota whose foreign policy input has already shaped much of the Carter Administration. He has a strong focus on diplomacy, multilateral engagement, and international norms, and was involved in many of the normalization and arms control efforts during Carter's term. The very idea of diplomats taken hostage with a government's support repels him to his core, but he may be more reluctant to use force out of fear of escalation.

### **Chief of Staff Hamilton Jordan:**

Jordan is an old ally of Carter, running his successful governor's campaign in 1970, and subsequently brought along into the White House. As such, his main priority is managing the political fallout from the crisis, though he also holds a strong moral compass he strives not to violate. As one of Carter's closest confidantes, he has tremendous credibility to act as a liaison with the Iranians, but will

have to convince them to take steps that will politically help a president they despise if the crisis is to end.

**Press Secretary Jody Powell:** Similarly to Jordan, Powell is an ally of Carter since during his run for governor, and a Georgia native just like the President. As the mouthpiece for the administration, Powell is the public face of Carter's response to the crisis. He will be a valuable perspective in evaluating policy moves to ensure they will play well with the American public.

**Secretary of State Cyrus Vance:** The head of Carter's foreign policy represents one end of the spectrum of possible responses to the crisis. He heavily favors diplomacy, and during the Iranian Revolution favored the Shah to make democratic reforms to appease the protesters. He clashes frequently with Brzezinski, a far more hawkish figure who Carter also trusts deeply. Though he has numerous foreign policy achievements (including negotiation of Soviet Arms Treaties), his obsessive fixation on diplomacy leads some to view him as acting too weakly on American adversaries.

**National Security Advisor Zbigniew**

**Brzezinski:** The opposite end of the foreign policy spectrum from Vance, Brzezinski grew up in Poland during the prewar and World War 2 eras, giving him a heavily realist and practical view of foreign relations. He is staunchly anti-communist, and still fearful of Iran (and its natural resources) being handed to the Soviets while it is in a pseudo power vacuum. He favored violent repression by the Shah in response to protests, and is inclined towards military action to rescue the hostages. He also was part of the contingent who supported the Shah's admittance into the US to begin with.

**Secretary of Defense Harold Brown:**

Brown is a rare military hawk in a relatively diplomatic administration. While Carter has pushed for lowering defense funding, Brown has advocated for more advanced military technologies and more extensive contingency plans for military action in countries in which the US has a strategic interest. He will be a crucial part of any military mission involving Iran, and will have to monitor the defense ramifications of the crisis throughout the Middle

East.

**United Nations Representative****Donald McHenry:** As UN

Representative, McHenry is another voice for diplomacy in resolving the crisis. Like Brown, McHenry is another figure who will have to evaluate America's actions in regards to how they impact the rest of the global stage. The Soviets will be watching his signals closely to see how the US approaches the crisis in Tehran and what it could mean for the rest of the Middle East.

**CIA Director Stansfield Turner:**

Turner is in a unique position as the head of the organization most vehemently targeted by the protestors. He must manage the American covert response to the crisis, without further enraging those same protestors and placing the hostages at risk. As director, he has led a CIA that has been relatively more accountable and transparent compared to the one that orchestrated the coup against Mossadeq, but still views force and espionage as playing a role in strong foreign policy.

**Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff**

**David Jones:** Jones is a lifetime



military man who has been a loyal public supporter of Carter. In terms of foreign policy, he advocates for close relations with American allies. He has a strong relationship with many of those allies as a result, including Saudi Arabia, which may be useful for regional leverage on Iran.

**Colonel Charles Beckwith, Commander and Creator of Delta Force:** Beckwith has the narrowest and yet potentially most consequential responsibility in regards to the crisis response. Beckwith is the father of the Delta Force, a first-of-its-kind counterterrorism unit using highly trained forces for special operations. If a military rescue mission is to be explored, Beckwith's forces will be utilized heavily.

**Secretary of the Treasury, George William Miller:** Though not directly involved in foreign policy, Miller will play a role in the economic leverage placed on Iran. Responsibilities over sanctions, freezing of assets, and managing the US economy's response to potential oil disruptions, make him a critical part

of the crisis response.

**Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher:** A meticulous and quiet diplomat, Christopher served as deputy Attorney General under Lyndon B. Johnson, and has carried that lawyerly streak into his foreign policy work. He has been involved in "hands-on" negotiations with Communist China and Panama over other elements of President Carter's foreign policy, and can be a critical asset in negotiations with the new Iranian regime.

**Senator Frank Church, Chair of Senate Foreign Relations Committee:** Senator Church is a progressive foreign policy leader, often thought of as positioned to the left of Carter himself. He was a staunch congressional supporter of returning the Panama Canal to Panama, sparking frustration from more hawkish foreign policy supporters. Since the Vietnam War, he has broadly held an anti-military intervention policy, including opposing intervening to save the Shah's government. He will be part of the party's messaging and any legislative action taken to resolve the crisis.

**Representative Clement Zablocki, Chair of House Foreign Affairs**

**Committee:** Church's equivalent in the House is a more traditional centrist Democrat on foreign policy. He has backed the Vietnam war and generally supported interventionist policy, particularly in the fight against communism. Zablocki was a controversial nominee for Committee Chair, and may be well placed to find common ground across the aisle.

**Senator Howard Baker, Senate Minority Leader:** Senator Baker is a relatively moderate Republican who has emphasized bipartisanship and what is best for the national interest. He worked with the President on the Panama Canal agreement, and may be able to help build a bipartisan effort on responding to the events in Tehran.

**Representative John Jacob Rhodes, House Minority Leader:** Rhodes is a more traditionally conservative Republican, with strong anti-communist leanings and support for high levels of defense spending. He has developed a strained relationship with the President over environmental regulations, and may seek to hold the administration accountable for any actions it takes in response to the crisis.

## Resource for Delegates

For further basic information on Iran and the hostage crisis, most reliable online resources (online encyclopedias, US government websites, etc.) give fairly good summaries that should fill in any basic context I may have missed in the background guide

If you would like to dive deeper I would highly recommend the books I list below as resources. Bowden's book in particular gives detailed accounts of many individuals' experiences during the crisis to give you inspiration for your arcs (especially for Beckwith, Vance, Brzezinski, and Jordan). Abrahamian is one of the most well respected Iranian scholars writing on the general history of Iran, including the 1979 Revolution.

## References:

*All The Shah's Men*, By Stephen Kinzer

*Guests of the Ayatollah*, by Mark Bowden

*A History of Modern Iran*, by Ervand Abrahamian

*Iran's relations with the West: The Revolution and its Aftermath*, lecture series by Dr. Said Rezaeiejan (September-October 2025)

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