

SHOOTING THE AYATOLLAH:
PHOTOJOURNALISM, THE PRESS, THE FOREIGN POLICY PUBLIC,
& THE IRAN HOSTAGE CRISIS

by

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(Under the Direction of William Stueck)

ABSTRACT

This thesis quantifies the volume, type, and tone of images used by the mass-market newsweeklies – *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *U.S. News and World Report* – to depict Iran and the Iran hostage crisis in an attempt to characterize related media coverage. In four chapters, this study's quantitative approach describes the entire lifecycle of hostage crisis media – from its creation in Tehran and Washington by news service reporters and Iranian photojournalists, its communication on the pages of the American news magazines, a statistical examination of news media consumption by various strata of American society, and a comparison of the American press and its Arab analogue. This thesis also tests a number of core assumptions about hostage crisis media coverage that dominated the contemporary press and continue to linger in the current historiography, providing a new, more accurate image of the crisis's cultural impact.

INDEX WORDS: Iran Hostage Crisis, Media, Photography, News Magazines, Foreign Press, Arab Press, Media Consumption, Marketing Statistics, Foreign Policy Public, Carter Presidency, Jimmy Carter, Ayatollah Khomeini, The Shah of Iran, Terrorism, Hostages, Cultural History, Media History, U.S.-Middle Eastern Relations, 1970s, 1980s.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
LIST OF FIGURES	vii
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION: THE IRAN HOSTAGE CRISIS	
AS A CULTURAL PRODUCT	1
2 CREATION: REVOLUTION AND CRISIS	
THROUGH THE VIEWFINDER.....	14
Witness to History: The Cultural Value of Newsweeklies	
and Photojournalism	16
Different Editors, Same Sources: The Newsweeklies and	
the Wire Services.....	23
Through the Viewfinder: Photographers of the Iran Hostage Crisis.....	32
3 COMMUNICATION: PORNOGRAPHY OF GRIEF,	
PORNOGRAPHY OF POLITICS	44
Mullahs and Mosques: Newsweekly Coverage of Iran	
Before the Hostage Crisis.....	47
William Belk and the Ayatollah Khomeini: Iran Hostage Crisis	
Visual Narratives	63
Iran Vanishes: Coverage of Iran After the Return of the Hostages.....	75

4	CONSUMPTION: POLLS, PUBLIC, & PRESIDENTS.....	80
	Of Polls and Public Opinion: Public Reaction	
	to the Iran Hostage Crisis	82
	Of Diplomats and The Press: The Foreign Policy Public	
	and the Newsweeklies	91
	Of Presidents and Politics: The Impact of Crisis Coverage	
	on the White House	104
5	COMPARISON: THE IRAN HOSTAGE CRISIS	
	IN THE ARAB PRESS	125
	Khomeini Through Arab Eyes: Arab Press Perspectives	
	on Iranian Islamism	127
	The Interanational Information Order: The Arab Press	
	and the News Services	134
	All News is Local News: The Hostage Crisis as Local News	
	in the Arab Press.....	140
6	CONCLUSION: IRAN, THE PRESS,	
	AND CULTURAL HISTORY	146
	BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	153

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1.1: The U.S. Embassy Compound in Tehran	2
Figure 1.2: Iran and Hostage Crisis Newsweekly Covers During the Iran Hostage Crisis.....	7
Figure 2.1: Four Generals in the Tehran Morgue	15
Figure 2.2: January and February 1978 Newsweek and Time Covers	28
Figure 2.3: Associated Press and United Press International Photographic Contributions to the News Magazines' Iran and Hostage Crisis Coverage.....	31
Figure 2.4: Individual Photographic Contributions to the News Magazines' Iran and Hostage Crisis Coverage	35
Figure 2.5: Hostage Robert Ode, Photographed by His Captors	37
Figure 2.6: A David Burnett's Photo of the Ayatollah During Exclusive Access	38
Figure 2.7: Reza's Iconic Photograph of William Belk	40
Figure 3.1: ABC <i>World News Tonight</i> Coverage of Iran and the Iran Hostage Crisis	50
Figure 3.2: CBS <i>Evening News</i> Coverage of Iran and the Iran Hostage Crisis.....	51
Figure 3.3: <i>Newsweek</i> Coverage of Iran and the Iran Hostage Crisis.....	52
Figure 3.4: <i>Time</i> Coverage of Iran and the Iran Hostage Crisis.....	53
Figure 3.5: <i>U.S. News and World Report</i> Coverage of Iran and the Iran Hostage Crisis.....	54
Figure 3.6: The World of Islam	57
Figure 3.7: <i>Newsweek</i> Photographic Subjects	61
Figure 3.8: <i>Time</i> Photographic Subjects.....	61
Figure 3.9: <i>U.S. News</i> Photographic Subjects	61
Figure 3.10: Iranian Demonstrators in Tehran and Beverley Hills	65

Figure 3.11: The Ayatollah and the President	69
Figure 3.12: The Shah of Iran	71
Figure 3.13: Hostage Jerry Miele on Television; <i>Time</i> and <i>Newsweek</i> Covers Featuring William Belk	73
Figure 3.14: Iranians, Afghanis, and Sadat from <i>Time</i> and <i>Newsweek</i>	74
Figure 3.15: The Hostage Parade in New York	77
Figure 4.1: Newsweekly and Television News Program Weekly Audiences	82
Figure 4.2: Favorable and Unfavorable U.S. Public Opinion Regarding Iran	85
Figure 4.3: Public Attention to the Situation in Iran	88
Figure 4.4: Public Ignorance of the U.S.-Iran relationship Before the Hostage Crisis	89
Figure 4.5: Newsweekly Readership by Education	96
Figure 4.6: Newsweekly Readership by Occupation	96
Figure 4.7: Newsweekly Readership by Individual Income	96
Figure 4.8: Newsweekly Readership by Household Income	96
Figure 4.9: Television News Viewership by Education	97
Figure 4.10: Television News Viewership by Occupation	97
Figure 4.11: Television News Viewership by Individual Income	97
Figure 4.12: Television News Viewership by Household Income	97
Figure 4.13: Hollingshead Social Class Spectrum	102
Figure 4.14: Newsweekly readership by Social Class	103
Figure 4.15: The Iran Hostage Crisis as International and National News	115
Figure 5.1: Iranian Demonstrators in <i>Al-Ahram</i> and <i>Time</i>	143



“Mr. President, I hope you were watching TV...”
 – *Former hostage, Bruce Laingen*¹

Chapter 1: Introduction THE IRAN HOSTAGE CRISIS AS A CULTURAL PRODUCT

A large demonstration was already underway when, shortly after 10:00 am on Sunday, November 4, 1979, a small group of chador-clad women from the Tehran Polytechnic University marched past the motor pool gate of the U.S. Embassy. The women suddenly reversed course and surrounded the Iranian guard stationed at the gate. Three hundred more students emerged from adjoining streets and crossed Takht-e-Jamshid Avenue – a road that, before the revolution, had been named in honor of Franklin Roosevelt – to cut the locks on the embassy gate and scale the compound’s eight-foot walls. The uniformed Iranian soldiers stationed on the American compound to protect the reduced embassy staff lowered their weapons and greeted the students with kisses.

The students, a group calling themselves the Muslim Students Following the Imam’s Line, locked the gates behind them, preventing the even larger mob outside from gaining immediate access to the embassy. Wearing headbands that read *Allah-u Akbar* (الله اكبر) – “God is great” – and black and white bibs bearing the likeness of the Ayatollah Khomeini, the students split into groups and headed toward the four main buildings scattered across the 26-acre American compound.

¹ Bruce Laingen, The White House Historical Association, “Remarks made at a Ceremony Welcoming Home the Freed Hostages,” <http://www.whitehousehistory.org/05/timemachine/index.htm> (accessed March 6, 2007).

In the chancery, a two-story rectangular building faced with narrow yellow bricks set back from the street on a circular drive (*figure 1.1*²), Colonel Chuck Scott, the U.S. Army military attaché, watched on the lobby guard post's closed circuit TV as the mob swarmed through the gates and over the walls. He may have even seen an Iranian woman approaching the chancery carrying the misspelled sign, "Don't be afraid. We just want to set in [sic]." Within minutes, the chancery staff retreated to the second floor security vault

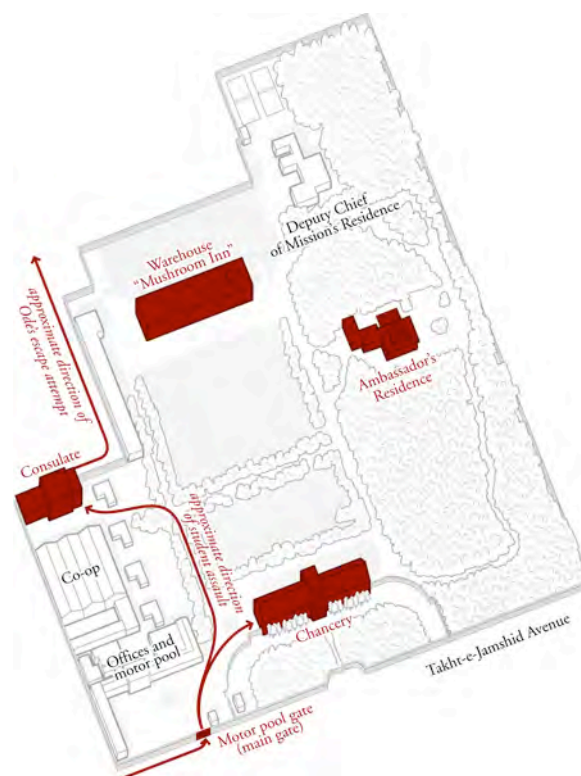


figure 1.1
THE U.S. EMBASSY COMPOUND IN TEHRAN

where Scott and Elizabeth Ann Swift, chief of the embassy's political section, frantically called Washington and Bruce Laingen, the embassy charge d'affairs across town at the Iranian Foreign Ministry. Meanwhile, marines armed with shotguns, flak jackets, and gas masks tried using tear gas to slow the penetration of the building through weakened basement window grates.

On the other side of the compound, Robert Ode, a retired Foreign Service officer on temporary duty in Tehran, watched from a second floor window as students approached the rear of the consulate. The staff and visitors sat huddled in an upstairs hallway hoping the students would pass by the empty downstairs windows and leave the building for empty. But word came from the chancery that they had been breached – a marine crackled through the consulate guard's walkie-talkie: "You're on your own. Good luck."

² Illustration adapted by the author from Matthew Ericson, Mark Bowden, *Guests of the Ayatollah: The First Battle in America's War with Militant Islam* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2006).

The consulate staff decided to evacuate the building, releasing the Iranian staff and visa applicants before the American visitors and consulate staff. When it came time for Ode to step outside he was surprised to find the street quiet – the students and demonstrators converged on the chancery, leaving the consulate unguarded. He stepped into the first weak rain of the season and, with five other staffers, started away from the embassy compound along back streets. They barely made it half a block before a large group of Iranians surrounded them. Ode and the other Americans protested, trying to push their way through the crowd, until a shot rang out over their heads and men armed with pipes, pistols, and automatic rifles surrounded them.

Back in the chancery, matters had gotten worse. Armed students captured off-duty staff in their homes and brought them to the compound. Security Chief Al Golacinski went outside to talk with the militants but was instead bound and blindfolded. When Scott tried calling the Ambassador's residence an Iranian voice answered the phone. Looking outside, he saw students roaming the grounds outside the chancery, ropes and blindfolds clutched tight.

The students started setting fires around the chancery, trying to smoke out the Americans, and dragged Golacinski in front of a security camera, threatening to kill the security chief if the chancery staff did not surrender. While reporting these developments over the phone to Laingen, Scott received the order to surrender. Once the communications staff was secured in another interior vault, giving them more time to destroy sensitive documents, the marines opened the security doors. Student protestors swarmed inside, wet and excited. And when the students came upon Scott and Swift, they grabbed the phones from their hands. "Who were you talking to?" demanded a student confronting Scott.

"Ayatollah Khomeini," he replied. "He told me to tell you all to leave here and let us go." The Iranian struck Scott across the face.

By 2:00 pm the assault was over. Ode was roughly led back to the embassy compound through the rain. Scott was led out of the chancery, a tight muslin blindfold covering his eyes and nose. Together with the other 61 Americans captured at the embassy that morning, the charge d'affaires and his two aides held at the Foreign Ministry across town, and six other Americans hiding in the Canadian and Swedish embassies, their hostage crisis had begun. A 444-day ordeal defined by isolation and mistreatment lay ahead for most of the hostage. A nightmare of torture and abuse lay ahead for an unfortunate few.³

But this is not how the Iran hostage crisis began for most Americans. As the students broke into the embassy buildings, and as the hostages were blindfolded and paraded across the grounds, camera viewfinders focused on them. Photojournalists covering the demonstration, or alerted to the seizure of the embassy, rushed to the scene, snapping off iconic images of William Belk, a towering communications and records officer, blindfolded in front of a small group of marine and diplomat hostages. Film crews recorded footage of Jerry Meile, a communications officer hiding in the interior vault, led blindfolded from the chancery between grim-faced militants. For most Americans the hostage crisis began 11.5 hours after the surrender of the chancery when CBS's Bob Schieffer, NBC's Jessica Savitch and Dick Schaap, and ABC's Sam Donaldson began another 444-day ordeal – an ordeal defined by images of angry Iranian demonstrators, a scowling ayatollah, a powerless president, and the ordinary faces of Americans held hostage half a world away.⁴

³ This account is derived from: Bowden, 44-64; David Harris, *The Crisis: The President, the Prophet, and the Shah – 1979 and the Coming of Militant Islam* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2004), 3-4, 205-7; Diary, Robert C. Ode, November 4, 1979, "Diary", Box 13, Ode Collection, Jimmy Carter Library; Charles W. Scott, *Pieces of the Game: The Human Drama of Americans Held Hostage in Iran* (Atlanta: Peachtree Publishers, 1984), 16-26.

⁴ Tehran is 7.5 hours ahead of New York, home of all three networks' Sunday night 6:00 broadcasts. The networks are listed in order of viewership, according to Simmons Market Research Bureau, Inc. *The 1979 Study of Media and Markets*, vol M-11 (New York: Simmons Market Research Bureau, 1979), 25 and Nielsen data reported in "CBS Shakes Up the Season" *Newsweek* (April 7, 1980), 99. Because the attack on the embassy occurred on a Sunday, CBS and NBC's main news anchors, Walter Cronkite and John Chancellor, respectively, did not break the story. Likewise, some markets did not show the weekend news. For instance, the Nashville, Tennessee CBS affiliate, from which this study's CBS television data is drawn, did not carry the evening news on Sunday, November 4, 1979 in lieu of a Roger Mudd special about Teddy Kennedy.

Shooting the Ayatollah characterizes Iran and hostage crisis media coverage by quantifying the volume, type, and tone of images and visual techniques used by the American mass-market newsweeklies – *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *U.S. News and World Report* – and by comparing news magazine coverage of the hostage crisis with that of the regular network nightly news broadcasts. By focusing on these orthodox media outlets, this analysis intends to show that Iran and the hostage crisis consumed the attention of the media – and the media’s myriad audiences – at the expense of other newsworthy events and trends. This study will remove the metaphorical blindfold that, once covering the eyes of Americans obsessed with the drama playing out in an embassy under siege, has since transferred to historians obsessed with finding meaning in the way that drama was told.⁵

This study employs content analysis to describe the entire lifecycle of hostage crisis media – from its creation in Tehran and east coast newsrooms, through public communication on the pages of the newsweeklies, consumption by various strata of society, and in comparison with foreign media. *Shooting the Ayatollah* tests a number of core assumptions about the hostage crisis’ media coverage that dominated the contemporary press and lingers in the current historiography: first, that the media’s lack of foreign reporters denied the press access to Iranian culture and cultural assets⁶; second, that Iran’s absence from the printed and broadcast media prior to the beginning of the hostage crisis left the

⁵ The creation of additional news broadcast programs, such as *America Held Hostage* – which would later evolve into ABC’s *Nightline* – factors into the total corpus of crisis-related news media. But such communications occur outside the closed-system of the regularly scheduled news and, thus, outside of the scope of this study.

⁶ Edward Said is perhaps the most frequently cited proponent of this position; an examination of footnotes in hostage crisis histories reveals that Said’s work informed the first generation of crisis historians. In *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1997) – first published during the crisis in 1980 – Said argues that the Western media’s failure to accurately cover the Iranian revolution and the first six months of the hostage crisis was the result of the absence of media bureaus in Iran and the Greater Middle East and the absence of Muslim reporters among the news outlets’ staffs. Said relies heavily on television news, newspapers, and newsweeklies as sources for this criticism – an irony given the ubiquity of Iranian photojournalists that contributed to many of these reports. Indeed, Said’s criticism is only accurate when one considers the broadcast press in a vacuum. His criticism falters upon any examination of newsweeklies, as shall be shown below, where Iranian natives and expatriates provided a large percentage of the visual narrative and were also often credited authors for revolution- and crisis-related stories.

public and policymakers unprepared for crisis-era antagonism⁷; third, that the crisis was a human-interest story, not a diplomatic or political narrative, and that Islam and the Middle East's treatment in the crisis-era press was monolithic and negative⁸; fourth; that Carter-era foreign policy decision-makers were immune to the pressures associated with public perception⁹; and fifth, that the Arab world's view of the crisis was sympathetic to the Iranian

⁷ Criticisms of the U.S.'s lack of knowledge about the situation in Iran are numerous. Most historians draw from Gary Sick's *All Fall Down: America's Tragic Encounter with Iran* (New York: Random House, 1985) and Stansfield Turner's *Terrorism and Democracy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1991), two Carter administration memoirs that are quick to explain America's lack of knowledge about Iran as an intelligence failure and a betrayal by the shah's intelligence service, SAVAK. The lion share of this criticism is directed at American ignorance preceding the shah's fall from power in January 1979 – the implicit assumption that, after the shock of the shah's fall, the Carter administration woke to the new realities of Khomeini's Iran. But many cultural analyses of America's crisis-era encounter with Iran, such as David Harris's *The Crisis: The President, the Prophet, and the Shah—1979 and the Coming of Militant Islam* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2004) and Melani McAlister's *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945-2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), explore the public's ignorance of Iran before the hostage crisis. These cultural studies, some of which likewise explore the intelligence failures of the Carter administration, often blame the dearth and quality of media coverage before the hostage crisis for perpetuating public ignorance.

⁸ Said and McAlister are the principal sources for such criticisms. Both of these authors greatly emphasize the role of the crisis in shaping American perceptions of Islam and the Middle East – including the Arab world, which was antagonistic to the Iranian regimes and to Iranian Shi'ism. Said and McAlister's analyses of the hostage crisis's cultural impact are themselves monolithic, down-playing or ignoring many of the other newsworthy stories about the Islamic World that appeared in the American press but in which no universally negative impression of Islam was communicated (eg. the Egyptian-Israeli peace accord, the Iran-Iraq war, or the invasion of Afghanistan). Catherine Scott's "Bound for Glory: The Hostage Crisis as Captivity Narrative in Iran," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (March, 2000) compares the appeal of hostage crisis human interest stories to that of Puritan captivity narratives, focusing on personal and human interest journalism and hostage memoirs at the expense of other crisis-era news media. Brigitte Nacos's *Terrorism and the Media: From the Iran Hostage Crisis to the World Trade Center Bombing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) takes a quantitative look at the first six months of hostage crisis coverage and finds, rightly, a predominance of human interest themes in the written literature. But her incomplete examination of the crisis, like Said's, leaves the totality of the crisis unexamined and has contributed to the perpetuation of crisis-media stereotypes founded on incomplete sets of data.

⁹ Carter administration memoirs are the primary source for this argument – especially the many reminiscences of Jimmy Carter, including *Keeping the Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York: Bantam, 1982) and *The Blood of Abraham: Insights into the Middle East, New Edition* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 1993), and Hamilton Jordan's *Crisis: The Last Year of the Carter Presidency* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1982) which attempts to refute the claim that public pressure affected presidential decision making. Nacos and Patrick Houghton's *US Foreign Policy and the Iran Hostage Crisis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) attack this position on a number of levels, including analyses of presidential approval ratings, correlative decision-making, and the complex processes with which the White House monitored public opinion through the press and the polls. Indeed, the vast majority of presidential analyses consulted, ranging from communications studies (John Anthony Maltese, *Spin Control: The White House Office of Communications and the Management of Presidential News*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), election studies (Kenneth L. Hacker's *Candidate Images in Presidential Elections*, London: Praeger, 1995), and the confessions of Carter's own press secretary (Jody Powell, *The Other Side of the Story*, New York: William Morrow and Company, 1984) contradict any notion of a functional separation between public opinion and presidential decision making.



figure 1.2

IRAN AND HOSTAGE CRISIS NEWSWEEKLY COVERS DURING THE IRAN HOSTAGE CRISIS

revolution.¹⁰ A scientific approach to the crisis-era press demonstrates the fallacy of these assumptions and provides a new, more accurate image of the crisis.

That the Iran hostage crisis dominated the contemporary media is demonstrated by a cursory examination of news magazine covers during the 444-day hostage crisis. Over a period of 65 weeks, Iran and the hostage crisis dominated the covers of *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *U.S. News and World Report* thirteen, eleven, and four times, respectively (figure 1.2), and

¹⁰ This perspective is particularly advanced in contemporary news literature – especially surrounding events in other Muslim countries that journalists connected, rightly or wrongly, to the situation in Iran. Notable examples include *Time*'s exposé “The World of Islam,” about which more will be said below, and the newsweeklies’ coverage of the November 1979 seizure of the Al-Masjid al-Harām (The Sacred Mosque in Mecca) by Islamic fundamentalists opposed to the Saudi monarchy and the subsequent attack on the U.S. embassy in Islamabad. While the Islamabad attack resulted from public outrage in response Khomeini’s broadcast accusation that Americans were behind the Sacred Mosque attack, American press coverage of these and similar events created a simplistic image of Islamic militancy that eventually spread to nearly all evocations of Muslim faith and which obfuscated sectarian and ethnic differences among the world 750 million Muslims.

additionally appeared across the top of *Newsweek's* covers twice, in the corner of *Time's* covers eleven times, and in a secondary position on *U.S. News and World Report's* covers seven times.¹¹ Iran and the hostage crisis appeared on the cover of these newsweeklies more than almost any other issue; the contentious 1980 presidential campaign garnered eleven, nine, and twelve respective covers while the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan warranted only two appearances on *Newsweek* and *Time's* covers and only one appearance on the cover of *U.S. News and World Report*.

The media is the essence of the Iran hostage crisis – through their use of the American press, the hostage takers and their supportive regime sought to change the mind of the American public about what the U.S. government should do and, thusly, affect change in ways negotiations never could.¹² Their goal was to bypass diplomatic channels and participate as a political force in the U.S. electorate. And as diplomatic channels increasingly broke down, the media became all the more important as a vehicle for international communication. But the crisis is also relevant because the media saw it as the most important story of the time and the president saw it as the most important item on his agenda. It was, according to a White House aide, “the central, dominant feature of the

¹¹ The crisis appeared on the cover of *Newsweek* on December 3, 17, and 31, 1979; February 25, April 21, May 5 and 12, October 6 and 20, November 10, 1980; January 26, February 2 and 9, 1981; and additionally across the top on November 11, 1979 and January 5, 1981; on the cover of *Time* of November 19 and 26, December 3 and 10, 1979; January 7, May 5, October 6 and 27, November 10, January 26 and February 2, 1981; and additionally as an inset on December 17, 24, and 31, 1979; February 11, March 17, May 12, July 21, August 18, October 13, November 3, 1980; January 26, and February 2, 1981; and on the cover of *U.S. News and World Report* on November 26, December 3, 10, and 17, 1979 and in a secondary position, either across the top of the page or as an inset image, on December 24, 1979; April 21, May 5, October 6, November 3, 1980; and January 26 and February 2, 1981.

¹² The role of international terrorism as a domestic political force has been oft commented upon. Nacos focuses, on this aspect of terrorism and the frequency with which terrorists succeed in accomplishing their stated goals. She also looks at incidences of terrorist presence in the media and subsequent public and government reactions to the media's role as a vehicle for terrorist rhetoric. William A. Dorman and Mansour Farhang's “*The U.S. Press and Iran: Foreign Policy and The Journalism of Deference*” (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1987) explores news coverage of the crisis and its impact on policy decision making. Even the contemporary National Advisory Committee on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, in its *Disorders and Terrorism: Report of the Task Force for Disorders and Terrorism* (Washington, DC: Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, 1976) found the terrorists, through the media, had “a significant influence on public fears and expectations.”

Carter administration from the day [the seizure] happened [until] the day that Jimmy Carter quit being president. It was the one thing that drove everything else in the White House.”¹³

Chapter two, “Revolution and Crisis Through the Viewfinder” argues that magazines are comparable to television in terms of their cultural and agenda-setting influence and that photojournalism is an important and unique lens through which news is transmitted and the first impressions of history are formed. This chapter also shows that, despite editorial differences, visual coverage of Iran was greatly equalized through collective reliance on the two major American news services, the Associated Press and United Press International. It further shows that Iranian photographers supplied a significant portion of pre-crisis and crisis-era photographs, a challenge to the current historiography’s assumption that the U.S. media lacked access to Iran and its cultural assets.

Chapter three, “Pornography of Grief, Pornography of Politics” demonstrates trends in the newsweeklies’ coverage of the crisis, including Iran’s dominance of the printed and broadcast media for a year prior to the embassy siege, a finding that suggests the American public should have been familiar with Iran before the capture of American hostages in November 1979. This chapter also characterizes the visual nature of the coverage, arguing that despite distortions of Iranian realities, there was no monolithic negative image of Islam in the U.S. press during the crisis as often depicted in *Orientalist* literature. It also shows that a diplomatic, political narrative kept pace with the human drama throughout the crisis and that Iran’s sudden departure from the national press was not because of neglect, but the result of changing public interests and the media’s expulsion by the ayatollah.

Chapter four, “Polls, Public, and Presidents” examines the impact crisis-era coverage had on American perceptions of Iran and Islam. This chapter also explores newsweekly readership, analyzing detailed marketing data and finding that magazines were

¹³ Harris, *The Crisis*, 214.

disproportionately read by a demographic matching the classic description of the foreign policy public. Additionally, the combination of crisis coverage and the administration's failures to manage the story combined to adversely effect crisis-related foreign policy decision making.

Chapter five, "The Iran Hostage Crisis in the Arab Press" compares American press coverage with that of two Arab dailies – Egypt's *Al-Ahram* (الاهرام), one of the most widely read and circulated newspapers in the Arab world, and Algeria's *El Moudjahid* (المجاهد). This chapter will show that the Arab press, while critical of the U.S., demonstrated no sympathy for the Iranian revolutionary cause. It will also show that American news services and conflicting local foci shaped Arab reporting of the crisis, creating an aggregate coverage that differed from its American counterpart little in substance but greatly in emphasis.

This study takes as its most basic assumption that cultural products – films, television, novels, magazines, news broadcasts, music, etc. – possess value as primary documents for revealing the past. Such products have often been employed to tease out the perceptions of a consuming audience or, more often, to loosely illustrate a point of cultural import in an otherwise disinterested study. But in this analysis, cultural products are measured to determine their outward characteristics and the conditions of their creation. This study will therefore show that mass communications are as much the product of the culture under examination as they are the manipulators of it.¹⁴

In order to discern an accurate picture of crisis-era media coverage, this essay uses an adapted form of content analysis, a common tool of intelligence and marketing analysis. Content analysis is the systematic and replicable examination of communications – verbal, textual, visual – using quantifiable methods and statistics to describe content, infer meaning,

¹⁴ Daniel Riffe, Stephen Lacy, Frederick G. Fico, *Analyzing Media Messages: Using Quantitative Content Analysis in Research*, (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1998), 6-8. This assumption forms the basis of content analysis in psychology, where the condition of the content producer is often the subject of interest.

and assess a cultural product's context both in terms of its consumption and its production.¹⁵ Additionally, this study uses a consecutive sampling method, not a random or proportional sampling technique that might miss significant fluctuations in coverage types and intensity. This is a unique aspect of this study, done both to create a complete picture of media coverage and to avoid criticism and estimations associated with proportions, errors, and standard deviations inherent in non-consecutive sampling.¹⁶

Content analysis, as employed in this study, assumes that editorial space in printed or broadcast media is not an infinite resource and that “the news-reporting process” must be seen as a “forced choice in a closed system.” Within this system, as something new is introduced, be it advertising or information, something else must necessarily be displaced.¹⁷ This measuring process is akin to scientific observation, allowing researchers to interrogate a large or varied volume of cultural products or documentary evidence in much the same way as a social scientist might interrogate a human subject.¹⁸ In this context, magazines represent a useful medium for study because of their quantifiability and ease of access. But they also represent a good comparative medium for the broadcast media – more often the subject of communications study in regard to the Iran hostage crisis – because both media outlets represent closed-systems of content and have comparable audiences.

This analysis is also based upon the assumption that societies and audiences, like individuals, have only limited attention spans – as new problems and issues are introduced to the public dialogue, existing concerns are retired. This is not a deliberate process. Reporters and editors are often more concerned with getting magazines out on time than with issue

¹⁵ Riffe, et al, *Analyzing Media Messages*, 20.

¹⁶ Many content analyses of magazine coverage rely on “constructed years,” the sampling of roughly one issue per month, or 14 issues per year, to determine the editorial makeup of an entire year’s editorial coverage. Riffe, 99.

¹⁷ John Naisbitt, *Megatrends: Ten New Directions Transforming Our Lives*, (New York: Warner Books, 1982), 4.

¹⁸ F. N. Kerlinger, *Foundations of Behavioral Research*, 2nd ed (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973), 525.

displacement or forming public perception.¹⁹ But by looking at the most empirical representations of the media's forced choice – page counts, advertising space, columns, broadcast minutes – it is possible to discern trends in cultural products just as readily as trends in social focus and changing values.

Such a study is not entirely without precedent. Douglas Little's *American Orientalism* demonstrated American perceptions of the Middle East as shaped by *National Geographic* photography – specifically the visual transformation of the region from a backward, barbarous desert into the modern, progressive oasis through the actions of the brave and industrious Israelis.²⁰ Melani McAllister's *Epic Encounters* also analyzed cultural products – television, literature, and film – that shaped American views of the Middle East.²¹ But the need for new approaches to cultural and media history is made apparent by even these studies. The cultural historian's use of imagination and inference to develop theses, in lieu of quantifiable metrics and quotable policy documents, is frequently attacked. Quantification, a *longue durée* perspective, and a more documentary review of the creation and consumption of cultural products can shore up the foundation upon which cultural history is built. Robert Darnton called for the creation of a history of communication in his 2000 American Historical Association Presidential Address and, indeed, such a history would help buttress many cultural studies.²² This paper is an attempt to demonstrate one such method of analyzing historical communications to create a sophisticated and accurate image of cultural products and their impact.

¹⁹ Naisbitt, *Megatrends*, 5.

²⁰ Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East Since 1945*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

²¹ Melani McAllister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945-2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

²² The term *longue durée* is meant to suggest the *Annales* approach that gives priority to long-term structures over particular events. Darnton's comments are drawn from Robert Darnton, "An Early Information Society: News and the Media in Eighteenth-Century Paris," *American Historical Review*, Volume 105, Issue 1 (2000).

Indeed, the only significant attempts to quantify media coverage of terrorism are Richard Schaffert's *Media Coverage and Political Terrorists: A Quantitative Analysis* and Brigitte L. Nacos' *Terrorism and the Media: From the Iran hostage crisis to the World Trade Center Bombing*. Schaffert makes no cultural claims about the quality or nature of the coverage – rather, he attempts to connect incidences of casualty and mortality in terror attacks to public anger.²³ Nacos, on the other hand, makes excellent use of social and cultural data, connecting the crisis and a handful of other terrorist events to public opinion and presidential approval. But her scope of analysis is limited to the early months of the crisis, missing an opportunity to measure changing public attitudes and presidential fortunes against the duration of the crisis.²⁴ Journalism and popular history texts on the subject of the media and terrorism likewise deal very little with pre-September 11 incidents and, when they do, treat situations such as the Iran hostage crisis only as historical background, regurgitating the conventional historiography and offering little analysis.²⁵ Thus, *Shooting the Ayatollah* fills a quantitative gap in the cultural and media history of the Iran Hostage Crisis and corrects inaccuracies in the prevailing historiography, buttressing future media and cultural analyses.

²³ Richard W. Schaffert, *Media Coverage and Political Terrorists: A Quantitative Analysis*, (New York: Praeger, 1992).

²⁴ Brigitte L. Nacos, *Terrorism and the Media: From the Iran Hostage Crisis to the World Trade Center Bombing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

²⁵ This is especially true of terrorism texts published after September 11, 2001, of which Nacos' later text, *Mass-Mediated Terrorism: The Central Role of the Media in Terrorism and Counterterrorism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), is an example. It is likewise true of popular narrative histories, such as Harris' *The Crisis* and Bowden's *Guests of the Ayatollah*.



“So let us today drudge on about our inescapably impossible task of providing every week a first rough draft of history that will never really be completed about a world we can never really understand.”

– Philip L. Graham, *Newsweek* chairman¹

Chapter 2: Creation REVOLUTION AND CRISIS THROUGH THE VIEWFINDER

In March, 1979, Abbas found himself staring through a viewfinder at the bodies of four Iranian generals rolled out of their freezers and on display in a Tehran morgue (*figure 2.1*²). A photographer with the Paris-based Gamma-Liaison agency, Abbas had rushed to his native Iran in September 1978 to cover the aftermath of the “Black Friday” massacre of anti-Shah demonstrators by government troops.³ Then, too, he had focused his lenses on bodies, secretly photographing bullet-riddled civilians laid out atop the graves of Behesht Zahra.⁴

Unlike most photojournalists covering the growing chaos in Iran, Abbas threw himself into the revolution, a choice that placed him in a unique position to document the movement from within even while threatening to muddy his journalistic objectivity. “My Iranian friends urged me on,” he wrote of his choice between activism and discernment.

¹ “Philip L. Graham, Publisher, Washington Post. Simpson’s Contemporary Quotations. 1988,” Bartleby.com, <http://www.bartleby.com/63/9/8109.html> (accessed November 9, 2006); photoillustration: Daniel Maffia. “Iran: The Test of Wills” *Time* (November 26, 197), 20.

² Photograph: Abbas. “Whose Running Iran”, *Newsweek* (March 5, 1979), 63.

³ On September 8, 1978, 20,000 demonstrators gathered at Jaleh Square for a public meeting called a week earlier. Only the day before the shah banned public demonstrations. A group of motorcyclists among the demonstrators, ignorant of the shah’s prohibition and hostile toward the army sent to disperse them, harassed the troops. The army opened fire on the crowd killing at least 200 demonstrators. Rumors surrounding the massacre multiplied the number of deaths into the thousands and also hypothesized that Israeli troops must have been sent to break up the demonstration, as no Iranian army unit would open fire on so many civilians. David Harris, *The Crisis: The President, the Prophet, and the Shah—1979 and the Coming of Militant Islam* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2004), 85.

⁴ The Behesht Zahra – the paradise of Zahra – is the largest cemetery in Tehran.

First, they argued, “we had to get rid of the Shah and then ‘we’d see’.” I preferred to risk weakening the image of the revolution, which at that point was peaceful and enjoyed support the world over, than to hide its excesses.”



figure 2.1

FOUR GENERALS IN THE TEHRAN MORGUE

But Abbas’ revolution was

not the revolution of the Ayatollah Khomeini and the mullahs. His revolution, like that of millions of his countrymen, was a progressive cause, linked inextricably to secularism and liberalism. In a single frame shot in a Tehran morgue, Abbas’ enthusiasm was spent. “How could I forget the dignified face of the captive General who was interrogated in front of the television cameras? Five days later, I photographed his body, one of four lying in the morgue. Their trial had been held in secret ... this revolution would no longer be mine.”⁵

This chapter explores Abbas’ photograph and the creation of the Iran hostage crisis as a cultural product, exploring what can be learned through a forensic analysis of the larger visual corpus of which Abbas’ image was a part: a pantheon of photography that brought the Iranian revolution and the Iran hostage crisis into American homes on the pages the most widely read newsweeklies of the era, *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *U.S. News and World Report*. After establishing the historical value of news magazines and photojournalism, this chapter uses photographic evidence to explore the creation of crisis-era media and demonstrates that, despite historical and editorial differences, the three major American newsweeklies drew their visual content from identical sources. This chapter also shows that, among individually credited photographers, Iranian photojournalists contributed significantly to Iran and

⁵ Abbas, *Allah O Akbar: A Journey Through Militant Islam* (London: Phaidon Press, 1994), 12-3, 17.

hostage crisis coverage, challenging the established contention that American media during the crisis was universally alien to Tehran.

[WITNESS TO HISTORY: THE CULTURAL VALUE OF NEWSWEEKLIES AND PHOTOJOURNALISM]

The majority of modern cultural studies, especially those regarding news coverage in the modern epoch, focus on the role of television. This essay, with its focus on news magazines, assumes the equality, and even superiority, of print to broadcast journalism in shaping public perception and influencing foreign policy decision-making during the Iran hostage crisis.

1970-80s news magazines were closer in substance and editorial direction to television than to newspapers. Both television and news magazines aimed to inform and summarize myriad complex issues of national and international import in a compact format, vividly illustrated with striking color images, for people too busy to read more extensive reporting in the handful of national and international newspapers.⁶ But where television news tended to focus on a handful of regular newsbeats – such as the golden triangle in Washington – the print press tended to cut across many and more varied newsbeats.⁷ And although magazine and newspaper articles regularly carried Washington datelines, they frequently covered developments from many other beats in the capital as well.⁸

These magazines were also more flexible than television in terms of their story selection and the total amount of non-advertising, news content published in each issue – the *newswhole*. Between November of 1978 and January 1982, the average *ABC World News Tonight* broadcast had only 21:50 minutes of news content alongside 6:10 minutes of advertising while *Time* had an average of 50 newswhole pages alongside 52 advertising pages

⁶ Herbert J. Gans, *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek, and Time* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2004), 159.

⁷ The term “golden triangle” is borrowed from a variety of sources, all of which use the term to denote the White House, Department of State, and Department of Defense newsbeats.

⁸ Brigitte L. Nacos, *Terrorism and the Media: From the Iran Hostage Crisis to the World Trade Center Bombing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 27.

per issue.⁹ *Time* suffered from a higher percentage of advertising content, but its newsworld was significantly larger; the typical television news transcript would occupy less than two columns on the *New York Times* front page – less than two pages in the typical newsweekly.¹⁰ Likewise, television news was limited to a half-hour format with only 22 minutes set aside for substantive news content. News magazines varied their length to suit editorial needs. During the hostage crisis era, *Time* ranged between 28 and 63 pages of newsworld, riding the ebb and flow of breaking stories and regular news as needs required. And while practical advertising and printing limitations restricted the newsweeklies at the extremes, this flexibility allowed for the inclusion of a wider variety of stories and more editorial depth than even a week of television news coverage could accommodate, including approximately ten-times the international news information carried by the television news.¹¹

That said, the practical limitations of space and time inherent in both the print and broadcast press inspired fierce competition among writers and editors, playing an important role in editing and filtering news essential to domestic and foreign policy processes.¹² The press did not set the national agenda but because it “edits out so much while including so much” it did decide what items were most important once that agenda was set.¹³ From the media consumer’s perspective, news that goes unreported, however important, might as well have never happened.¹⁴ Thus the power of the news media is not that it told people what to think but what to think about.¹⁵

⁹ This figure includes covers and the tables of contents.

¹⁰ Nacos, *Terrorism and the Media*, 59.

¹¹ W. Phillips Davidson, Donald R. Shanor and Frederick T.C. Yu, *News From Abroad and the Foreign Policy Public* (New York: Foreign Policy Association, 1980), 39.

¹² Gans, *Deciding What’s News*, 166-7.

¹³ “Interview with Hodding Carter” in Edmund Ghareeb, *Split Vision: The Portrayal of Arabs in the American Media* (Washington, DC: American-Arab Affairs Council, 1983), 243.

¹⁴ Patricia A. Karl, “In the Middle in the Middle East: The Media and U.S. Foreign Policy” in Edmund Ghareeb, *Split Vision: The Portrayal of Arabs in the American Media* (Washington, DC: American-Arab Affairs Council, 1983), 291.

¹⁵ Nacos, *Terrorism and the Media*, 70.

Newsweekly manipulation of cover story content is a good example of this agenda-setting influence. Breaking news or ongoing national and international stories typically dominated news magazine covers. Often chosen on the basis of public familiarity or interest – real or perceived – cover story selections legitimized their subjects, working them into the national dialogue. An ironic aspect of this phenomenon was the refusal by some news magazine editors to include certain divisive domestic figures on their covers, because of the perceived credibility it would assign them, while contemporaneously featuring controversial foreign figures such as Ayatollah Khomeini or Polish labor leader Lech Walesa.¹⁶

Crisis-era newsweeklies' were also unique in their use of photography. These news magazines typically devoted one third of their newsworld to dramatic images that buttressed or dominated written reportage.¹⁷ 22% of Iran and hostage crisis newsworld area was so utilized. This emphasis on visual reportage represents a characteristic of 20th century culture that some observers have called the *pictorial turn* – the realization the rhetorical value of image-dominant media surpassed word-dominant media in every cultural spectrum.¹⁸ Visual reportage became a unique and significant contributor to culture, serving both as a “witness to history” and giving “testimony in the court of public opinion” and may be the only credible source of reasonably true images about world culture and history for later decades.¹⁹

This emphasis on the visual is no coincidence. Just as television lead stories and print media front pages or cover stories were much more likely to be read than those otherwise buried in news broadcasts or publications, so too were pictures much more likely to be noticed and better remembered than words alone. Research has indicated that people better remember what they see than what they read or are exposed to in other ways. Even in

¹⁶ Gans, *Deciding What's News*, 154-5.

¹⁷ Gans, *Deciding What's News*, 4.

¹⁸ Julianne H. Newton, *The Burden of Visual Truth: The Role of Photojournalism in mediating Reality* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2001), 83.

¹⁹ In order of use: Harry Chapnick, *Truth Needs No Ally: Inside Photojournalism* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994), 13; Newton, xi, 1.

instances of conflicting messages between word- and image-based communications, information gleaned visually is better recalled.²⁰ Studies analyzing the use of imagery during the first Gulf War, for instance, found that while written reportage was at its most intense and critical, visual rhetoric in leading newspapers echoed the administration's position, casting administration leaders in positive, if not heroic, lights, and more significantly affected public perception of the conflict.²¹ This study's content analysis is in part based on this premise: that visualizations – in this case, documentary photography – can capture and communicate complex messages either independently or supplementary to text.²²

The rise of photojournalism in the American print media, fully embraced in most American markets by the 1930s, paralleled the rise of long journalism, the analytical and interpretive coverage of the news as opposed to a basic recounting of newsworthy events. It has been argued that the use of photography to supplement text facilitated the development of this more mature form of journalism, relieving the writer from describing factual events easily captured and evidenced with photography.²³ But photojournalism as a profession and as a unique form of reportage, often independent of text, only emerged later through war.

British Crimean war photography and Mathew Brady's sometimes misleading Civil War photography first brought dramatic images of conflict to the reading public. The large number of civilian and uniformed camera operators in World War I combined with the subsequent introduction and success of picture magazines and newsreels made photography an integral and expected part of the news. World War II saw an explosion of conflict

²⁰ Newton, *The Burden of Visual Truth*, 90.

²¹ Robert M. Entman and Benjamin I. Page, "The News Before the Storm: The Limits of Media Autonomy in Covering Foreign Policy" cited in Brigitte L. Nacos, *Terrorism and the Media: From the Iran Hostage Crisis to the World Trade Center Bombing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 27.

²² Craig Denton, "Examining Documentary Photography Using the Creative Method," in *Handbook of Visual Communication: Theory, Methods, and Media*, Ken Smith, et al., eds. (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc., 2005), 408.

²³ Kevin G. Barnhurst and John C. Nerone, "The President is Dead: American News Photography and the New Long Journalism," in Bonnie Brennen and Hanno Hardt, eds., *Picturing the Past: media, History, and Photography* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 61-3.

photography on all fronts, with German photographers documenting the Nazi invasion of Poland, allied cameramen landing at D-Day, and hundreds of Russian photographers dying on the frontlines of Moscow and Stalingrad. Joe Rosenthal's "Old Glory Goes Up on Mt. Suribachi, Iwo Jima" – considered one of the greatest news photographs of all time – offers testimony to the quality and frequency of war photographers in the field.²⁴ By the end of the war thousands of military-trained photographers flooded the domestic market. Thus photography accompanied the postwar economic and advertising boom: national associations were formed, elite photo agencies were founded, and photography found its way into nearly every national newspaper and magazine, driving the circulation figures of picture magazines to historic heights.²⁵

Photography enjoyed a lauded position in journalism – one of assumed objectivity assigned through the mechanical presentation of reality. This evidentiary quality of photography boosted the value of all print reporting as photojournalism flourished in the 1960s with the invention of the 35mm camera and advances in photographic printing and electronic transmittal.²⁶ Even as picture magazines such as *Life* were in decline by the start of the Iranian revolution and the hostage crisis, the advent of color photography in printed news magazines increased the rhetorical impact of images in the press. The newsweeklies had long used color for advertising but it was only after *Newsweek* published a special color-picture Christmas issue in 1976 that all three news magazines added color photography to their regular news repertoire. Previously considered an editor's toy by many journalists, color photos quickly came to be seen as necessary additions to the weekly medium, providing an

²⁴ The story of Rosenthal's iconic image is recounted in extraordinary detail in James Bradley, *Flags of our Fathers* (New York: Bantam, 2000).

²⁵ Michael Griffin, "The Great War Photographs: Constructing Myths of History and Photojournalism," in Bonnie Brennen and Hanno Hardt, eds., *Picturing the Past: Media, History, and Photography* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 123-5, 131-2, 143.

²⁶ Newton, *The Burden of Visual Truth*, ix. It is important to remember that the period under review, 1978-1982, preceded later digital imaging scandals that rocked august publications such as *National Geographic* and *Time* in the 1980-90s and that shook Reuters Middle East coverage in 2006.

added measure of competition between the newsweeklies, competing directly with television's visual reportage, already in color, and boosting the rhetorical and marketing impact of certain stories.²⁷

The advent of color also changed the way news magazines processed news. Photo editors, often veterans of picture magazines and visual publications such as *Sports Illustrated* and *National Geographic*, considered still pictures as important as text, judging photographs by much the same criteria television journalists judged film. At the most basic level, editors and publishers valued photography for its immediacy and impact: "you lead with a strong picture to catch the reader; the stronger or more unusual, the better." As photojournalism evolved and color became more common photo selection became even more important for weak stories and for photographs that served as stand-alone stories.²⁸

That color photography increased in importance relative to written content for the three leading newsweeklies is demonstrated by an analysis of the change color ushered into their editorial processes. In the late 1970s, weekly news magazines were typically assembled over a five-day period – Tuesday through Saturday for *Newsweek*, Monday through Friday for *Time*. Editorial processes thinned a wide field of story suggestions based on their newsworthiness, the availability of sources, the timing of world events, or the quality of the reportage. Before the introduction of color photographs to the newsworld, photo selection was rarely thought of as part of the story selection process and rarely considered before the fourth or fifth day of the news-cycle. But after the introduction of color photography, and as a result of changed practical considerations and color photography's additional visual impact and rhetorical value, photo selection moved up in the editorial process. Editors had to be picky, assigning the most important stories to the handful of color pages in each issue – produced as forms or signatures in multiples of four or eight pages – and balancing the use of

²⁷ Gans, *Deciding What's News*, 162.

²⁸ Gans, *Deciding What's News*, 159.

color pages early in the magazine with the additional use of color pages at the end.²⁹ Additionally, in the late 1970s, color pages still went to press at least a day before black and white pages, requiring earlier editorial decisions and more rapid story composition.³⁰ These factors all combined to push photography forward in the editorial process and eventually add photographic concerns to the initial measure of a story's worth.

Public consumption of the news media before and during the Iran hostage crisis was affected by photography and the increasing frequency with which dramatic color imagery was used to communicate the news. In the 20th century, the American public became experienced participants in the press's mediated reality wherein photographic coverage occupied an increasingly central position in explaining the world.³¹ The public assumed photographic objectivity, a result of the photograph's historical role as a supplement to written text and the neutral, mechanical eye of the camera.³²

This should not imply that photographs have or ever had universal meanings. Indeed, the differences in perception and the frequent disconnect between a photographer's intended message and the interpretation of various individuals and audiences is part of the cultural worth of photography as a subject of study. Take for instance the photograph of a Chinese student standing before a tank during the Tiananmen Square incident: in the West this iconic image stands for individual courage and popular resistance to an illiberal regime. In

²⁹ Even at the time of this writing, publishing technologies limit the page counts for all bound or folded publications to multiples of four or eight. This is a result of the printing process whereby two or four pages are printed at one time on each side of a single large sheet of paper and then folded – once or twice, depending on the number printed pages per sheet – before being bound and finally trimmed down to publication size. Saddle-stitch binding, where all the printed pages are attached by stapling through a center fold, required unbound page spreads to contain non-sequential pages. For instance, the front and back covers are on the same sheet of unbound paper, as are the innermost facing pages (the only consecutively numbered pages on the unbound sheets). This means that if an editor wants color images on pages 9 and 10 of a 100-page magazine that pages 91 and 92 must also feature color elements.

³⁰ Gans, *Deciding What's News*, 109-10.

³¹ Hanno Hardt and Bonnie Brennen, "Introduction" in Bonnie Brennen and Hanno Hardt, eds., *Picturing the Past: Media, History, and Photography* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 3.

³² Newton, *The Burden of Visual Truth*, 8.

China, the image, when shown at all, exemplifies military restraint.³³ This divergence of meanings is further heightened in photography of conflict, where significance and symbolism often become vehicles for national mythologies or patriotic expressions.³⁴ Images of political terrorism are especially important in their effect on public perception, an affect that in a democratic society with a plurality-based political system is all the more significant.

News magazines, like television news and other print media, affect the national agenda, dismissing some stories while emphasizing others. But unlike television, newsweeklies are flexible, expanding or contracting their newsworld to better accommodate changing coverage demands while preserving their compact format. Likewise, revolutions in photography, from its inception as a supplement to text through its post-war diffusion and the introduction of color in the newsweeklies, changed the editorial process of making news and increased its impact on the newsweekly audiences. Thus magazines and photography are seen as valuable cultural products, easily competing for attention with television. Indeed, the twentieth century belongs to photojournalists – no other epoch in human history has been visualized in such an unduplicated and presumably neutral way, photographs representing “the ultimate anthropological and historical documents of our time.”³⁵

[DIFFERENT EDITORS, SAME SOURCES: THE NEWSWEEKLIES AND THE WIRE SERVICES]

The three leading American newsweeklies, *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *U.S. News and World Report* have very different histories, editorial emphases, and photographic traditions. Yet, as the news magazines addressed Iran and the hostage crisis, they showed remarkable synchronicity of subjects and sources. Some of this similarity in coverage is the result of the Iranian newsbeat. But in particular regard to the photographic crisis, this similarity can be assigned

³³ V. Goldberg, *The Power of Photography: How Photographs Changed Our Lives* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1991), 250-1.

³⁴ Griffin, “The Great War Photographs,” 129.

³⁵ Chapnick cited in Griffin, “The Great War Photographs,” 61-3.

to the reliance of all three magazines upon the major American news services, the Associated Press and United Press International.

Time, the oldest of the newsweeklies, was by 1979 the most widely read and criticized news magazine in America. Henry Luce and Briton Hadden founded the magazine in 1923, inventing a modern means of news transmission that was less interested “in how much it included between its covers – but how much it got off its pages into the minds of its readers.”³⁶ *Time*’s group journalism, a development of the 1940s, transformed news articles from the product of an individual correspondent to a product of multiple correspondents, editors, and researchers. While this practice diminished – largely as a result of outside criticism and internal demands for individual credit – by 1981 it was still intact enough to warrant the condemnation that *Time* writers and editors often never left their offices in New York to work on their stories.³⁷ But group journalism allowed *Time* to develop a very flexible and reactionary style, one in which field correspondents, many of them foreign, would submit material to in-house writers whose output could be tailored by editors without any prepress delays. This style could lead to misinformation and lawsuits, such as Ariel Sharon’s suit regarding *Time*’s coverage of the Sadra and Shatila massacre in 1984 wherein field correspondents reported from Israel and Lebanon but all published writing and editing took place in *Time*’s relatively cloistered New York offices.³⁸

Such criticisms parallel those often leveled at the broadcast news: that immediacy denies time for reflection and distance from the subject, exaggerating the superficial components of events. The result is news that is ever more processed, ever more

³⁶ Robert T. Elson, *Time, Inc.: The Intimate History of a Publishing Enterprise, 1923-1941* (New York: Atheneum, 1968), 7. Luce and Hadden felt newspapers provided far too much news, while literary digests, the most popular periodicals of the period, provided far too little.

³⁷ John Tirnan, “Doing *Time*,” *Progressive*, August 1981, 48.

³⁸ Alan Nourie, Barbara Nourie, eds. *American Mass-Market Magazines* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990) 495-9.

authoritative, and ever more detached.³⁹ *Time* was also criticized for smothering its readers with raw facts. Critics argued that readers were attracted to the magazine by its “apparent breadth (if not depth) of knowledge” and that, while the magazine does not falsify facts, it uses so many that readers interpret every word in the publication as canon.⁴⁰ And though *Time* has never endorsed a candidate, it has been criticized, as have *Newsweek* and *U.S. News and World Report*, for attempting to shape campaign politics through its choice of cover stories, biased reporting, and timing.⁴¹

Time was, and in many respects still is, known for its unique literary style – *timestyle* – characterized by descriptive epithets, inverted sentences, alliteration, and the absence of simple descriptive verbs.⁴² But the look of the magazine – *Time*’s departments, typography, slogan, logo, and the signature red bar around the cover – have remained largely unchanged since its inception.⁴³ Articles remain short, reflecting Luce’s 400-word goal and the magazine’s annual “Man of the Year” feature remains popular, chosen by the editors according to the working definition of “a man or woman who dominated the news that year and left an indelible mark – for good or for ill.”⁴⁴

Newsweek, *Time*’s closest competitor in terms of audience size, official circulation, and format, emerged in the thick of the Great Depression. Throughout the magazine’s history, its competition with *Time* has been fierce, peaking in the 1960s when *Newsweek* temporarily surpassed *Time* in terms of advertising pages and revenue. In the 1960s, Chris Welles of *Esquire* wrote of *Newsweek*, “Over the past few years, *Newsweek* has often been

³⁹ George Gerber, “Instant History, Image History: Lessons from the Persian Gulf War,” in *Images in Language, media, and Mind*, Roy F. Fox, ed (Urbana, IL: National Councils of Teachers of English, 1994), 126.

⁴⁰ Tirnan, “Doing *Time*,” 47.

⁴¹ Alan Nourie, Barbara Nourie, eds. *American Mass-Market Magazines* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990) 495-9.

⁴² For decades after Hadden introduced *timestyle*, the magazine was notorious for not allowing individuals to simply walk or talk. Instead, they, respectively, dashed, ambled, and shuffled; barked, snapped, and gushed.

⁴³ The *Time* logo has changed slightly, in the detail of its serifs and the red bar, once implemented, has only been altered once – for a special September 11, 2001 issue where it was changed to black, symbolizing mourning.

⁴⁴ “Man of the Year,” *Time*, January 4, 1963, 10-1. The “Man of the Year” feature was changed to “Person of the Year” in 1999.

superior to *Time* in assessing the meaning, significance and implication of the news *Newsweek*, uncommitted to any formal ideological position, was more receptive to deviations from traditional thinking and as a result usually covered these events with more perception and accuracy.”⁴⁵ As far back as World War II, *Newsweek* enjoyed a reputation for striking black and white photography and was the first news magazine to introduce color photography to its regular reporting. During the 1970s and into 1980 conservative editor Osborn Elliott did not allow his Republican leanings to interfere with his editors and correspondents liberal tendencies,⁴⁶ producing balanced and non-ideological reporting. At the time of the Iranian revolution and the hostage crisis critics still warmly received *Newsweek*, awarding it the 1982 National Magazine Award for General Excellence for “its consistently high-quality reporting and editing, especially of events that require thoroughness and perspective beyond the often meager, surface coverage usually provided to the public.”⁴⁷

The least widely read of the three leading newsweeklies is the Washington-based *U.S. News and World Report*. This news magazine began as two separate publications, David Lawrence’s 1926 *United States Daily*, which later became the weekly *United States News*, and his 1946 *World Report*. Merged in 1948, *U.S. News and World Report* has been one of the nation’s top three newsweeklies ever since. Often compared to *Time* and *Newsweek*, *U.S. News and World Report* actually shares very little of their content, focusing on national and international business and government news rather than *Newsweek* and *Time*’s wider field of interest including culture, fashion, sports, and the arts. This editorial difference may explain *U.S. News and World Report*’s success – its focus on forecasting and analysis and its conservative tone foiled *Newsweek* and *Time*’s comparatively superficial analysis and liberal leanings. But like *Time*, the personality and interests of its creator overwhelmingly shaped

⁴⁵ Chris Welles, “Newsweek (a Fact) Is the New Hot Book (an Opinion),” *Esquire* (November 1969), 155, 242.

⁴⁶ Nourie, *American Mass-Market Magazines*, 313-5.

⁴⁷ “Memo from the President,” *Newsweek*, Spring 1983.

U.S. News and World Report. Lawrence, a reporter since his youth, one-time friend of Woodrow Wilson, and syndicator of financial news to the Associated Press developed the magazine with a relatively narrow focus on business and policy.⁴⁸

By the late 1950s *U.S. News and World Report* was larger in size than either *Newsweek* or *Time*, though not in circulation or revenue. It consistently exceeded its competitors in political coverage and coverage without editorial commentary. *U.S. News and World Report* was an early adopter and innovator of many cutting edge reporting processes. It was the first news magazine to experiment with color and computerized prepress and printing technologies.⁴⁹ The adoption of these technologies and associated techniques in 1977 helped speed up the magazine's time to press without the editorial risks inherent in *Time's* group journalism process. Nevertheless, *U.S. News and World Report* remained behind *Time* and *Newsweek* in almost every measure – advertising, circulation, audience, and revenue into the crisis-era and beyond.⁵⁰

Thus, by November of 1978, when this survey of the press begins, the three major American newsweeklies were all primed to approach the Iranian situation from different vantage points both ideologically and editorially. But as the Iranian crises demanded attention these differences took a back seat to competitive and content concerns.

Stories, breaking news or otherwise, are often run simply because editors fear their competitors will run them. If *Time* ran a story on the ongoing hostage crisis, for instance, and *Newsweek* did not then interested readers would certainly gravitate toward *Time*.⁵¹ This competition, and the related anxiety plaguing newsweekly editors, appears to have affected

⁴⁸ This friendship was terminated after Lawrence published details surrounding Wilson's stroke, describing the president as "incapable of fully rational decisions." Edgar Kemler, "The Lawrence Riddle. The Man of the Times?" *Nation* (March 19, 1955), 235.

⁴⁹ This technology was also employed by *Newsweek*, but *U.S. News and World Report* was an investor in the Atex system, benefiting from Atex's eventual sale to Eastman Kodak and thereafter offering computer-based editorial services to *Newsweek* and other publications.

⁵⁰ Nourie, *American Mass-Market Magazines*, 534-41.

⁵¹ Gans, *Deciding What's News*, 177.



figure 2.2

JANUARY AND FEBRUARY 1978 NEWSWEEK AND TIME COVERS

Newsweek and *Time* especially – their content and formats overlapped to a far greater extent than either publication did with *U.S. News and World Report*. This competition resulted in the most basic equalization of coverage between the newsweeklies. Consider the rapid back-and-forth cover selections of *Newsweek* and *Time* in early 1979 (figure 2.2). As the revolution reached its zenith, the shah fled Iran and Khomeini returned in triumph, the two newsweeklies alternated weeks of coverage throughout January, featuring the situation either prominently on the cover or buried inside the magazine, before finally synchronizing in February and carrying simultaneous profiles of the ayatollah and special reports on the Valentine's day hostage crisis at the U.S. embassy in Tehran.⁵²

But in respect to the situation in Iran, the unique editorial voice of the three newsweeklies appears to have been limited in large part by the availability of sources. Many critics of Iranian revolution and hostage crisis coverage have cited the absence of U.S.-based news bureaus in Iran. This absence is a matter of historical record and not at dispute here. But the closure of U.S.-based news bureaus in the Middle East, and in Iran in particular, was not a regional slight.⁵³ Rather it was part of a worldwide trend in the late 1970s and early

⁵² Revolutionary subjects appeared on the cover of *Newsweek* on January 8; February 12 and 26, 1979; on the cover of *Time* on January 15; February 12 and 16. *U.S. News and World Report* at no point featured the Iranian revolution as its main cover selection before November 26, 1979, after the start of the Iran hostage crisis.

⁵³ Edward Said is the source of much of this criticism. He cites the absence of regional bureaus as the primary reason why coverage of Iran and the hostage crisis was so stilted in the U.S. press. The implicit accusation is likewise made that the closure of the bureaus is racially or culturally motivated, with the U.S.-based news outlets closing their Middle East bureaus maliciously. Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1997).

1980s that saw most international news agencies consolidate their foreign offices. The closure of these embassies was not the result of journalistic negligence but the result of the rising cost of maintaining foreign offices, coupled with increased competitiveness among news services, broadcasters, and publications worldwide. In a world of 4.3 billion people, the expense of maintaining even one correspondent for each 100 million people – 40 international correspondents – was prohibitively high. Of U.S.-based media outlets only the two wire services, the Associated Press (AP) and United Press International (UPI), steadily exceeded this number of foreign correspondents. And of those foreign bureaus that remained in 1979, many were regionally instead of nationally focused. This is especially true in the third world where, except during crisis situations, day-to-day news was of little interest to the American public. Rather than maintain a large number of unneeded American journalists, foreign bureaus supplemented their regional correspondents with nation-specific stringers – freelance journalists and photographers who worked in-country on an as-needed basis and often for more than one Western news outlet.

The alternative practice used by most American news outlets– including the newsmagazines, television news programs and national newspapers – was to have a small number of “firemen,” correspondents “with their bags more or less permanently packed,” ready to fly off to this week’s trouble spot. So while the three news magazines maintained large writing and editing staffs, a large number of domestic correspondents, and a handful of permanent foreign correspondents in the world’s most important Cold War-era capitals, they had no first-hand experience with many of the countries about which they reported. More often than not, American news outlets, broadcast and print, got their international news for these off-beat countries from the wire services.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Davidson, et al., *News From Abroad and the Foreign Policy Public*, 30.

Mark Twain once said of AP, “There are only two forces that can carry light to all corners of the globe – the sun in the heavens, and the Associated Press down here.” The oldest news agency in the world, AP is a nonprofit corporation founded in 1848 by six New York newspaper publishers inspired by the growth of the mid-nineteenth-century “penny press” and the development of the telegraph.⁵⁵ From the outset, AP identified itself as a foreign news service, gathering news from transatlantic liners at its Halifax, Nova Scotia office and wiring it straight to New York for distribution. AP launched its World Service, a dedicated foreign reporting arm, in 1944 after a series of conflicts with United Press and Reuters, and by 1976 it maintained 2,500 reporters in 150 bureaus in 100 countries. These bureaus were run by American journalists with foreign experience but staffed almost exclusively by natives. Basic news transmission, to which all three newsweeklies and television news outlets subscribed, was frequently supplemented with special reports, audio and video materials, and photography sent across AP’s photowire service.⁵⁶

The newsweeklies also subscribed the AP’s only serious American competitor, UPI. United Press, founded in 1907 as a for-profit company to avoid AP’s cooperative news monopoly, merged with the International News Service of the Hearst newspaper chain in the late 1950s. During World War I, United Press was the first American wire service to offer a dedicated foreign news product. By 1976, it carried 4.5 million words, hundreds of pictures, and special reports across 1.2 million miles of cable and phone line every day from 10,000 full and part-time journalists and technicians in 238 bureaus in 62 countries worldwide. In addition to personalized news and editorials for American consumption, UPI maintained photographic, newsfilm, and audio services for its subscribers.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ William H. Read, *America’s Mass Media Merchants* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 99. This claim must be weighed against Reuters foundation thirteen years prior as a market information service, not a news service.

⁵⁶ Read, *America’s Mass Media Merchants*, 96-102.

⁵⁷ Read, *America’s Mass Media Merchants*, 109-14.

Indeed, when news breaks from the first world as well as the third, newsweekly editors appear to have responded like generations of newsrooms and news desks before them, asking, “Well, what does the AP say?”⁵⁸ An analysis of newsweekly photo credits from crisis-era reporting indicates that all three news magazines relied on the two wire services for a significant percentage of their visual coverage (*figure 2.3*). *Newsweek*, with the largest total visual area dedicated to Iran and hostage crisis photography, relied on AP and UPI more than any other content provider, 12% and 9% respectively. *U.S. News and World Report*, which dedicated the least amount of visual coverage to the situations in Iran, relied on the wire services even more completely, using AP for 33% of its visual coverage, UPI for 18%.

The newsweeklies’ reliance on wire services for their foreign news is not outstanding. In some American newspapers, AP or UPI provide as much as 90% of the international news.⁵⁹ Nor does this be interpreted to mean that wire service contributions to the newsweeklies went unfiltered. Just as textual reporting went through rounds of draft revisions as it passed from bureau to bureau on its long trek back to wire service offices in

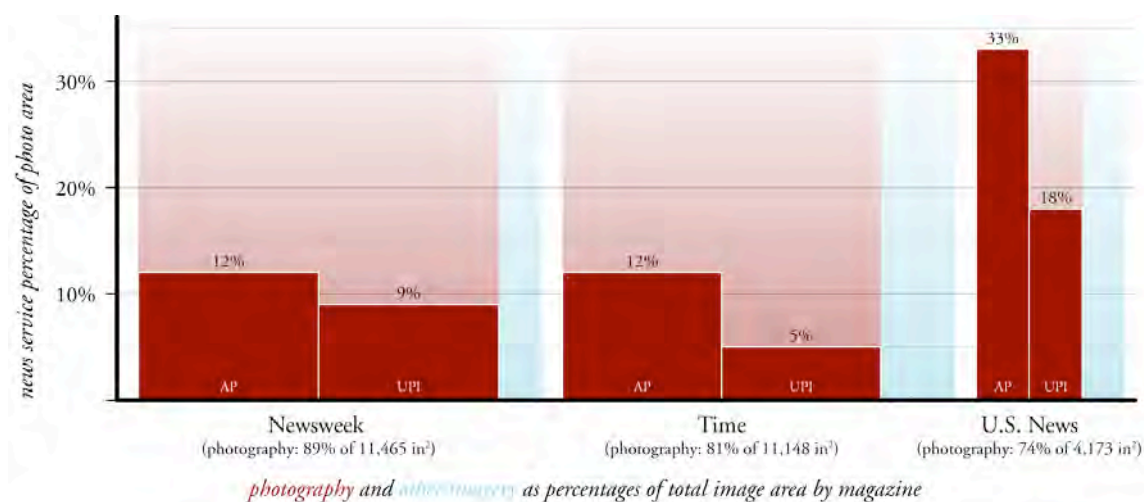


figure 2.3

ASSOCIATED PRESS AND UNITED PRESS INTERNATIONAL PHOTOGRAPHIC CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE NEWS MAGAZINES’ IRAN AND HOSTAGE CRISIS COVERAGE

⁵⁸ Newton, *The Burden of Visual Truth*, 75.

⁵⁹ Davidson, et al., *News From Abroad and the Foreign Policy Public*, 35.

New York and Washington, editors at the receiving publications rewrote the stories to match their own style or worked several subscribed stories into a single larger piece. So too were AP and UPI transmitted photographs filtered by the receiving photo editors. But the newsweeklies' dependence on the wire services for photography is more significant than its textual counterpart because, while text can be altered to suit a writer's narrative style, significant limitations – ethical and technological – prevented similar modification of photographic content. Selection or omission, size, crop and position, color or black and white printing were the photo editor's only editorial options.

The wire services may have had no ideological agenda in selecting which photographs to send out to their subscribers, but news magazine photo editors and designers work as gatekeepers between news service photographers and the reading public.⁶⁰ The newsweeklies received many of the same images but, in coordination with competitive and reportage demands, rarely ran the same photos. When such overlaps did occur the newsweeklies often used identical photographs to reach the same rhetorical ends. As the next chapter shows, this use of identical photography – images of hostage William Belk and the Hermitage Pennsylvania memorial among the notable coincidences – with similar or identical themes equalized crisis-era coverage and limited the conflicting voices of the various newsweekly editorial traditions to create a surprisingly uniform visual narrative. This reliance on AP and UPI for much of their Iran and hostage crisis coverage meant that much of that newsweeklies' coverage was similar in both tone and appearance.

[THROUGH THE VIEWFINDER: PHOTOGRAPHERS OF THE IRAN HOSTAGE CRISIS]

There is no monolithic 444-day Iran hostage crisis among photojournalists any more than there is a singular hostage encounter characterized by brutality, torture, mock-executions,

⁶⁰ Sally Stapleton, vice president of photography, international division, of the Associated Press in Newton, *The Burden of Visual Truth*, 75-6.

and isolation among the hostages. Rather, as former hostage Charles Scott reminds us, “there are fifty-two separate, distinct, and equally valid hostage stories.”⁶¹ If any generalization can be made about the men and women captured in the U.S. Embassy on the morning of November 4, 1979, it is simply that a few of them – a vocal few, well documented in numerous memoirs and accounts of the crisis – were experts in the region, fluent in Farsi, familiar with the country, and sensitive to the ways of its people. The remaining majority of the embassy staff was surprisingly uninformed in the ways of Iran – inarticulate in the local tongues and, by necessity, more familiar with the embassy compound than the revolutionary nation on the other side of its walls.

The same is true of the reporters and photographers who brought the crisis home to the American viewing and reading public. As we have seen, except for an office briefly maintained by *The New York Times* in the mid 1970s, no major American news outlet maintained a Tehran bureau, relying instead on Pakistani and Indian “stringers,” “firemen” journalists, or their wire service analogues to do occasional reporting.⁶² Indeed, the previous historiography, focusing on the broadcast media, holds that during the first days of the

⁶¹ Col. Charles W. Scott, *Pieces of the Game: The Human Drama of Americans Held Hostage in Iran* (Atlanta: Peachtree Publishers, 1984), 8. After their return to the United States in early 1981, a number of the former hostages wrote memoirs of their experiences in captivity. Few of these memoirs have received critical attention from scholars. Catherine Scott’s “‘I Had Left One America and Come Home to Another One’: First-Person Accounts of Captivity During the Iran Hostage Crisis,” *The Journal of American Culture*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (March, 2004), attempts to survey the field but fails to include several published memoirs by former hostages and, most notably, the unpublished Ode Diary. A wide field of published memoirs are available, including William J. Daugherty, “Held Hostage in Iran: A First Tour Like No Other,” (Center for the Study of Intelligence, CIA, 1996), <http://www.aiipowmia.com/other/iran.html>; and *In the Shadow of the Ayatollah: A CIA Hostage in Iran* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2001); “Diary of a Hostage / Robert Blucker on Captivity: From a Hostage’s Diary,” *The Washington Post*, 7 February 1981, A1; Moorhead Kennedy, *The Ayatollah in the Cathedral* (New York, Hill and Wang, 1986); Kathryn Koob, *Guest of the Revolution* (Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers, 1982); Bruce L. Laingen, *Yellow Ribbon: The Secret Journal of Bruce Laingen* (Washington D.C.: Brassey’s, 1992); Penne Laingen, “An American Diplomat in Iran: Prelude to Crisis” and “An American Diplomat in Iran: The Hostage Crisis,” *Manuscripts*, Vol. 41, No. 2 and 3 (1989); Richard Queen, *Inside and Out: Hostage to Iran, Hostage to Myself* (New York: Putnam, 1981); Barbara and Barry Rosen, *The Destined Hour: The Hostage Crisis and One Family’s Ordeal* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1982); and Col. Charles W. Scott, *Pieces of the Game: The Human Drama of Americans Held Hostage in Iran* (Atlanta: Peachtree Publishers, 1984). In addition, there is one contemporary diary in print: Rocky Sickman, *Iranian Hostage: A Personal Diary of 444 Days in Captivity* (Topeka, Kansas: Crawford Press, 1982).

⁶² William O. Beeman, *The “Great Satan” vs. the “Mad Mullahs”: How the United States and Iran Demonize Each Other*, (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2005), 179.

hostage crisis, there were approximately 300 reporters in Tehran, none of whom could speak Farsi and few of whom were regionally savvy.⁶³ And while one must assume that this last comment refers to reporters serving U.S. media outlets, it is surprisingly inaccurate – an inaccuracy demonstrated by even the most cursory examination of crisis-era coverage appearing in *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *U.S. News and World Report*.

Looking at photographic credits appearing in all three magazines before, during, and after the crisis, two trends emerge. First, of those images not credited to one of the news consortiums, AP and UPI, only a small handful of photographers provided a significant portion of the newsweekies' imagery.⁶⁴ Second, and more importantly, many of these photographers were not American. Several photojournalists working for the U.S. press were Farsi-speaking Iranians, citizens and expatriates, and in the case of one particular photographer an active participant in the revolution.

The broadcast press faced the difficult mechanics of deploying camera crews abroad. But all press outlets faced problems of uncooperative governments and alien locales. Such barriers were not insurmountable if the reporter had access to appropriately valuable contacts. But these contacts – valuable and most-often confidential – could not be produced on short notice. Well-qualified foreign correspondents were experienced in the region, knew well how to deal with the government and the public, were fluent in the native language, and were perceptive students of national affairs. As such, local journalists are often valuable resources for international journalists.⁶⁵ But in the case of the Iranian crises, Iranian photojournalists were more than just resources for foreign correspondents – they became

⁶³ This is a claim repeated throughout much literature of the hostage crisis media, drawn here from Said, *Covering Islam*, lii. Among reporters familiar with the region that did not work for the Americans newsweeklies Joe Alex Morris, Jr., the Middle East correspondent for the *Los Angeles Times* who died in Iran in February 1979 and Doug Tunnerl, an Arabic-speaking CBS Middle East correspondent are worth noting. Davidson, et al., *News From Abroad and the Foreign Policy Public*, 26.

⁶⁴ The vast majority of contributors provided only one image to any of these publications over the course of the 38-months this study is concerned with.

⁶⁵ Davidson, et al., *News From Abroad and the Foreign Policy Public*, 16-7.

correspondents. As Abbas would later describe the situation in Tehran, “During the revolution, photography became important in Iran as a form of expression. The hostage crisis furthered the careers of several Iranian photojournalists, since their foreign counterparts found it harder to work in Iran after this.”⁶⁶

Indeed, the top-contributing photographers (*figure 2.4*) for both *Time* and *Newsweek* were Iranian: Kaveh Golestan for *Time*, brothers Reza and Manoocher Deghati for *Newsweek*, and Abbas for both magazines. Additionally, a German magazine *Stern* distributed numerous images taken by the student-terrorists occupying the Tehran embassy. Of the remaining top contributors to all three newsweeklies, four were French photographers: Phillippe Ledru, Oliver Rebbot, Alain DeJean, and Alain Mingam; two were American photographers: David Burnett and Timothy Murphy; and one was Australian: James A. Pozarik. *U.S. News and World Report*, which featured the smallest amount of photographic coverage of the Iranian situations, employed Reza Deghati as well, but relied much more heavily on wire services and official image outlets, such as the U.S. Navy.

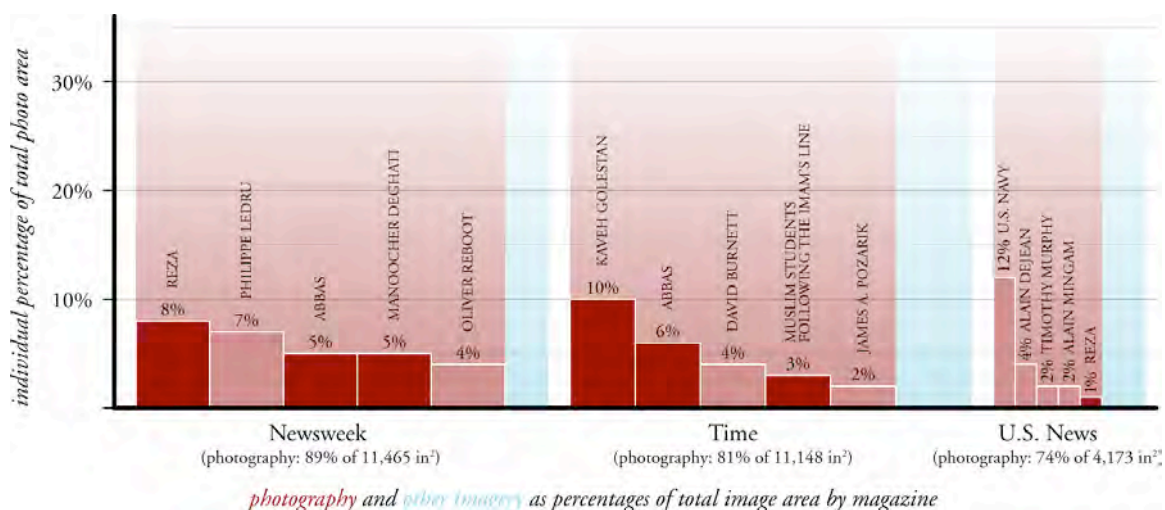


figure 2.4

INDIVIDUAL PHOTOGRAPHIC CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE NEWS MAGAZINES' IRAN AND HOSTAGE CRISIS COVERAGE. IRANIAN PHOTOGRAPHERS HIGHLIGHTED.

⁶⁶ Sonali Pahwa, “Shifting visions” *Al-Ahram* (January 1-7, 2004).

This realization reveals a critical, and often marginalized aspect of cultural study. The messages and characterizations of images and other cultural products, so often criticized for stereotypical messages, are not simply functions of their content but also functions of their creation. For instance, previous analyses of crisis-era media criticize the press for 1) their ignorance, linguistic and cultural, in conjunction with their need for immediate results, and 2) their reliance on “experts” whose expertise and bias Said categorizes as typically anti-humanist.⁶⁷ The result of these conditions is imagery that projects an unfair image of the Iranians, their religion, and their revolution. But how is this criticism affected by the influence of photographers from among the demonized?

All of these photographers were either on contract for, or employees of, the American newsweeklies and would thus be accountable to the same deadlines and editors. And all photographers, regardless of nationality, faced the same central challenges in creating accurate and marketable visualizations: objectivity and aesthetics. But in the particular case of photographers, the Heisenberg Principle of physics illustrates a problem wherein nationality and language make a difference.⁶⁸ How much the photographer affects his or her environment, be it a staid press conference or a tumultuous public demonstration, is highly variable. Does the crowd play to the camera? Can the photographer separate himself from the myopic field of his viewfinder? How well can the photographer navigate the country, its institutions and its personalities?

The nationality and loyalties of the photographer can be important. The student-terrorists, for instance, took many photographs of the hostages later distributed by the German magazine *Stern*. In his captivity diary, Robert Ode painted a clear picture of the

⁶⁷ Said, *Covering Islam*, 49.

⁶⁸ Denton, “Examining Documentary Photography Using the Creative Method,” 408. In quantum physics, the Heisenberg uncertainty principle states that when measuring observable quantities of a single elementary particle, increasing the accuracy of the measurement of any one quantity (such as the particle’s position) increases the uncertainty of the simultaneous measurement of the other quantity (such as the particle’s speed). Thus, the act of measuring one quality impacts the value of all others.

impact these photographers had on their subject mater, describing how they released him into an enclosed yard only long enough to get a picture of him on an exercise bike (figure 2.5⁶⁹). Weeks later the student-terrorists tried to coerce him into writing a detailed caption and accompanying statement for the image, encouraging him to send the photograph to *Stern* himself.⁷⁰



figure 2.5
HOSTAGE ROBERT ODE,
PHOTOGRAPHED BY HIS CAPTORS

The Muslim Students Following the Imam's Line were active not only in photography but broadcast media as well, installing cameras and a dish antenna of their own at the embassy compound so that they could broadcast directly to the U.S. networks via cooperating American satellites, bypassing their government's attempts at censorship.⁷¹ They even provided U.S. television networks with controversial access to the hostages. NBC and the student-terrorists agreed to film and interview a hostage, William Gallegos, selected by the students. The awkward December 10, 1979 interview generated a firestorm of condemnation for the network, from other networks that criticized NBC's ethics to the administration that disapproved of its exploitation of the hostage. Subsequent efforts to push propaganda videos on American television networks, including Christmas footage of four hostages reading handwritten admissions of espionage and condemnations of the Shah were aired only with an accompanying expert panel or, as in a later and more damning video of quisling Joe Subic, were refused outright.⁷²

⁶⁹ Photograph: Muslim Students Following the Imam's Line. "For the Families, a New Concern." *Time* (May, 5, 1980), 35.

⁷⁰ Diary, Robert C. Ode, March 13 and 14, 1980, March 12, 1980, May 1, 1980.

⁷¹ Karl, "In the Middle in the Middle East," 286.

⁷² Robert McFadden, Joseph B. Treaster and Maurice Carrol, eds., *No Hiding Place* (New York: Times Books, 1981) 65-73. Subic aided and abetted his captors and, while never charged with treason, was the only one of the 21 military hostages held during the crisis not to receive the Defense Department Meritous Service Medal.

But a more germane analysis is found by comparing the experiences of professional photographers working in Tehran during the revolution and the hostage crisis: American David Burnett and Iranians Abbas and the brothers Reza and Manoocher Deghati.

Burnett worked in Iran from January through March 1979 as a contract reporter for *Time* through Contact Press Images. Staying at the Intercontinental, home to most of the international press, Burnett navigated Tehran with groups of other foreign and Iranian photojournalists, including *Time's* Kaveh Golestan. Despite learning quickly to mask his nationality – posing as a Frenchman or Canadian to avoid the attention an American might attract – and cultivating local contacts, Burnett's access to Iranian demonstrations and the Iranian leadership was often limited. Observing the revolution from without, he could only react to incidences of public demonstration. Likewise, the length Khomeini's speeches, and the additional time it took for translators to consecutively repeat him in English, often limited Burnett's access to the imam.⁷³ But this does not mean that Burnett was unable to otherwise access the revolutionary leadership. In March 1979, after several days of harassing Khomeini's beleaguered press liaison, Burnett and a colleague were given unprecedented access to the ayatollah. For fifteen minutes, Burnett shot photographs of Khomeini taking refuge from his enthusiastic followers, holding council with his advisors, and enjoying a quiet cup of tea (*figure 2.6*⁷⁴). This precious access, highly irregular for a foreign journalist, gave Burnett time to shoot



figure 2.6
A DAVID BURNETT'S PHOTO OF THE AYATOLLAH
DURING EXCLUSIVE ACCESS

⁷³ David Burnett, Personal interview, November 1, 2006.

⁷⁴ Photograph: David Burnett. "Guns, Death, and Choas". *Time* (February 26, 1979) 30.

30 exclusive frames of the ayatollah – two of which were printed in *Time* – and demonstrate that valuable contacts and access could be garnered by a foreign journalist with no prior Iranian resume.⁷⁵

Abbas, the only photographer of any nationality to make a significant contribution to both *Newsweek* and *Time*, was an Iranian expatriate living in Paris who became passionately involved in the Iranian revolution after returning to Iran to cover it. Able to navigate both the larger society and the smaller revolutionary movement, his photographs for the Gamma-Liaison agency were taken from a position deeply embedded in the crowd and exceptionally close to the Iranian leadership. Even after Abbas became disillusioned with the revolution he remained in Iran as a self-described “camera *non grata*.” And while American photographers were forced to leave the country after the government expelled Western reporters, Abbas and other Iranian journalists were able to remain. Staying in Iran for almost two years, from November 1978 through fall 1980, Abbas recorded armed uprisings, demonstrators filling the streets, the changing cast of Iranian leadership, and the seizure of the U.S. Embassy from an envied position among the Tehrani public.⁷⁶

Reza Deghati – an Azerbaijani known professionally simply as “Reza” – was the only photojournalist on the scene when the student-terrorists captured the American embassy on November 4, 1979. While other photographers covered street demonstrations scattered across the Iranian capital, Reza was at the embassy for *Newsweek* and captured the most iconic image of the news magazines’ hostage crisis coverage (*figure 2.7*⁷⁷) – William Belk’s emergence from the chancery, bound and blindfolded. Unlike Burnett and Abbas, Reza

⁷⁵ David Burnett, Personal interview, April 9, 2007. The two images used were the image shown in figure 2.6 and another of the Ayatollah waving from his window to the eager crowd outside. Two other images from the session also appealed to Burnett’s photo editor at *Time*, Arnold Drapkin. One was a photograph of the ayatollah framed by the long black robes of two foreground mullahs. The other was an alternate version of the image shown above – an image Burnett counts among his favorites and currently includes in traveling exhibitions.

⁷⁶ Abbas, *Allah O Akbar*, 12-19, 26.

⁷⁷ Photograph: Reza. Cover. *Newsweek*, (January 26, 1981).

became a photographer in response to the revolution in Iran. As an architecture student at the University of Tehran in 1978, he watched a handful of Iranian troops gun down a group of student demonstrators. By the end of the day he abandoned architecture and took up the camera, shooting alongside European photographers and making a sudden, dramatic splash in the Western press; Reza's work was first published simultaneously in *Paris Match*, *Stern*, and *Newsweek*.⁷⁸



figure 2.7
REZA'S ICONIC PHOTOGRAPH
OF WILLIAM BELK

Manoocher Deghati, Reza's younger brother, followed much the same path. Returning from film school in Rome to help his brother shoot the revolution, Manoocher soon found himself a target. Manoocher recalls, "A truckload of soldiers rolled by. One of them loaded his rifle and fired at me. The burst of bullets passed on either side of my head. I was alive. I was shocked. But above all, I realized that I was a target because I was taking pictures. That only reinforced my determination."⁷⁹

No matter how large the media apparatus, the press remained a system of individuals wherein the process of information dissemination remains, effectively, the communication of information from one human being to another. This transmission preserved all the frailties, biases, and ambitions inherent in interpersonal communication.⁸⁰ For instance, in the 1990s, approximately 80% of photojournalists were male. One must assume that at least as many of the stringers or contractors in revolutionary Iran were male – indeed, *Time's* Catherine

⁷⁸ Betty Blair, "In Pursuit of Freedom and Justice: Through the Eyes of a Photojournalist—Reza," *Azerbaijan International* (Spring 1998), 38–41.

⁷⁹ "Manoocher Deghati," *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manoocher_Deghati (accessed March 12, 2007).

⁸⁰ Richard W. Schaffert, *Media Coverage and Political Terrorists: A Quantitative Analysis* (New York: Praeger, 1992), 61.

LeRoy was among the only female crisis photographers. Thus, the vast majority of images were taken from a male perspective.⁸¹ This is not an accusation of intentional bias. Consider the various steps in the photographic creation-communication process: the viewer looks at a photo in the printed magazine that was organized by editors who obtained the photo from a wire service or photography agency after the photographer or a desk editor had selected the image from part of a larger series shot at the scene. Now consider that the photographer had a far larger scene before him than could be captured on film. Thus the photographer had to be selective about his subject matter – a subject that, in the case of the hostage crisis, may or may not have been staged or otherwise organized.⁸² In the photographic and editorial processes – as in the advertising design process – photographers and their editors were often inclined to make decisions about visualizations based on either their own aesthetic or cultural judgments. Such decision-making often produced compelling photographs. But it also produced, with equal or even greater regularity, compositions exhibiting little cross-cultural sensitivity.⁸³

Despite different backgrounds and access, and despite objective ambitions, these photographers brought biases to their work. According to Burnett, “the primary reason you’re there is to tell the story, to tell what’s going on ... to communicate to other people who aren’t going to be there, who don’t know about it.” But as an American with little Middle Eastern experience Burnett symbolized the American stranger in a strange land; according to *American Photographer*, “he’s been everywhere, but only for an hour.”⁸⁴ Notwithstanding the cultivation of local resources, and an ambitious effort to familiarize

⁸¹ Newton, *The Burden of Visual Truth*, 46.

⁸² Newton, *The Burden of Visual Truth*, 14.

⁸³ Sandra Moriarty, Lisa Rohe, “Cultural Palettes in Print Advertising: Formative Research Design Method,” in *Handbook of Visual Communication: Theory, Methods, and Media*, Ken Smith, et al., eds. (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc., 2005), 117.

⁸⁴ *American Photographer* cited in *David Burnett-Photojournalist*, <http://www.davidburnett.com/> (accessed January 10, 2007).

himself with the revolution and Khomeini's charged literature, Burnett remained an outsider, conspicuous by his cameras, appearance, and French or English speech.⁸⁵ He often learned of demonstrations only after he heard the gunshots and teargas canisters and even relied on demonstrators to help him get the best camera angles in unfamiliar squares.⁸⁶

Abbas and the Deghatis' participation in Iranian society during the revolution and hostage crisis was tempered by backgrounds and ideologies which placed them in opposition to the aims of the ayatollah. Abbas' writing reveals a strong affection for secularism and a deep mistrust of fanatical religion – be it Christianity or Islam. Paralleling American writers of the period, Abbas showed frustration with the failure of the secular revolution, and eventually characterized it as devolution, grafting “seventh-century concepts ... on to [sic] modern day Iran.” Even as Said criticized Western journalists and photographers for emphasizing the place of martyrdom in the Iranian psyche, and in the ideology of militant Islam, Abbas recognized in his own countrymen this tendency for fanaticism and sacrifice, describing Iran as “the country of the *Thousand and One Nights*” and as a nation in which “the myth of the martyr had begun.” But Abbas' perspective – looking out from within the revolution – provides a glimpse of humanity invisible to the non-Farsi speaking journalists in Tehran. His images paint a picture of another hostage crisis, a mirror image of the embassy occupation in which “45 million Iranians [were] hostages to religious fanaticism.”⁸⁷

1970-80s news magazines were comparable to television in terms of their cultural and agenda-setting influence. Likewise, photojournalism had matured by the onset of the Iranian crises, becoming a unique lens through which news was transmitted and the first impressions of history were formed. And despite editorial differences, visual coverage of Iran was greatly equalized through collective reliance on the Associated Press and United Press

⁸⁵ David Burnett, Personal interview, November 1, 2006.

⁸⁶ In order of use: Susan Vermazen, ed. *War Torn* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 129, 135; Nacos, *Terrorism and the Media*, 51.

⁸⁷ Abbas, *Allah O Akbar*, 12, 26, 192, 257.

International for visual reportage. But most importantly, an analysis of newsweekly photo credits reveals that a small number of Iranian photographers supplied a significant portion of crisis-era photographs, a challenge to the current historiography's assumption that the U.S. media lacked access to Iran and its cultural assets.



“How fragile the West is! A mullah proclaims his anathema from a bygone age, taking advantage of his free access to western media, and the West is in turmoil.”

– *Abbas, photojournalist*¹

Chapter 3: Communication PORNOGRAPHY OF GRIEF, PORNOGRAPHY OF POLITICS

News of the embassy attack traveled quickly. On the morning of November 4, 1979, as students swept over the walls and through the gates of the U.S. embassy in Tehran, reporters and photojournalists covering the demonstration rushed to the scene, writing short bulletins about what was happening on the scene and shooting roll after roll of film of what they saw.

Newspaper, magazine, and wire service correspondents rushed to nearby phones – either on the street, at nearby businesses, or in friendly residences – and called in their bulletins. For Associated Press and United Press International correspondents and stringers, these short paragraphs were called into local bureaus in Israel or Turkey where they were teletyped by cable or microwave to major regional bureaus in Cairo or Beirut, respectively. From Egypt and Lebanon these reports were relayed by cable or bounced off satellites to European offices in France or Belgium and cabled to London before transmission by submarine cable to the AP’s headquarters in New York or UPI’s headquarters in Washington, DC. The entire trip from Tehran to 50 Rockefeller Plaza and 1510 H Street took less than one minute and required almost no human interference.

¹ Abbas, *Allah O Akbar: A Journey Through Militant Islam* (London: Phaidon Press, 1994), 192; photo: adapted from UPI. “A Memo to Our Readers”, *U.S. News and World Report* (January 26, 1981), 6.

Once in the United States, World Desk and Word Service editors and reporters took over, editing the bulletins for style and accuracy before transmitting them to subscribers by a computerized system. Within an hour the bulletins were transmitted to subscribers worldwide.

Meanwhile, the photojournalists – independent, contracted, and staff photographers – rushed shot rolls of film and handwritten captions to the Tehran airport. There they met news service couriers or, more likely during the revolution and the early days of the hostage crisis, searched out sympathetic London- or Paris-bound airline passengers and crew. Once the film arrived in England or France and was processed, photo editors used small 8x Lupe magnifiers to sort out the best images from the more than 200 strips of 35mm color and black and white negatives littering their lightboxes. Only the best images were transmitted back to the U.S. Most AP and UPI bureaus and subscribers received these images across slow photo printers. AP's Laserphoto took as long as half-an-hour to print black and white negatives and individual color composite negatives – four of which, in cyan, magenta, yellow, and black, were required to produce one color photograph. UPI's Unifax took as long as fifteen minutes to print a photograph, one wet tenth-of-an-inch at a time. A small handful of subscribers received these images across new digital imaging systems such as AP's electronic darkroom while many international subscribers relied on far slower mail services.

As the story continued to develop, correspondents in Tehran provided further details of the embassy siege and subsequent developments by phone while wire service and news publication bureaus in related countries and diplomatic correspondents in Washington collected relevant supplemental information. This information was gathered in New York or Washington offices and either worked into the main story or compiled to create a separate sidebar story intended to run alongside the main piece. Rarely, frantic telex messages would be sent to photographers in the field, clarifying or seeking new captions for images poised to

run in subscriber or contracting publications. Additionally, wire services writers stateside and in local bureaus would draft regional versions of these articles designed to appeal to Middle Eastern subscribers and would field inquires and special requests from domestic and international subscribers as required.² The result was the rapid diffusion of foreign news and images to the printed page. Reporters and photojournalists – American, European, and Iranian – revealed to the hungry American news audience an unfolding crisis which journalist George Will once called the “Pornography of grief.”³

This chapter quantifies the volume, type, and tone of these visualizations and the techniques used by American mass-market newsweeklies to depict Iran and the hostage crisis for the purpose of characterizing related media coverage. This exercise removes the metaphorical blindfold that, once covering the eyes of Americans obsessed with the drama playing out in an embassy under siege, has since transferred to historians obsessed with finding meaning in the way that drama was told. This chapter shows that pre-hostage crisis coverage was significant and defining, setting the tone for coverage that would follow. It also demonstrates that coverage of the crisis was neither entirely a human-interest story, as it has been most often characterized, nor was it monolithic in its negative treatment of Islam.

² The description of the correspondent reporting process is an adaptation of William H. Read’s description of the wire service news process to suit AP and UPI’s regional specifics in the Middle East. William H. Read, *America’s Mass Media Merchants* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 103-4. The description of the photographic transmission process is derived from descriptions in Michael H. Anderson, “Emerging Patterns of Global News Cooperation,” in Jim Richstad and Michael H. Anderson, eds., *Crisis in International News: Policies and Prospects* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 325; David Burnett, Personal interview, November 1, 2006; Mark Hertzberg, “A Year in the Life of Photojournalism,” in *Behind the Viewfinder*, (Digital Storyteller, September 21, 1998) <http://www.digitalstoryteller.com/YITL/Mark%20Hertzberg/sept21.html> (accessed March 16, 2007); Julianne H. Newton, *The Burden of Visual Truth: The Role of Photojournalism in mediating Reality* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2001), 30; Joshua Prager, “The Ayatollah’s agents come calling,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 2 December 2006, A1.

³ George Will according to Brigitte L. Nacos, *Terrorism and the Media: From the Iran Hostage Crisis to the World Trade Center Bombing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 126.

[MULLAHS AND MOSQUES: NEWSWEEKLY COVERAGE OF IRAN BEFORE THE HOSTAGE CRISIS]

The existing historiography argues that, as little attention as Iran afforded in corridors of power, it garnered even less attention in the public consciousness. Despite sustained contact with the United States, “Iran remained *terra incognita* for almost all Americans.”⁴ The U.S.’s closest ally in the Muslim-World, a civilization stretching back over two thousand years, could only elicit a blank stare or a vague Oriental description upon public inquest. Indeed, prior to the hostage crisis, references to Iran were more likely to evoke images of carpets and hookahs instead of mullahs and mosques. As Gary Sick comments, “it is not an exaggeration to say that America approached Iran from a position of almost unrelieved ignorance.”⁵

In this context, it is easy to understand America’s surprise when, on Sunday, November 4, 1979 three thousand demonstrators poured over the walls and through the shattered gates of the U.S. embassy in Tehran. After the embassy seizure, pre-crisis public ignorance was replaced by “the longest-running human interest story in the history of television.”⁶ For fourteen months, ABC’s *Nightline* opened with, and Walter Cronkite’s *CBS Evening News* closed with, reminders of the hostages and their plight in Iran. News coverage of the hostage crisis garnered at least as much sustained media attention as the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War, and Watergate – only the 24-hour cable-news network’s coverage of the 1991 Gulf War later surpassed it.⁷

Some academic attention has been paid to U.S. media coverage of Iran before the revolution. A survey of pre-revolutionary newspaper and newsweekly coverage found that the Pahlavi shahs controlled media access to Iranian dissidents as carefully as they limited

⁴ Gary Sick, *All Fall Down: America’s Tragic Encounter with Iran*, (New York: Random House, 1985), 5.

⁵ Gary Sick, *All Fall Down*, 5. This characterization of the pre-crisis ignorance is echoed by a number of authors – as mentioned in the n7, p6.

⁶ Sick, *All Fall Down*, 220.

⁷ Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945-2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 205.

American intelligence access to them.⁸ With little American media presence on the ground, and unable to depend on native stringers who could not be relied upon to write articles that might, if published, result in their arrest, American news outlets were left echoing the voices of U.S. foreign-policy makers rather than pursuing independent information.⁹ But Iran was not so closed and veiled a society to prevent journalists – to say nothing of intelligence services – from accurately reporting on the nature of the shah’s regime. Nor is it only hindsight that reveals the fractured society in Iran before the revolution, as the writings of a few reporters and numerous western academics between 1954 and 1978 demonstrate.¹⁰

But an aspect of this media coverage previously overlooked by much of the historiography is Iran’s presence in the press prior to the embassy seizure and during the revolution. References to pre-crisis media paint a consistently sparse picture of Iran that was, at best, superficial and distorted.¹¹ Even as the Islamic revolution swept aside the Shah, the media failed to foster among Americans any understating of the domestic, political, or cultural realities in Iran and instead advanced simplifications and mischaracterizations that lingered throughout the crisis.¹² But what coverage there was remains an important test for cultural quantification and, potentially, a significant force in shaping American perceptions of Iran, its revolution, and its leadership – the Ayatollah Khomeini, in particular – in subsequent coverage during the hostage crisis.

The shaping of opinion is a function of selective perception, a fundamental aspect of stereotypical thinking that affects both those who produce and consume images. It is, simply, the active – albeit, often subconscious – filtering of new information through a lens

⁸ William O. Beeman, *The “Great Satan” vs the “Mad Mullahs”: How the United States and Iran Demonize Each Other* (London: Praeger, 2005), 167.

⁹ Barry Rubin, *Paved with Good Intentions: The American Experience and Iran* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 338.

¹⁰ William A. Dorman, Mansour Farhang, “*The U.S. Press and Iran: Foreign Policy and The Journalism of Deference*” (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), 1-7.

¹¹ James Bill, “Iran and the Crisis of ’78,” *Foreign Affairs* (Winter 1978/79), 323-42.

¹² Rubin, *Paved with Good Intentions*, 342.

of previously accepted perception and prejudice. New information and ideas do bypass this filter, and are often key in the formation of new perceptions, but more frequently percipients reject new information to accommodate their pre-existing worldview.¹³

In the year before the crisis, from November 1978 through October 1979, these biases were forged through the significant coverage Iran received in both the broadcast and weekly print media. During the 444-day hostage crisis, ABC and NBC's coverage of Iran and the hostage situation (*figures 3.1-3.2¹⁴*) garnered 23.5% and 21.7% of the networks' total nightly news, 5.3 and 4.9 minutes per broadcast, respectively. But during the year before the crisis Iran, the revolution, the exiled shah, and the return of Khomeini warranted a surprising 5.7% of ABC's *World News Tonight* broadcasts, approximately 1.3 minutes per night, and 6.2% of CBS *Evening News* broadcasts, approximately 1.4 minutes nightly. And a handful of these pre-crisis broadcasts, such as those covering the shah's overthrow and flight from Iran, even reached crisis levels of saturation. The January 16, 1979 ABC *World News Tonight* broadcast, for instance, dedicated 67.4% of its 22 minutes of non-commercial airtime, approximately 15 aggregate minutes, to Iran and the shah's flight while the February 20, 1979 broadcast spent 63.2% of its airtime, approximately 14 minutes, covering a variety of Iran-related topics, ranging from the Valentine's day embassy attack to Iranian demonstrations in Beverly Hills and a Tehran prison breakout. And as recently as September 10, 1979, less than two months before the beginning of the hostage crisis, the assassination of Khomeini's principal rival, Ayatollah Taleghani, warranted 21% of the evening news' coverage – 4.7 minutes.¹⁵

¹³ Travis Linn, "Media Methods that Lead to Stereotypes," in *Images That Injure: Pictorial Stereotypes in the Media*, Paul Martin Lester and Susan Dente Ross, eds (Westport, CN: Praeger, 2003), 26.

¹⁴ This study quantified any coverage having to do with Iran or the hostage crisis, even in part. In cases where coverage of Iran was secondary to the purpose of the article or broadcast, an effort was made to accurately measure this component and not count the entire story of which it was a part.

¹⁵ ABC evening news, January 16, 1979, February 20, 1979, September 10, 1979. Vanderbilt Television News Archive.

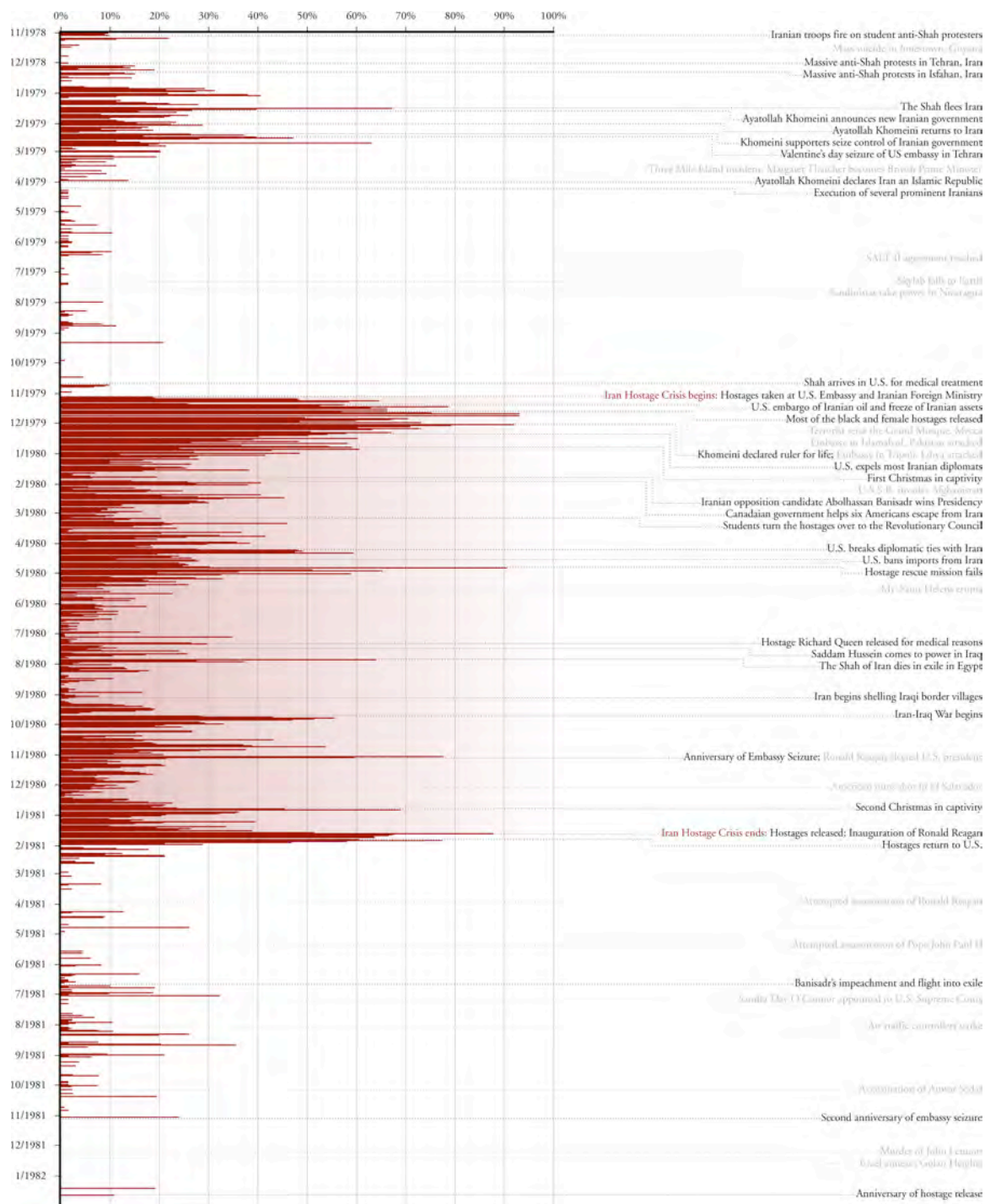


figure 3.1

ABC *WORLD NEWS TONIGHT* COVERAGE OF IRAN AND THE IRAN HOSTAGE CRISIS,
NOVEMBER 1978 THROUGH JANUARY 1982,
BY PERCENTAGE OF THE TOTAL NON-COMMERCIAL NEWSWHOLE WITH SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

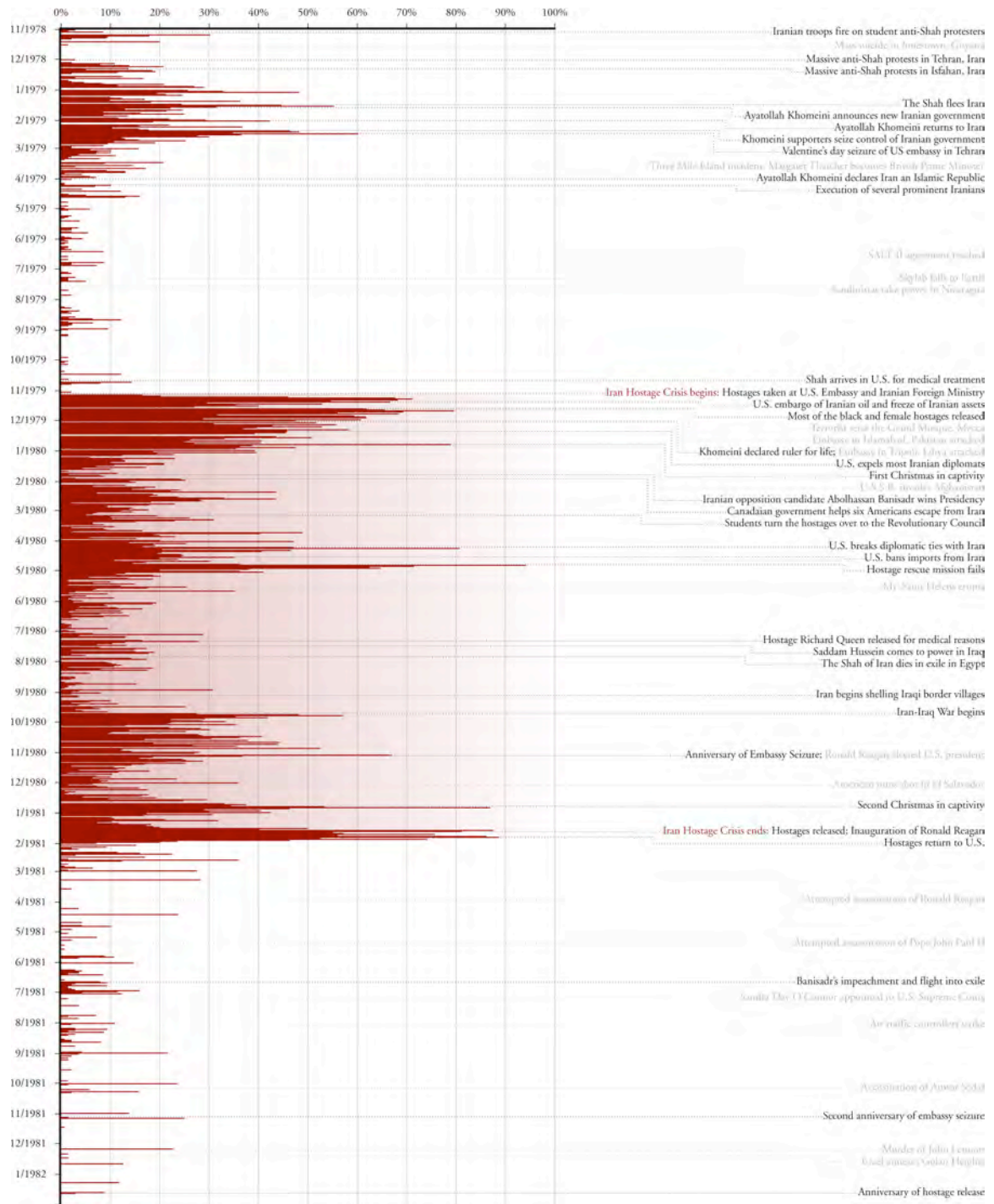


figure 3.2

CBS EVENING NEWS COVERAGE OF IRAN AND THE IRAN HOSTAGE CRISIS,
NOVEMBER 1978 THROUGH JANUARY 1982,
BY PERCENTAGE OF THE TOTAL NON-COMMERCIAL NEWSWHOLE WITH SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

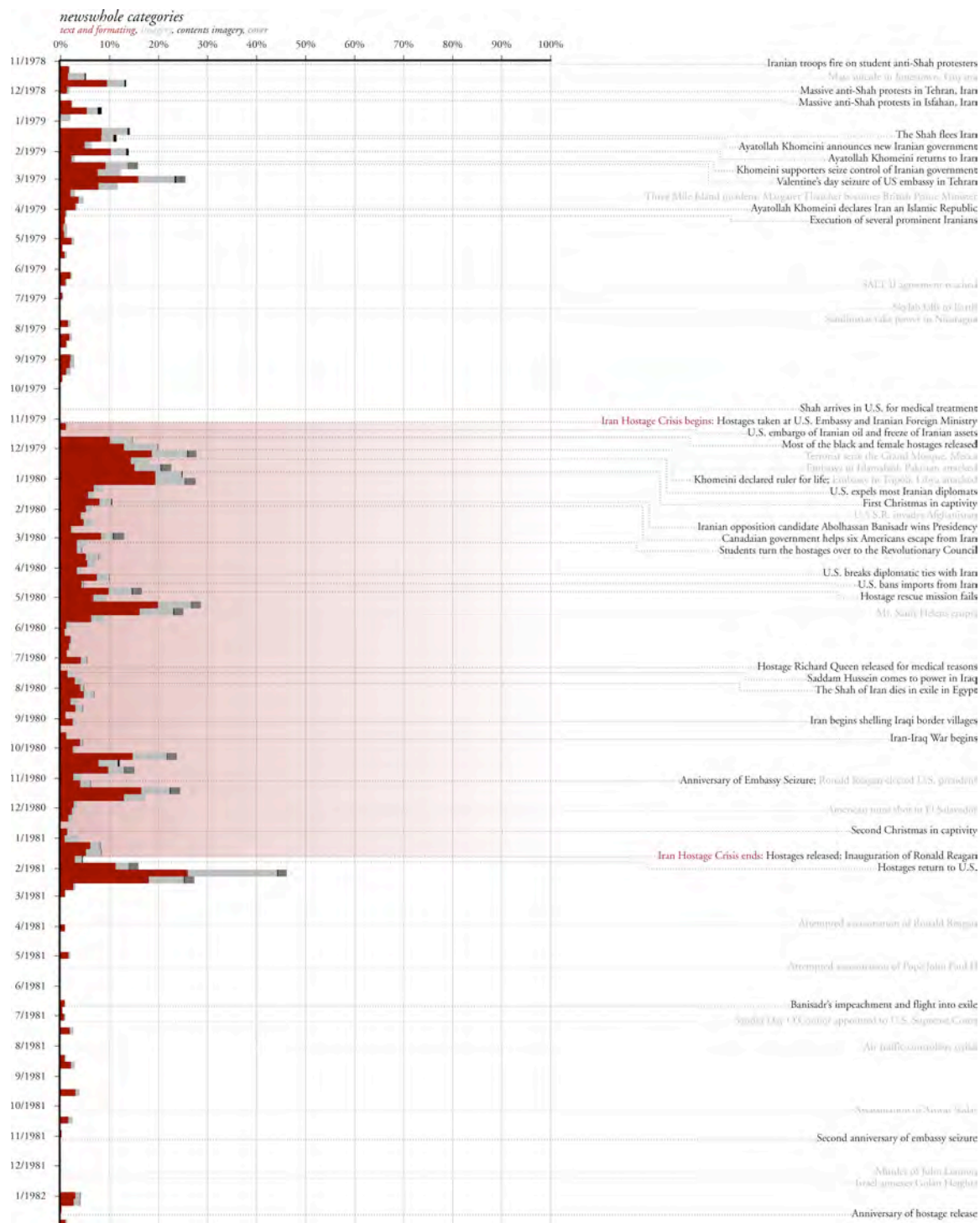


figure 3.3
NEWSWEEK COVERAGE OF IRAN AND THE IRAN HOSTAGE CRISIS,
NOVEMBER 1978 THROUGH JANUARY 1982,
BY PERCENTAGE OF THE TOTAL NON-COMMERCIAL NEWSWHOLE WITH SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

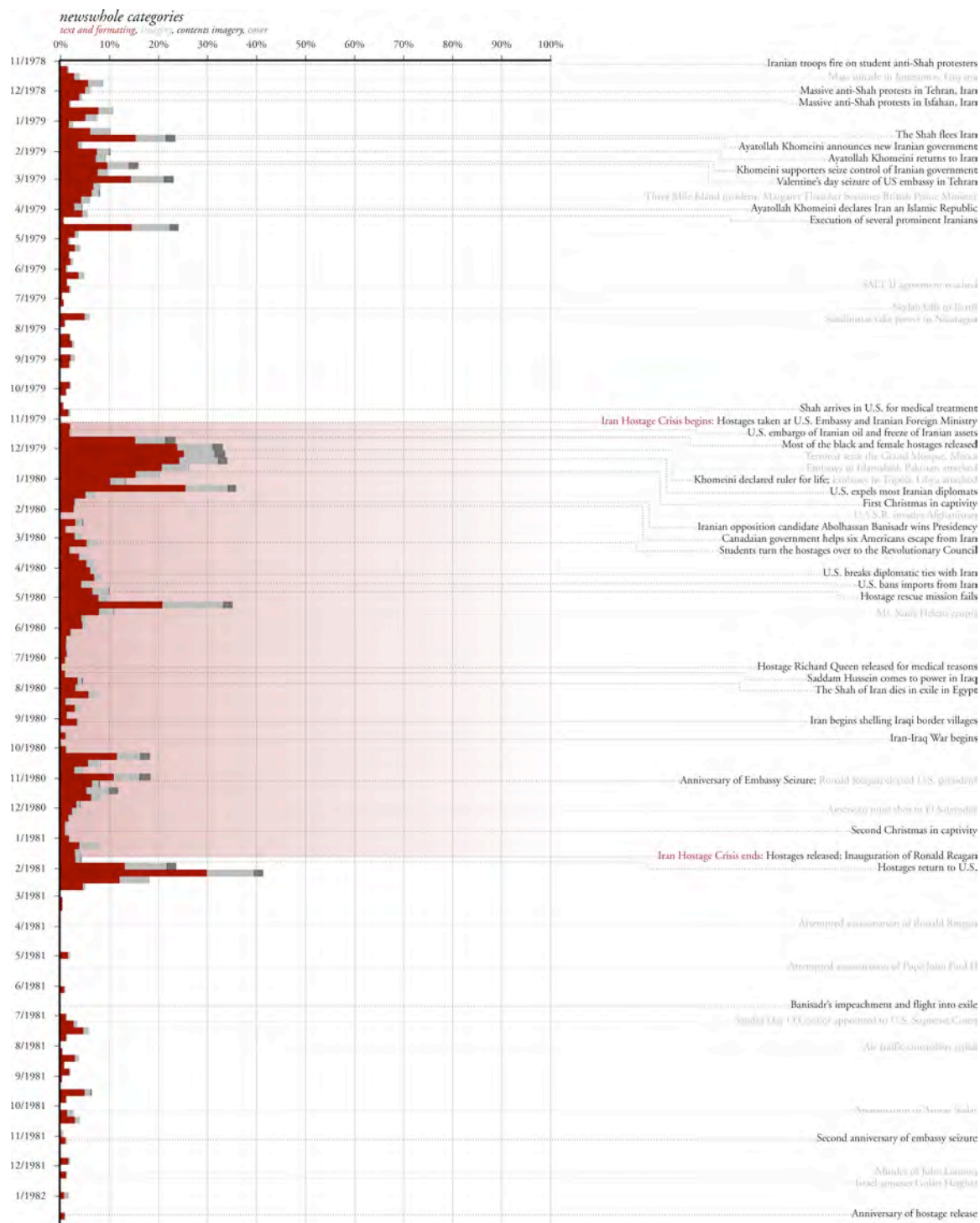


figure 3.4

TIME COVERAGE OF IRAN AND THE IRAN HOSTAGE CRISIS,
NOVEMBER 1978 THROUGH JANUARY 1982,
BY PERCENTAGE OF THE TOTAL NON-COMMERCIAL NEWSWHOLE WITH SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

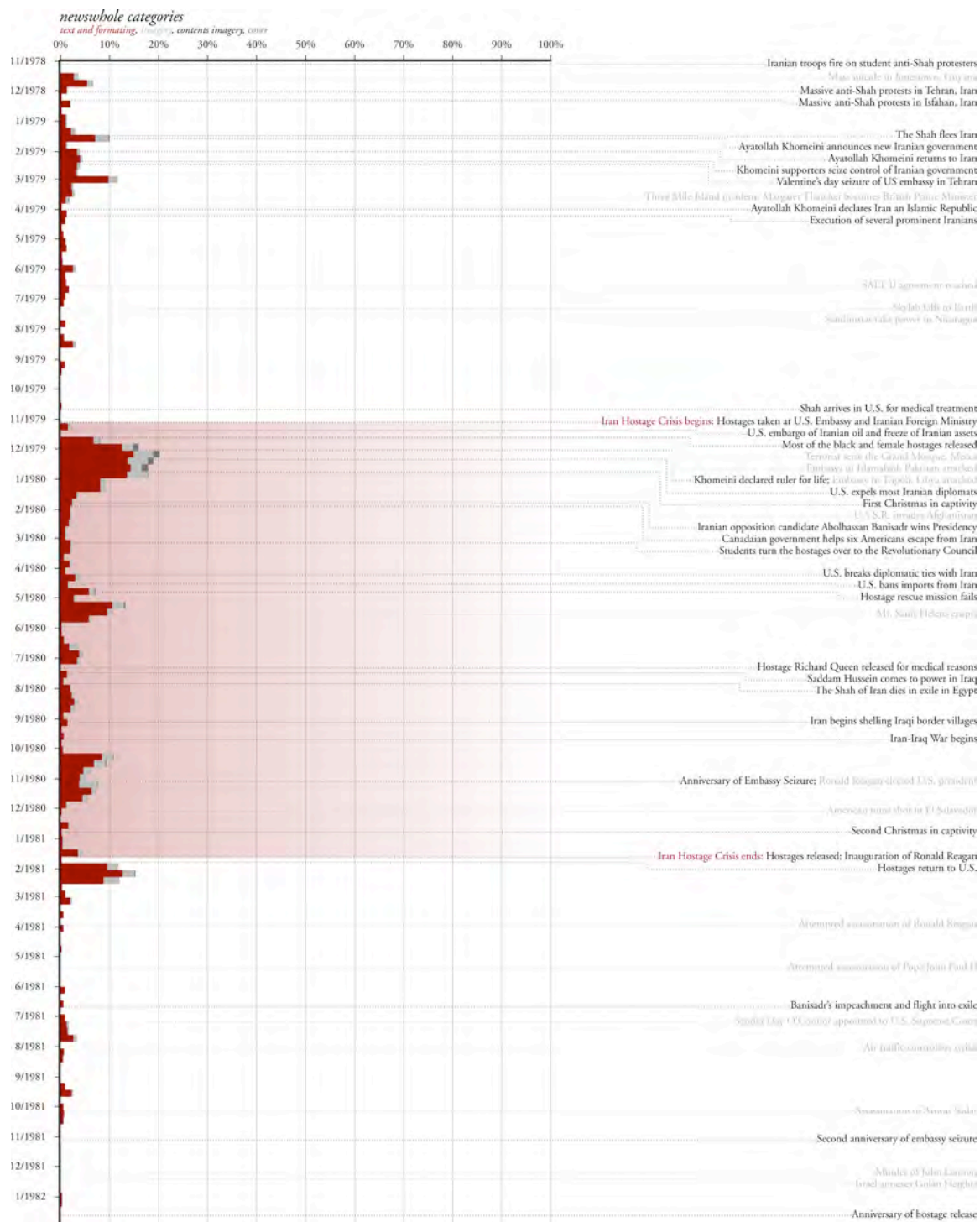


figure 3.5

U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT COVERAGE OF IRAN AND THE IRAN HOSTAGE CRISIS,
 NOVEMBER 1978 THROUGH JANUARY 1982,
 BY PERCENTAGE OF THE TOTAL NON-COMMERCIAL NEWSWHOLE WITH SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

Nor was this coverage isolated – much of it was sustained over consecutive days and weeks. Indeed, over the course of the year leading up to the crisis, 47% of ABC news broadcasts featured stories on Iran – a total of 142 nights and six hours, twelve minutes of aggregate coverage; for CBS, 56% of pre-crisis broadcasts featured news of the Iranian situation or related stories – 193 nights and over seven hours, 55 minutes worth of aggregate coverage.¹⁶ From December 1978 through April 1979, nightly news coverage of Iran even reached sustained levels that matched or exceeded hostage crisis coverage – hardly sparse coverage, as previous historians have indicated.

Content quantification reveals a parallel trend in the mass-market press. *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *U.S. News and World Report* all mirror ABC and CBS' extensive and sustained pre-crisis coverage over the course of the year preceding the embassy seizure (*figures 3.3-3.5*). The news magazines' Iran and hostage crisis coverage never reached the saturation levels experienced by the television press, and the newsweeklies' coverage of events in Iran was a week or two behind television's because of the magazines' slower production and distribution. But the printed media's coverage remained nonetheless significant. During the crisis, for instance, *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *U.S. News and World Report* dedicated 9.2%, 8.8%, and 4.5% of their non-advertising content to the hostage crisis, a commitment of 4.7, 4.4, and 3.7 pages per issue, respectively.¹⁷ But for a year before the hostage drama, the news magazines dedicated a considerable, though smaller, portion of their content to Iran and its related issues: 3.3% of *Newsweek*, approximately 1.7 pages; 4.7% of *Time*, approximately 3.3 pages; and 1.6% of *U.S. News and World Report*, approximately one page per issue.¹⁸

¹⁶ This figure is based upon the 302 nights of ABC *World news Tonight* and 346 nights of CBS *Evening News* recorded in Nashville, TN. During this period, ABC news was typically carried 6 nights a week, sometimes 5. ABC *World News Tonight* and CBS *Evening News*, November 1, 1978 through November 2, 1979. Vanderbilt Television News Archive.

¹⁷ *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *U.S. News and World Report*, November 19, 1979 through February 9, 1982. This period is defined by the magazines' first and final significant responses to event related to the hostage crisis.

¹⁸ *Time* and *Newsweek*, November 6, 1978 through November 12, 1979.

Comparing the percentages of dedicated coverage between television and the periodicals should not, however, lead one to conclude that magazines dedicated less attention to Iran or the later crisis. Rather, television news coverage's excess is a function of its medium. The modern media consumer is accustomed to the instantaneous production of news, both on 24-hour cable news networks and the Internet. And while the former outlet was only emerging and the latter barely nascent in 1980, network news coverage and its spin-offs during the Iran hostage crisis fit the now common role of media as a transmitter of near-instant information. It is in this context of ABC, CBS, and NBC's daily transmission of the crisis into American homes, then, that the slower medium of the magazine proves its worth. The broadcast media's emphasis on speed of reporting conflicted with its desire to offer sophisticated verbal explanation and analysis – hallmarks of good reporting.¹⁹

Thus, while the broadcast media was able to react more quickly, transmitting news into American homes almost as soon as it happened, the magazines' slower format allowed them to place the news into a larger and less urgent context. The newsweeklies, therefore, present the first concerned effort to organize the crush of events by their significance and their meaning. This is the context in which Philip L. Graham's famous description of the weekly news is meant to be understood – the magazine as “a first rough draft of history.”²⁰ And while the newsweeklies demonstrated their topical parity with the networks in their shared emphasis on the return of Khomeini and the Valentine's day hostage crisis, *Time* further demonstrates the tendency of magazines to situate topics in a larger context with two of its pre-crisis cover stories, “The Crescent of Crisis” and “The World of Islam.”

Just as news stories carried at the top of a television broadcast are more likely to reach their target audience, and indicate the importance of that story to the program's

¹⁹ George Gerber, “Instant History, Image History: Lessons from the Persian Gulf War,” in *Images in Language, media, and Mind*, Roy F. Fox, ed (Urbana, IL: National Councils of Teachers of English, 1994), 125.

²⁰ Graham, Bartleby.com.

editors, so too does the appearance of an article on a magazine's cover indicate both its importance to the producing staff and its imagined importance to the readership. With these two *Time* cover stories, Iran was thrust into a lofty editorial position. "The Crescent of Crisis" situates the turmoil in Iran, shortly after the departure of the shah, into the context of wider regional disorder. Iran became a lens by which troubles in Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Egypt all became relevant. The issue even contextualized Iranian demonstrations in Beverly Hills into this Islamic "crescent of crisis."²¹

But, more dramatically, *Time*'s April 1979 cover story "The World of Islam" used Iran as the entry point into an exploration of Islamic militancy throughout the Muslim world, revealing the power of images and demonstrating even older American perceptions than those forged in the pre-crisis epoch. Starting at the cover (*figure 3.6*), *Time* situated Islam in the romantic past, placing alongside the teasing headline "Islam: a Militant Revival" the image of a turbaned *muezzin* calling the faithful to prayer from atop a high minaret.²²

Behind him sprawled a dusty, desert city littered with spires, an image designed to represent Baghdad, Damascus, Cairo, Islamabad, or Tehran – equally ill-suited to all of these modern cities. For all its talk of Islamic militancy, the article relied instead on images of ordinary Muslims and their places of worship from across the Islamic world, including the Sacred Mosque in Mecca. On almost every spread of this special section of the magazine – eight times, in total – *Time* reinforced the antiquity and exotic nature of Islam



figure 3.6
THE WORLD OF ISLAM

²¹ "The Crescent of Crisis" *Time* (January 15, 1979), 18-25.

²² A *Muezzin* is a chosen person operating from a mosque who leads the call to prayer five times daily, typically from the top of a minaret, often with the aid of electronic amplification.

with an oriental graphic that subsumed Arabic with Latin characteristics.²³ It was even used, and not without irony, in conjunction with an article on *Orientalism* by Edward Said. The device's exoticism was a component of the whole article, extending from the use of traditional and religious images at the expense of images of the more modern Muslim World. In the case of Iran, previous issues of *Time* had shown the modern and politically vibrant streets of Tehran, the sophisticated oil industry of the Gulf, and the Iranian military equipped with cutting-edge American-made weapons. But in the context of Islam, Iran's militant fervor became an ancient trend, tied inextricably to the otherwise peaceful *hajj*²⁴ or images of the angel Gabriel. It became not the political ideology of Khomeini and the mullahs, but of all Muslims, from China to Nigeria with little distinction made between various ethnic, national, and sectarian differences.²⁵

These cover stories were only part of a trend. In the year before the Iran hostage crisis, Iran and its related topics appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine as the principal story four times, as a inset story six times, on the cover of *Newsweek* four times, and as a secondary story on the cover of *U.S. News and World Report* five times.²⁶ In the case of *Newsweek* and *Time*, Iran was the most common cover story or partial cover story over the course of the pre-crisis year – only inflation, the energy crisis, Mideast peace, China, and the coming 1980 elections ranking three or more cover appearances apiece.

²³ The issue of Latin or Western typographic manipulation of Arabic, both for good and for ill, is largely an issue of visualization limited to the subfield of typography. An excellent analysis of trends in Arabic design by Westerners, and the pitfall that many designer fall victim to, can be seen in Mourad Boutros, *Arabic for Designers* (New York: Mary Batty, 2005) and information about Arabic typographic can be found in Huda Smitshuijzen AbiFares, *Arabic Typography: A Comprehensive Sourcebook* (London: Saqi Books, 2001).

²⁴ *Hajj*, literally pilgrimage in Arabic, is typically understood as the pilgrimage to Mecca, which Muslims are encouraged to make at least once in their lives.

²⁵ "The World of Islam" *Time* (April 16, 1979), 40-52.

²⁶ The four times Iran was on the cover of *Newsweek* were November 20, 1978; January 1, February 12 and 26, 1979. The four times Iran and its related stories took prominence on the cover of *Time* in this period were January 15, February 12 and 26, and April 16, 1979. The six times that Iran appeared in the inset position, in the top corner of *Time's* cover, were November 20, December 12, 1978; January 8 and 29, February 5, and March 12, 1979. The five times Iran was on the cover of *U.S. News and World Report* were November 20, 1978; January 8 and 15, February 26, March 19, and November 19, 1979.

Much of the newsweeklies pre-crisis coverage greatly oversimplified the complexities of Iranian domestic politics and culture – another trend that would persist into crisis-era coverage. In early 1978, *Newsweek*, despite having previously discerned the connection between urban liberals and conservative Muslims among dissident groups, could only describe the anti-shah moment as a Mullah-led religious opposition to land reform, liquor sales, and movie theaters. In September 1978, *Time* defined the revolution's motivating force as "Islamic Puritanism [sic]" reacting violently to the shah's "vigorous modernization campaign." Iranian revolutionaries attributed *Time's* critical coverage of the revolution to its alleged receipt of millions of dollars from the shah and the Iranian Oil Company since 1953 – an accusation that may have been encouraged by the shah's pre-revolution practice of placing ads in American publications as part of his international PR campaign.²⁷

Newsweekly coverage in the year preceding the hostage crisis also failed to connect the U.S. to Iranian anger regarding the shah. Even when covering the Valentine's hostage crisis, the U.S. media failed to explain that most Iranians saw the shah's defense programs, his industrial and economic reforms, and his oil policy as faithful executions of U.S. policy. Nor did pre-crisis coverage mention or visually demonstrate that ubiquity of Iranian graffiti demanding the death of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the "American shah."²⁸

In *Newsweek's* November 6 interview with Khomeini, the press began to associate Khomeini as the leader of the revolution, subsuming the widespread popular movement into the will of one religious exile.²⁹ This emphasis on Khomeini and his ilk, focused on anti-modern and backward-looking revolutionary motives among the powerful Shī'a clergy led by the exiled ayatollah, marginalized the legitimate complaints many Iranians held against the

²⁷ Rubin, *Paved with Good Intentions*, 340, 342, 355.

²⁸ Richard Cottam, "Goodbye the America's Shah," *Foreign Policy* 34 (Spring 1979) cited in Mark J. Gasiorowski, *U.S. Foreign Policy and the Shah: Building a Client State in Iran* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), x.

²⁹ Dorman and Farhang, *The U.S. Press and Iran*, 160-1.

Shah's regime.³⁰ It also played into the carefully crafted media image Khomeini and his Paris brain trust – including exiled Islamist Abolhassan Banisadr and Sadegh Ghotbzadeh – created to make the ayatollah attractive to revolutionary liberals, leftists, and conservatives.³¹ Most importantly, it set the precedent by which crisis-era misunderstandings and conflations of Islam and militancy inside and outside Iran would be based.

The newsweeklies' pre-crisis photographic coverage reflected this simplistic textual emphasis on Khomeini's Islamic cause. A quantitative analysis of photographs by size and subject (*figures 3.7-9*) reveals that all three newsweeklies focused on the revolutionary demonstrators, the ayatollah, and the shah almost exclusively – *Newsweek* and *Time* each dedicated 25% of their pre-crisis photographic coverage of Iran to generic scenes of angry demonstrators – *U.S. News and World Report*, 14% – often with little or no indication of their goals or grievances. Such coverage led U.S. media consumers to believe that the revolution was one of ongoing violence in the streets, with little distinction between the tactics of the revolutionaries or the government. But most of the revolution's violence – except for the few days surrounding the actual collapse of the regime in early 1979 – was isolated and small in scale.³²

Likewise, all three magazines featured the ayatollah and the shah prominently in their coverage, juxtaposing regal images of the Iranian monarch opposite scowling, sinister images of the aging imam. Images of the shah's flight and Khomeini's return illustrate the media's sympathy for the shah. The deposed monarch is depicted as a noble yet sorrowful man surrounded at his departure by loyal devotees while the ayatollah's return to Iran, days later, is framed by scenes of mob action and radicalism balancing on the verge of violence.

³⁰ Dorman and Farhang, *The U.S. Press and Iran*, 5.

³¹ David Harris, *The Crisis: The President, the Prophet, and the Shah—1979 and the Coming of Militant Islam* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2004), 109, 127.

³² Dorman and Farhang, *The U.S. Press and Iran*, 155.

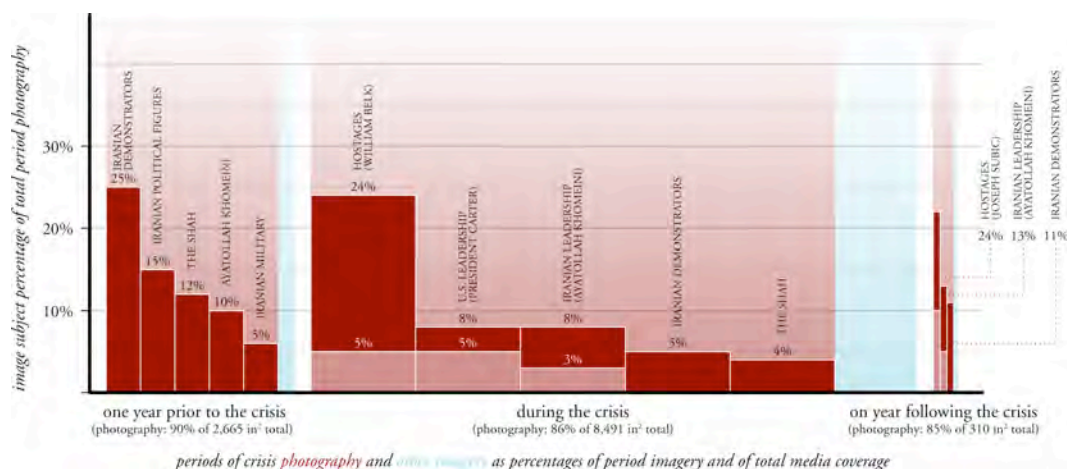


figure 3.7

NEWSWEEK PHOTOGRAPHIC SUBJECTS BY PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL PHOTOGRAPHIC AREA

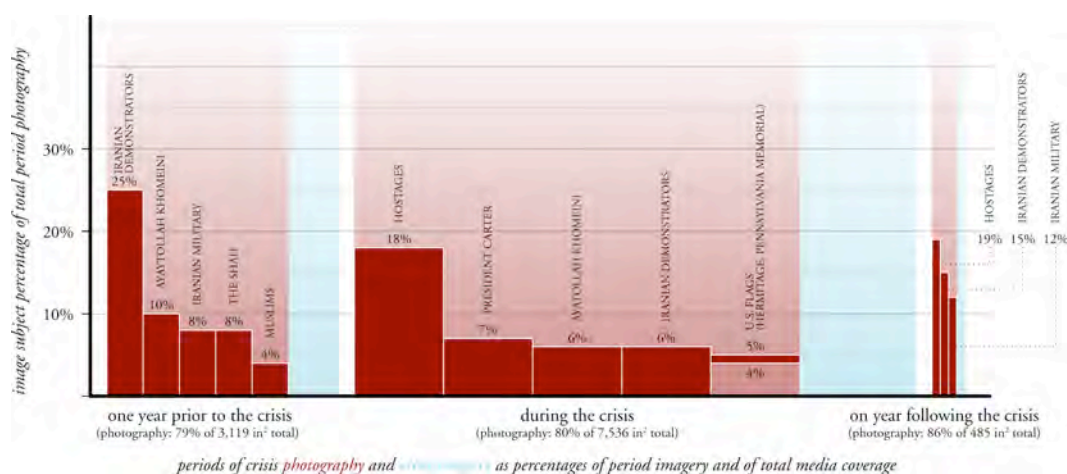


figure 3.8

TIME PHOTOGRAPHIC SUBJECTS BY PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL PHOTOGRAPHIC AREA

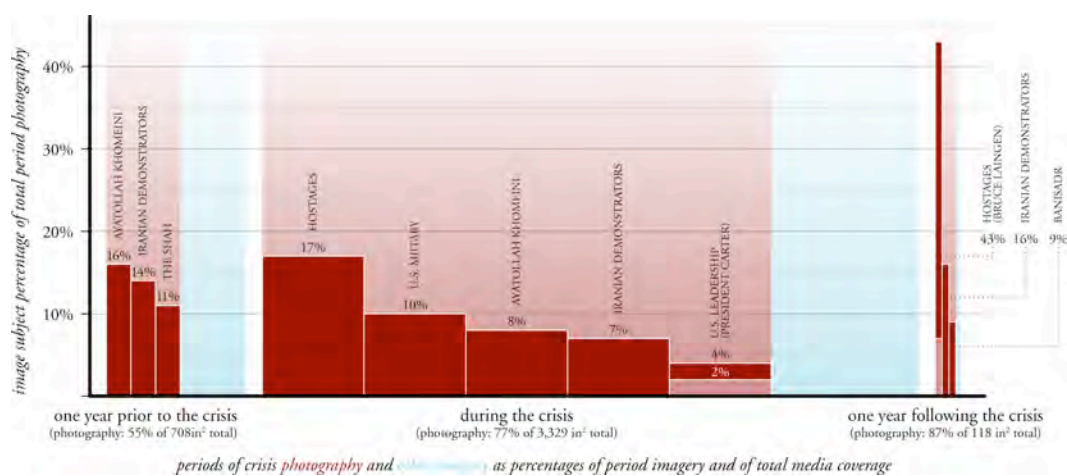


figure 3.9

US.NEWS PHOTOGRAPHIC SUBJECTS BY PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL PHOTOGRAPHIC AREA

Few images of the shah's soldiers suppressing the demonstrators or explanations of the various political groups round out this simple visual rhetoric.

That no other story dominated *Newsweek* and *Time* in the pre-crisis period should, alone, quell the myth that the American media was silent on Iran prior to the taking of the hostages. For at least a year images of Iranian demonstrators, the triumphant Ayatollah Khomeini, and the exiled, jet-setting shah filled the pages of the nation's most popular news magazines. But if no other evidence were available, *Newsweek's* February 26, 1979 cover story would suffice to demonstrate the communication of Iran as a potential American enemy.

On Valentine's Day, 1979, Iranian militants seized the U.S. embassy in Tehran, the very same embassy around which the later Iranian hostage crisis would revolve. Hundreds of Americans and Iranian embassy staff were taken hostage, held at gunpoint, and paraded in front of the cameras in an eerie prophecy of the crisis-to-come. Indeed, even the language of the article, with its emphasis on America as a helpless giant, presaged the later crisis. Although this Valentine's day attack was resolved in less than a day – ironically, at Khomeini's insistence – its presence on *Newsweek's* cover and the parallel coverage in *Time* and on television attests to Iran's threatening presence in the American cultural dialogue.

This high level of pre-crisis coverage is surprising not because the American media chose to focus on the overthrow of one of the U.S.'s most important cold war allies, but rather because so much literature concerning the Iran hostage crisis neglects this period. Even contemporary criticism of crisis coverage, such as that voiced by Said in his 1981 *Covering Islam*, fails to recognize this trend, sarcastically asking, "Were there no events taking place in Iran *before* the embassy takeover that might illuminate things?" The answer is a resounding *yes* – the proof laying in the contemporary mass-market literature.³³

³³ Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 104.

[WILLIAM BELK AND THE AYATOLLAH KHOMEINI: IRAN HOSTAGE CRISIS VISUAL NARRATIVES]

In order to attract an audience, media outlets look for “dramatic, conflictual stories of interest to the entire nation that can be illustrated vividly with good pictures of action footage, possessed easily recognizable images, simple themes, a plot with two opposing sides.” A story has added appeal if it involves a large nation, the president, or a well-known group or individual; if there was some practical predictability of locales and sources; if it is psychologically close to its target American audience, either affecting large numbers of that audience directly or through some self-perceived connection; and if it conforms to pre-existing ideas of the world, making it simple to understand.³⁴ The Iran hostage crisis possessed all of these characteristics. Additionally, the crisis fits the mold of a *terrorist spectacular* – an extraordinary terrorist event designed to exploit the media by 1) responding to political developments or historically significant dates; 2) targeting locations or people with ready access for the media; 3) affecting a large enough, or elite enough, population to warrant mass media coverage.³⁵ Crisis-era news broadcasts and magazine reports introduced Americans to a world of angry street protests, flag burnings, tearful families scattered across the nation, a concerned president dedicated to the release of the hostages, and endless anger directed toward Iranian militants.³⁶ And for more than fourteen months the public grappled, often poorly, to contextualize a series of events and an alien rationale as difficult to understand as it was sensational.³⁷

Coverage of the Iran hostage crisis was overwhelming (*figures 3.1-5*), sometimes surpassing media coverage of the Vietnam War. Previous scholarship estimates that 20% of

³⁴ William Adams and Phillip Heyl, “From Cairo to Kabul with the Networks, 1972-1980” in William C. Adams, ed., *Television Coverage of the Middle East* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing, 1981), 30; W. Phillips Davidson, Donald R. Shanor and Frederick T.C. Yu, *News From Abroad and the Foreign Policy Public* (New York: Foreign Policy Association, 1980), 5-6.

³⁵ Richard W. Schaffert, *Media Coverage and Political Terrorists: A Quantitative Analysis* (New York: Praeger, 1992), 69-70.

³⁶ McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 198-206.

³⁷ McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 198-206. 208-209. The image of hostage Jerry Miele, discussed below was used iconically on a daily basis to symbolize the crisis.

news broadcasts, 4.1 minutes of each ABC news episode, were dedicated to the crisis in Iran.³⁸ Previous studies also show that television coverage of the crisis was comparable to network reporting of the Vietnam War. In 1972, with 150,000 American troops in Vietnam, CBS dedicated 1,092 minutes of airtime to the war and, between November 1979 and November 1980, the same network dedicated 1,026 minutes of coverage to the Iran hostage crisis.³⁹ Indeed, this study finds crisis-related news coverage in excess of these findings. A quantitative analysis of ABC's coverage reveals that, during the crisis, the network devoted an average of 23.5%, or 5.3 minutes of its average 22-minute broadcast newswatch, to the national drama.⁴⁰ This analysis also finds hostage crisis media saturation at even greater levels than previously argued. Over the duration of the hostage crisis story – from the seizure of the embassy to the hostages' release – ABC *World News Tonight* dedicated 1,883 minutes, and CBS *Evening News* dedicated 2,006 minutes, to Iran and the ongoing crisis. Likewise, the newsweeklies dedicated the lion share of their coverage to the crisis: Over the course of 65 weekly issues, *Newsweek* gave the hostage drama 307 total pages, including 86 pages of photography and other imagery. *Time* devoted 290 pages, with 44 pages of imagery, and *U.S. News and World Report* allocated 176 pages, 35 of images, to the situation in Iran.

Conventional wisdom holds that the narrative of the Iran hostage crisis was one of humanity and captivity – this study takes no issue with this general theme of the crisis. But the hostages were not available to contemporary photographers. The hostages were instead relegated to the arena of illustrators, vintage photographs and, more often, absence. Indeed, it is not until the end of the captivity – the eve and aftermath of the hostages' release – that

³⁸ McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 198-206 and Hamid Naficy, "Mediating the Other," in *The Making of Exile Cultures: Iranian Television in Los Angeles* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 78.

³⁹ Adams and Heyl, "From Cairo to Kabul," 26

⁴⁰ Vanderbilt Television News Archive. Nashville, TN: Television News Archive, Vanderbilt University, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/> (accessed September, October 2006). This and subsequent quantifications of television coverage of Iran and the hostage crisis are based on the archived nightly news summaries in the Vanderbilt Television News Archive, an extensive database of the news media from August 1968 to the present.

imagery of the hostages sweeps in to dominate the visual narrative. With the rare exception of a burst of images such as those at Christmas and such as those leaked by the student-terrorists to the German magazine *Stern* and run in *Time* alongside images of the failed April 1980 rescue attempt, the hostages are surprisingly absent from the periodicals visual record.

But if hostage images were not always available to news magazines, what other images typified the Iran hostage crisis in *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *U.S. News and World Report*? Magazine photographers and television film crews frequently targeted hostage families, especially as the crisis wound down to its emotional conclusion. The attention these families received was disproportionate to their small numbers. But for the majority of the hostage crisis, and the period preceding it, coverage of Iran was dominated by images of demonstrators in the streets, the Ayatollah Khomeini, and President Carter.

Images of the Iranian mob (*figure 3.10*⁴¹) were critical to the formation of American perceptions of the Iranian revolution and the Iranian people. Before and during the hostage crisis, the American press often characterized the omnipresent Iranian mob, a routine and organized mass demonstration staged for the benefit of the press, as fundamentally different from its American analogues. This is particularly the case in media juxtapositions of Islamic Iran



figure 3.10
IRANIAN DEMONSTRATORS IN TEHRAN
AND BEVERLEY HILLS

⁴¹ Photos: Kaveh Golestan. "Angry Attacks on America" *Time* (December 3, 1979) 25; Julian Wasser. "In the U.S., Too" *Time* (January 15, 1979). 28.

with Christian America.⁴² *Time* repeatedly used these “mobs” to contrast the rational, Christian U.S. with a deranged Islam.⁴³ *ABC*’s coverage of comparable American demonstrations exaggerated America’s fundamental peacefulness, reason, and reverence in opposition to Iranian anarchy and susceptibility to propaganda.⁴⁴ While images of violent Iranian demonstrations were the meat and potatoes of crisis coverage, images of anti-Iranian protests in the U.S. were scarce to the point of irrelevance in all three newsweeklies; *Time* and *Newsweek* featured only three and five images of anti-Iranian American demonstrations alongside 86 and 54 pictures of violent or anti-American Iranian demonstrations, respectively.⁴⁵

Another disparity in the magazine press’s coverage of Iranian demonstrations is the conflicting image of massive spontaneous demonstrations with the reality that many of these demonstrations were small, staged, and well-organized propaganda events. Indeed, of all the news magazines’ photographs of Iranian demonstrations throughout the crisis, none depict the organizing mechanics behind the scenes. It was left to editorial cartoons and textual reportage to describe the artificial quality of many of these demonstrations. *Newsweek*, for example, featured a *Washington Post* illustration of a U.S. television crew setting up their camera film while a mob of Iranian extras responded to a “Ministry of Demonstrator” director’s instruction, “I know you’re all tired, but let’s shake those fists again, and don’t burn today’s Uncle Sam effigy till the cameras roll — Okay — Action.”⁴⁶ But the American public failed to appreciate the fact that many of these demonstrations were performed

⁴² McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 210-1.

⁴³ Catherine Scott, “Bound for Glory: The Hostage Crisis as Captivity Narrative in Iran,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (March, 2000), 182.

⁴⁴ McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 212.

⁴⁵ The figure, as dramatic as it is, does not include more abstract images of flag burning or Iranian militants with US hostages, images equally damning.

⁴⁶ “TV: Held Hostage?” *Newsweek* (December, 24, 1979), 27.

expressly for the benefit of international reporters.⁴⁷ The implicit phoniness of the demonstrations frustrated journalists and photographers who saw their work transformed into “staged propaganda, cynical theater designed to reach the widest unfiltered audience.”⁴⁸ The American audience was left with no other conclusion than to interpret the omnipresent and generic images of the violent and angry mob as the natural condition of most Iranians. Footage and images of Iranians going about their daily routines of working, raising families, grocery shopping, and socializing were nonexistent alongside images of riotous mobs clamoring against the gates of the seized embassy.⁴⁹

A component of this myopic presentation of Iranian demonstrators was the media’s depiction of Iranian labor. Contemporary Polish labor leaders and strikers received sympathetic coverage from the newsweeklies as they stood up to the Soviet Union in 1981. But Iranian workers received textual and photographic condemnation when they went on strike in 1978 and 1979 – Iranians remained inhuman, their motives religious, the striking laborers unlauded, while Polish workers fighting an analogous battle for their rights against threats of martial reprisals were routinely shown heroically and in intimate detail. Polish leader Lech Walesa was even named *Time’s* man of the year while Iranian labor advocates were often shown with images of the reviled ayatollah – the imam’s image reason enough to condemn Iranian labor.

As *Time* conflated Iranian militancy with the larger Muslim world in its pre-crisis exposés, “Crescent of Crisis” and “World of Islam,” so too did the American public conflate the violence apparent in Iranian demonstrations with the rest of the Muslim world. Polls reveal a conflation of public attitudes about Iran and the Muslim world at large – a Persian-

⁴⁷ Beeman, *The “Great Satan” vs the “Mad Mullahs,”* 179.

⁴⁸ Patricia A. Karl, “In the Middle in the Middle East: The Media and U.S. Foreign Policy” in Edmund Ghareeb, *Split Vision: The Portrayal of Arabs in the American Media* (Washington, DC: American-Arab Affairs Council, 1983), 287.

⁴⁹ David Altheide, “Iran vs. US TV News: The Hostage Story Out of Context” in William C. Adams, ed., *Television Coverage of the Middle East* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing, 1981), 149.

Arab confusion that persists at the time of this writing.⁵⁰ Shortly after the capture of the Tehran Embassy, a surprising 74% of Americans polled acknowledged that they would favor the removal of essential U.S. government personnel from the embassies in all Muslim countries, even those antagonistic to Iran.⁵¹

The newsweeklies contributed to this association of Islam and violence throughout the crisis with articles and images depicting massive protests, flagellants, violent demonstrators in the shadows of minarets, and the ayatollah's revolutionary leadership holding court under the magnificent arches of Qom. Revolutionaries used religious institutions – they used the Shī'a infrastructure as a government within a government – but media coverage of the wider Muslim world, and the press's failure to distinguish between religious and non-religious elements among Iranian dissidents, poorly prepared the American public to interpret hostage-crisis images of Islam and Shī'a militancy. American attitudes toward Islam in the first years of this clash of civilizations were framed by a series of specific issues that involved Muslims but which were not fundamentally religious in their content. The resulting stereotypes were transferred to the dominant religion of Arab and Iranian communities. Many factors contributed to the formation and preservation of these stereotypes: the absence of Muslim civilizations from world history curriculums, the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict, the oil crisis, historical relations between Occident and Orient –

⁵⁰ Among pop-culture examples of Arab-Persian confusion, there is perhaps no better example than the Clash's popular song "Rock the Casbah," a song inspired by the Ayatollah's banning of rock and roll music in revolutionary Iran. References in the song confuses its Persian-themed story of a king and his people rebelling against the fatwah with a laundry list of cultures and terms, including Indian "ragas;" Arab "sheiks," muezzins, "shareefs," "casbahs," "bedouins," and Jewish "kosher," and "temples."

⁵¹ It is uncertain how respondents to this poll reacted to the contemporary attack on the U.S. embassy in Pakistan. These results are in response to the survey question: "As a result of what has happened in Iran (the hostage crisis), would you favor or oppose the U.S.... Removing all but essential personnel from embassies in Moslem countries?" Conducted by ABC News/Louis Harris and Associates, November 26-November 29, 1979 and based on telephone interviews with a national adult sample of 1,496. Retrieved April 16, 2006 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut. <<http://www.ropocenter.uconn.edu.proxy-remote.galib.uga.edu:2048/ipoll.html>>. For more on the problem of conflating Islam and militancy, see Edmind Ghreeb, ed., *Split Vision: The Portrayal of Arabs in the American Media* (Washington D.C.: American-Arab Affairs Council, 1983); William C. Adams, ed. *Television Coverage of the Middle East* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing, 1981).

however poorly they may have been understood – and the Iran hostage crisis. And it is only at the onset of this crisis that the press made its first feeble attempts to educate Americans about Islamic history, tenets, and schisms.⁵² In particular, journalists' attempts to describe the distinction between Sunni and Shī'a Islam were infrequent and too late. Pre-crisis coverage had long since established Iranian Islamic militancy in the mind of the American public and contributed to the formation of confused national and ethnic stereotypes.

Khomeini's image is significant in two important respects: intensity and consistency. Images of the ayatollah dominated coverage of Iran even before his triumphant return in February 1979. In that period, both *Newsweek* and *Time* featured the aged revolutionary on their covers and during the thick of the hostage crisis, *Time* named Khomeini "Man of the Year." At the same time, images of the ayatollah remained remarkably consistent, likely the result of a combination of Khomeini's control over photographers' access to him and the press's nationalist biases exaggerated by the international crisis.⁵³ The image of the imam communicated to the public is one of a serious, passionate, and pious man whose image was both grave and terrible. The entire corpus of photographs and illustrations in these magazines is one of a sinister figure that has more in common with Darth Vader than Mohammad. Media representations of Khomeini are typified nowhere better than by Daniel Maffia's November 26, 1979 cover illustration for *Time*, (figure 3.11) juxtaposing a yellow-eyed, gray-skinned



figure 3.11
THE AYATOLLAH & THE PRESIDENT

⁵² Fred R. von der Mehden, "American Perceptions of Islam," in John L. Esposito, ed., *Voices of Resurgent Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 18, 25-6.

⁵³ Altheide, "Iran vs. US TV News," 147.

Khomeini with a photograph of a thoughtful, vibrant President Carter.⁵⁴ This criticism of news magazine visual coverage of Khomeini is not meant to exonerate the ayatollah – he remained throughout the revolution and the crisis a figure of profound danger to the hostages, the West, American allies in the Middle East, and the liberal ambitions of many Iranian revolutionaries. This criticism is merely meant to demonstrate how, despite Khomeini's dangerous fanaticism and Islamist ideology, the press often used visual techniques to make the ayatollah even more sinister than he already was.

Khomeini's image is also exemplary of a general trend in *Time's* visualization of the crisis. Quantification of *Newsweek* and *Time's* visuals (figure 3.7-9) indicate that while the hostages were the single largest visual subject of crisis coverage, the crisis's political drama equaled or outweighed the hostages' human drama. This was especially true of *U.S. News and World Report* (figure 3.9), which, true to its serious policy theme, featured the lowest total area and relative percentage of hostage images. In photography the dominant vision of the hostage crisis was the political drama of President Carter versus the ayatollah and their rotating cadre of associates – most frequently Prime Minister Banisadr, Foreign Minister Ghotbzadeh, Secretary of States Cyrus Vance, and Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher – with the shah floating in the diplomatic ether between them. In *Newsweek*, for instance, the hostages accounted for a plurality of 25% of the visual area but the aggregate of Khomeini, the shah, and President Carter kept pace with 20% of the coverage – 25% when Banisadr and other Iranian political leaders are added to the mix. In *U.S. News and World Report*, the combination of the ayatollah, U.S. leadership, and the U.S. military outweighed hostage photography 22% to 17%.

The frequency of Khomeini's picture in the newsweekly press must be balanced against his comparatively infrequent citation in the text. While much is said of Khomeini,

⁵⁴ *Time* (November 26, 1979), cover.

rarely did he say anything in newsweekly articles; more often the Iranian government was represented by a small number of English-speaking agents, including Banisadr and Ghotbzadeh. Thus many of Khomeini's speeches and public statements, such as his November 12, 1979 address to the papal nuncio explaining the grievances of the Iranian people and justifying the seizure of the embassy, or his March 21, 1980 New Year's message reminding Iranians that they "are at war with international communism no less than we are struggling against the global plunderers of the West, headed by America, Zionism, and Israel" went unreported.⁵⁵

Images of President Jimmy Carter and the exiled shah were the polar opposite of that of the ayatollah and his cadre. The shah received generally favorable coverage on television, following the trend in reporting the shah established long before the revolution and his flight from Iran.⁵⁶ Newsweekly coverage of the shah was equally superficial, often describing him in tragic euphemisms such as "The Man Who Meant Well."⁵⁷

The news magazines only strayed into criticism occasionally, dedicating only a handful of pages and even fewer images to questioning the shah's record before his flight into exile – *Newsweek* and *Time*, for instance, featured 43 and 50 images of the shah, respectively, but only one image of SAVAK torture devices, each. Thus, the shah's image remained throughout the crisis that of a noble and legitimate modernist monarch, unblemished and impeccable (*figure 3.12*⁵⁸). He was frequently depicted in uniform and often on



figure 3.12
THE SHAH OF IRAN

⁵⁵ Imam Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution*, trans. Hamid Algar (London: Kagan Paul, 2002), 278-86.

⁵⁶ Altheide, "Iran vs. US TV News," 138.

⁵⁷ "The Man Who Meant Well," *Newsweek* (August 4, 1980), 41-2.

⁵⁸ Photo: Eddie Adams. "Nobody Influences Me!" *Time* (December 10, 1979), 28.

his throne. Indeed, despite periodic images of the shah in exile, the most common images of the deposed monarch remained those of his time on the throne and at his royal funeral in Cairo. Likewise, despite criticisms of Carter's leadership during the crisis, images of the president were almost always thoughtful or prayerful, emphasizing his constant concern for the hostages even after such concern came to be seen as either hubris or tragic. And rarely did Carter appear, as mentioned above, without the ayatollah, a mob of demonstrators, or the hostages shown alongside, rendering any textual condemnation moot by visual comparison with the Iranian pariahs and the sympathetic captives.

Surprisingly, though, little photographic attention is paid to the hostage takers. While one of the top contributors of photographs to *Time* magazine – by way of the German magazine *Stern* – the Iranian student terrorists appear relatively infrequently. One of the most visible of the student terrorists, Massoumeh Ebtekar – more commonly referred to as Sister Mary – was a nineteen-year old polytechnic sophomore fluent in colloquial American English.⁵⁹ She appeared regularly on television coverage of the hostage crisis but only rarely in the newsweeklies and never as the principal subject of a published photograph.

The newsweeklies' coverage of the crisis also differed from the television networks' reporting in terms of their hostage iconography. Melani McAllister asserts that Jerry Miele, blindfolded and paraded in front of ABC news cameras, became the icon of the Iran hostage crisis.⁶⁰ Yet for all of Miele's iconic dominance on the nightly news, he was not the iconic hostage for the weekly print media. In fact, while images of Jerry Miele remain among the most frequent of all hostages for whom identification is possible – only Richard Queen, released by the Iranians for medical reasons on July 11, 1980, appears as frequently – he did not receive the same iconic treatment in the news magazines. That honor is reserved for William Belk. Like Miele, Belk was paraded for the benefit of the press, blindfolded and

⁵⁹ Harris, *The Crisis*, 236

⁶⁰ McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 208-9.

escorted by militant student-terrorists. But while Miele was filmed for television by ABC hours after the capture of the embassy, *Newsweek's* Reza Deghati photographed Belk only moments after the surrender of the chancery. Belk, as a hostage icon, appeared three times on the cover of *Newsweek* and four times on the cover of *Time* during the course of the crisis (figure 3.13).⁶¹ Most significantly, and warranting the iconic status previously afforded only to Miele, each of these covers made use of the same image – whether a photograph taken by Reza for



figure 3.13
HOSTAGE JERRY MIELE ON TELEVISION;
TIME AND *NEWSWEEK* COVERS FEATURING
WILLIAM BELK

Newsweek or an illustration based on a nearly identical photograph by Burt Silverman – as do numerous other reproductions of the image inside all three news magazines.

Finally, a survey of crisis-era images reveals a surprising photographic phenomenon. Said has famously – or infamously – criticized the Western media's persistent tendency to depict Islam and Middle Eastern peoples in a monolithic, derogatory, and racist manner.⁶²

⁶¹ Belk appeared one the cover of *Newsweek* on February 25, 1980, as the foremost part of a montage on November 10, 1980, and on January 26, 1981. Belk appeared on the cover of *Time* on November 19, 1979 and again as an inset image on December 31, 1979, August 18, 1980, and November 3, 1980. Incidentally, a small picture of Barry Rosen appeared in a montage on the cover of *Time* on November 10, 1980. It is worth noting that *Time's* adapted Reza's photograph into an illustration, to match their established cover style for this period, thus Belk's images are disproportional reduced in the overall measurements of crisis-era photography.

⁶² Said is best known for his concept of *Orientalism*, the intellectual and editorial means by which scholars, imaginative writers, and political officials defined, restructured, and dominated the East while obfuscating the inherent and universal humanity present therein. Orientalists define the Islamic World and Asia as static, backward, unreformable, and inferior – racially and culturally – to the more advanced West. Said's polemic blames colonization and its associated modes of thought for encouraging this uneven comparison, explaining Orientalism in terms of binary opposition and a pervasive post-Napoleonic's state of colonial inequality. The public exchange between Said and Bernard Lewis, a professor of Near Eastern studies at Princeton, debated the merits of Orientalism in numerous academic journals. Indeed, a din of criticism continues to attack Said's thesis as a profoundly flawed account of Western scholarship while Said's supporters continue to contend that

Although images of Iranians protesting in the streets, Khomeini's grave complexion, and blindfolded hostages escorted by rifle-wielding militants certainly evoked Said's negative stereotype, in all three American mass market news magazines these visualizations ran alongside images that challenged Said's criticism. Even as the press transformed Iranians into deranged and dangerous zealots, images of noble, peace-loving Egyptians, characterized by President Anwar Sadat, and images of proud, freedom-loving Afghanis, warring against the common Soviet adversary, littered the pages of *Newsweek*, *Time* and *U.S. News and World Report* (figure 3.14⁶³). The American public's perception of Sadat is striking in its dissimilarity to that of Iran and Khomeini. A May 1981 *U.S. News and World Report* survey found that 39.2% of Americans identified Sadat as their most admired foreign leader, besting British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (29.5%), German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt (12.1%), Polish labor leader Lech Walesa (3.3%) and Pope John Paul II (2.5%).⁶⁴

Additionally, images of Iranian military forces were often juxtaposed with photographs of the Iraqi army. Images of victorious Iraqi troops, capturing Iranian soldiers and bombing Iranian cities, were typically depicted larger, more frequently, and almost always in color. Iraqi forces were also shown moving left-to-right across the page – a direction which the Western eye reads, like it reads text, as progressive and with forward



figure 3.14

IRANIANS, AFGHANIS, AND SADAT FROM *TIME* AND *NEWSWEEK*

Western scholars remain so heavily influenced by Orientalist tradition that they are unable to present a fair and clear image of their subjects. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

⁶³ Photos: AP, "The Long Ordeal of the Hostages", *Time* (January, 26, 1981), 20; Gorgoni, "A Year in a Dark Tunnel", *Newsweek* (December 29, 1980), 30; "Mideast Turmoil (October, 19, 1981), cover.

⁶⁴ "The Foreign Field: Win, Place, and Show," *U.S. News and World Report* (May 18, 1981), 45.

momentum. Thus Saddam Hussein's invasion of Iran can be interpreted on the pages of American news magazines as a form of punitive action by proxy. In the shadow of America's failed rescue and failed diplomacy, Iraq's early success in the Iran-Iraq War offered sympathetic revenge for frustrated American readers. And while no suggestion is made that images of Sadat, the Afghans, or the Iraqis are any more accurate representations of their associated populations than images of the student-terrorists at the Tehran embassy are representative of the Iranian people, they do demonstrate that a larger and more complicated visual dialogue about the Muslim world was ongoing and that competing images of Islamic peoples were present and plentiful in the U.S. press.

[IRAN VANISHES: COVERAGE OF IRAN AFTER THE RETURN OF THE HOSTAGES]

The press's role as a filter for news from Iran, genuine and contrived, was affected by the need to fill airtime with news of the crisis even during the long weeks and months of little discernable activity. Daily progress was often trivial – increasingly so as the crisis became old news. Once the immediate efforts to free the hostages came to no avail, both television and the weekly print news spent countless minutes of airtime and precious pages of newsworld reporting on minutiae: day-to-day status updates, speculation of new developments and diplomatic breakthroughs, the status and health of the Shah, and any word on the condition of the hostages. Often the emphasis rested on the pronouncements of the State Department, Iranian officials, the student-terrorists, the International Court of Justice, and the UN, with little or no outside corroboration.⁶⁵

This pressure to provide daily and photogenic coverage of the continuing crisis created an environment in which networks and newspapers emphasized the short- rather

⁶⁵ Altheide, "Iran vs. US TV News," 131.

than the long-term⁶⁶ and in which out of date images were often used to illustrate what would otherwise be gaps in the photographic reportage. The majority of David Burnett's photographs for *Time* appeared in that magazine during his January through March 1979 tour in Tehran. But for two years after his return to the U.S., a handful of Burnett's photographs were used to illustrate the continuing situation in Iran. Burnett's images of the Ayatollah Khomeini, in particular, appear out of time and sometimes out of context.⁶⁷

Among the stories that struggled to fill this news gap were persistent "October Surprise" editorials. These pieces, based on questionable accounts of pre-election military action to end the hostage crisis, were routinely denied by the White House and subsequently dismissed by many daily media outlets.⁶⁸ But many television programs and publications persisted in publishing these stories, *Newsweek* included.⁶⁹ Such conspiracy stories combined with coverage of Carter's foreign policy failures before and during the hostage crisis and a spike in crisis-related coverage on the eve of the 1980 presidential election, saturating the marketplace with negative images of the president. Overwhelming crisis coverage confronted Carter everywhere he went on the campaign trail, especially when he returned to Washington on November 3.⁷⁰ The inauspicious alignment of the hostage crisis's first anniversary and the 1980 presidential election devastated Carter's chances for re-election. Carter lost the election 51 to 41%, carrying only Georgia, Minnesota and a small handful of other states in a landslide 489-49 electorate vote. Exit polls showed that half of those voting for Reagan voted, more than anything else, against Carter.⁷¹

⁶⁶ Abraham A. Ribicoff, "Lessons and Conclusions" in Warren Christopher, et al., *American Hostages in Iran: The Conduct of a Crisis* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1985), 391.

⁶⁷ Burnett's work appears in *Time's* on January 8, 15, and 29, February 5, 12, 19, and 26, April 2 and 30, June 18, August 6, December 24, 1979; January 7 and may 5, 1980; and January 26, 1981.

⁶⁸ Ribicoff, "Lessons and Conclusions," 164.

⁶⁹ Jody Powell, *The Other Side of the Story* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1984), 268-73.

⁷⁰ Chris Matthews. *The Press and the Presidency*, The Carter Presidency: Lessons for the 21st Century, University of Georgia; Athens, GA, 2007.

⁷¹ Harris, *The Crisis*, 410.

Media coverage spiked again at the end of the crisis as genuine news of the hostages' release flooded the press. The rush of excitement as Algerian and American diplomats secured the release of the hostages on the eve of Reagan's inaugural captivated the nation. The hostages returned home to tickertape parades in New York (figure 3.15⁷²) and hundreds of thousands of well-wishers lined the Washington D.C. parade route – the nation's long, public ordeal finally ended.



figure 3.15
THE HOSTAGE PARADE IN NEW YORK

With the hostages returned, the media's overwhelming coverage of the situation in Iran ended as well. Over the course of the next year, with anxiety about the crisis abated and the tickertape parades over, Iran – by then an international pariah and established American villain – receded from the mass media's attention. On television, Iran withdrew to occupy a meager 2% of ABC and CBS's airtime, less than 30 seconds of the average nightly broadcast, while in the newsweekly press it shrunk to a mere 1% of *Time's* coverage and 0.6% of *Newsweek* and *U.S. News and World Report's*, an average weekly allowance of only half a page and a third of a page, respectively.⁷³ Despite continuing disorder in Iran, and the ongoing war with Iraq, when the hostages came home, so, too, did the story.

This sudden loss of interest in Iran by the American media is not surprising. Sociologist Herbert J. Gans reports that American journalists of this period had a wry,

⁷² Photo: Medford Taylor. "The Last Hurrah," *Time* (February 9, 1981), 16.

⁷³ ABC evening news, February 1, 1981 through January 31, 1982. Vanderbilt Television News Archive and *Time* and *Newsweek*, February 16, 1981 through January 25, 1982. The difference in these periodizations is a function of the publication cycle, whereby the periodicals typically ran story a week or two behind the television news broadcasts.

satirical formula to determine the newsworthiness of an international event or crisis. In their formula, the value of an airline disaster depends not on the number of people killed but on where they were from – 100 Czechs were equal to 43 Frenchmen, and so on. A November 1979 airplane disaster in Pakistan, which killed 156 pilgrims returning from Mecca, was therefore reported in a small one-column story while a comparable British airline disaster five months later warranted a two-column front-page spread and a three-column interior photograph.⁷⁴ Thus a nation in crisis that had severed its own ties with the U.S. government and which no longer threatened the lives of a handful of American hostages receded to the back of the news magazines and out of the mainstream international news agenda.

Coverage of the hostages continued for a short while. Retrospectives of individual hostages, particularly the former charge d'affairs Bruce Laingen and a handful of other very visual men and women, appeared intermittently in *Newsweek* and *Time* for a year following the hostage crisis's resolution – especially on the anniversary of the embassy seizure. But the absence of the American hostages from Iran does not, by itself, account for the country's sudden disappearance from the U.S. press's international coverage. While the public need to follow developments in the region was satisfied by the crisis's resolution, the combination of continuing conflict in Iran involving established crisis-era personalities – such as the impeachment of Banisadr, terrorist attacks against anti-Khomeini groups, and the ongoing war with Iraq – and the presence of hundreds of international journalists and their crisis-era media infrastructures in Tehran suggests that media attention on Iran in the U.S. press should have continued.

By the end of 1981, the ayatollah's regime had become frustrated with the continued foreign media presence in Iran, accusing the Western news bureaus of inaccurate reporting and attempting to discredit the revolution. One after another, the wire services – the

⁷⁴ Gans, *Deciding What's News*, 6-7.

primary source of all international news – were expelled from the country. By the end of 1981, only the Agence France Presse remained among the big four news services in Iran.⁷⁵ Thus the decline in Iranian coverage must be seen as a combination of waning public interest in the region and practical matters surrounding the press's expulsion from the country.

This quantitative analysis of Iran hostage crisis-era printed media demonstrates the following trends in the newsweeklies' coverage of the hostage crisis: first, Iran dominated the printed and broadcast media for a year prior to the beginning of the hostage crisis, a finding that contradicts many descriptions of the pre-crisis media in the current historiography. Second, while images of the hostages represent a plurality of published images during the crisis, images of Iranian demonstrators, the Ayatollah Khomeini, the shah, and President Carter garner nearly equal coverage. This should not dismiss the human story inherent in the hostage drama. It merely suggests that, despite the collective memory of the Iran hostage crisis as the personal drama of 52 individuals held captive in Iran and 227 million held captive at home, the story was far more complicated. And it reminds us that the myth of the monolithic, surprising crisis is itself a fabrication of selective memory. Third, this analysis of magazine imagery demonstrates that the printed and broadcast media used different hostages as icons for the crisis and that there existed no monolithic, negative image of Islam, as often depicted in *Orientalist* literature. Fourth, Iran's sudden departure from the national press was not because of neglect, but the result of transformed public interest perception and the media's expulsion by the ayatollah.

The question that remains most obvious and difficult to answer is: Who consumed this coverage – newsmagazines in particular – and what, if any, affect did this coverage have on the public's perception of Iran or the political elite's management of the crisis?

⁷⁵ Beeman, *The "Great Satan" vs the "Mad Mullahs,"* 180.



“How did we manage the press? I think you’ve got your question backwards. The press managed us.”

– Jody Powell, *White House Press Secretary*¹

Chapter 4: Consumption POLLS, PUBLICS, & PRESIDENTS

On April 11, 1980, Helen Thomas went looking for Jody Powell. The veteran United Press International White House correspondent, a diminutive 59-year-old Arab-American, had covered every president since John F. Kennedy. She stalked out of the UPI press booth and navigated through a crowd of reporters circling the small print press carrels, the semi-soundproof broadcast booths, and the under-serviced vending machines. Walking through the back of the Press Briefing Room – a Nixon-era addition to the White House built over the West Wing’s indoor swimming pool – Thomas weaved between waiting film crews, photographers, and reporters who reclined on worn sofas and stuffed chairs as they watched a small television, gambled, or wolfed down a quick snack, letting the cellophane remains fall to the floor among spent cigars, cigarette butts, papers, and discarded camera and sound equipment. She stopped only long enough to pick up a pad of paper she had left on her seat in the front row of folding chairs encircling the press secretary’s raised podium.

She stepped through the sliding wooden doorway marking the end of the press’s territory and proceeded through the cramped lower press office, past the Rose Garden, up a

¹ In response to a question from the author, Jody Powell. *Foreign Affairs*, The Carter Presidency: Lessons for the 21st Century, University of Georgia; Athens, GA, 2007. Photo: Walter Bennett. “Debate in the Desert” *Time* (May 5, 1980), 12.

ramp capped by a Secret Service checkpoint, and around the corner toward press secretary Powell's spacious office in the northeast corner of the West Wing. But Thomas did not find Powell behind his horseshoe-shaped desk or helping security guards reign-in a smoky fire in his unpredictable office fireplace. Instead, she caught him, with Secretary of Defense Harold Brown, coming from the direction of the Oval Office. Thomas had caught wind of the meeting and suspected, rightly, that the lingering crisis in Iran was its subject. She approached Powell and Brown, asking, "Big meeting, huh? You guys decide to nuke 'em?"

Powell and Brown nodded, the press secretary smiling as he offered to give Thomas and her colleagues enough advance notice so they could be on the scene when the warheads flashed over Tehran. But behind Powell's signature wit laid the truth behind the meeting and the press's growing suspicions about the administration's frustration with Iran. Just moments before, the president had given the order to launch a hostage rescue mission – a mission Thomas, her colleagues in the press, the enraptured American public, and the media-sensitive Washington elite had helped to precipitate just as much as the student terrorists and the ayatollah had, half a world away.²

Chapter two described the hostage crisis-era press and chapter three the content of its communications. This chapter will examine how three different sectors of the newsweekly audience reacted to hostage crisis coverage. First, through a careful reading of polls the public's reaction to crisis-era coverage of Iran will be gauged. Second, this chapter looks closely at the newsweeklies' readership, finding a demographic description of America's foreign policy public. It will then explore how the White House lost control of the hostage crisis story and how the press's coverage of the crisis affected the administration's decisions regarding the course of the crisis.

² This description of the Carter-era press offices and Thomas conversation with Powell are derived from David Chambers, "Calling Helen Thomas," *Saudi Aramco World* 57, no. 2 (March/April 2006); Jody Powell, *The Other Side of the Story* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1984), 28-32, 228.

[OF POLLS AND PUBLIC OPINION: PUBLIC REACTION TO THE IRAN HOSTAGE CRISIS]

According to a 1980 Nielsens report, ABC news was viewed by slightly more than 12 million *households* – not individual viewers.³ Indeed, in any given week, 22.6 million Americans watched a *World News Tonight* broadcast – approximately 14.5% of the total U.S. adult population.⁴ In light of these figures, one columnist's contemporary observation is all the more poignant: "ABC finally found someone who can beat Johnny Carson. Khomeini."⁵

Previous studies of various media outlet's impact on the American public have emphasized the role of television. The analysis below agrees with the basic assumption that television is the most universally consumed cultural product in the United States. But these previous analyses have underestimated the impact of the U.S.-based newswEEKlies, estimating their relative impact based on their circulation. In 1979, at the start of the Iran hostage crisis, *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *U.S. News and World Report* were the nation's most widely read news magazines (*figure 4.1*⁶), with published circulations of 3 million, 4.3 million, and 2.1 million respectively. But more accurate media estimates of each

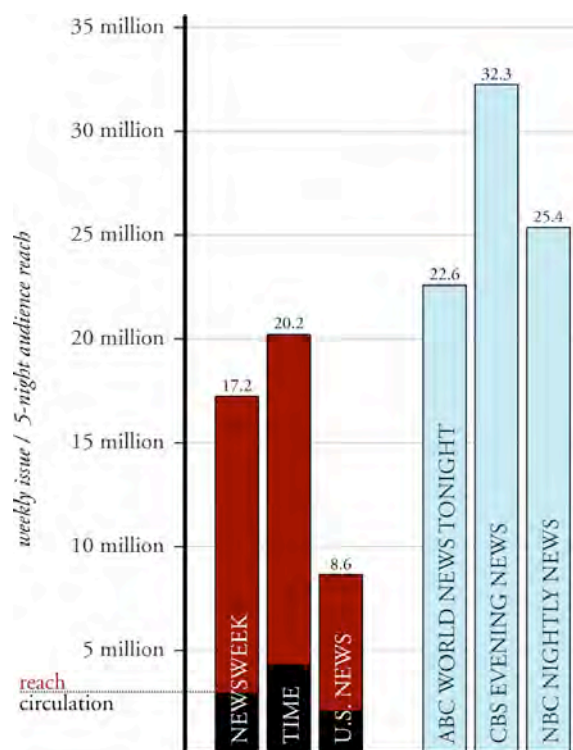


figure 4.1
NEWSWEEKLY AND TELEVISION NEWS
PROGRAM WEEKLY AUDIENCES

³ Nielsen Media Research, cited on Journalism.org, <http://www.journalism.org/> (accessed November 6, 2006).

⁴ Simmons Market Research Bureau, Inc. *The 1979 Study of Media and Markets*, vol M-11 (New York: Simmons Market Research Bureau, 1979).

⁵ H. Rosenberg quoted in Naficy, "Mediating the Other," 80.

⁶ Reach figures: Simmons Market Research Bureau, Inc, vols M-3, M-11. Circulation figures: Audit Bureau of Circulation figures published in '78-'82 *Ayer Directory of Publications* (Bala Cynwyd, PA: Ayer Press, 1978-1982).

publication's *reach* – the number of people exposed to the newsweeklies content, not just the number of subscribers or purchasers – reveal that in 1979 *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *U.S. News and World Report* reached an estimated 17.2 million, 20.2 million, and 8.6 million weekly readers, respectively. At the same time, *ABC World News Tonight*, *CBS Evening News*, and *NBC Nightly News* reached an estimated 22.6 million, 32.3 million, and 25.4 million respective viewers in a given week. But unlike television viewers who, by virtue of broadcast times, watched one network at the expense of the others, a 1977 study of magazine audiences showed that magazine purchasers were not exclusive, purchasing an average of nine titles with frequently overlapping interests.⁷ Thus many of *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *U.S. News and World Report*'s readers overlapped. Indeed, an estimated 31.7 million Americans read either *Newsweek* or *Time* in a given week – 5.7 million Americans read both.⁸

Additionally, magazines, regardless of type, competed well with television for the audience's cumulative attention over the course of a week. Magazine subscribers spent an average of 1.6 hours over the course of 1.9 days⁹ reading their magazines while the diligent 5-night-a-week nightly news viewer – of which there were less than 3 million for each network – spent no more than 1.9 hours watching the news.¹⁰ Magazine audiences also benefited from readership habits not shared by broadcast news viewers: selective and repetitive reading and pass-along. Unlike television, magazines can easily pass from person to person, regardless of broadcast time and well past the date of issue. Thus individual issues of a magazine, and the articles and images contained therein, can be seen by an audience many

⁷ *How & Why People Buy Magazines: A National Study of the Consumer Market for Magazines*, (New York: Publisher's Clearing House, 1977), 76.

⁸ Simmons Market Research Bureau, Inc. vol M-2.

⁹ *How & Why People Buy Magazines*, 76; Simmons Market Research Bureau, Inc. vol M-3.

¹⁰ This estimate is based on ABC's average 22.5 minute *ABC News*, available in markets both 7 and 6 nights a week (the above figure is an average of 7-night and 6-night weekly total aggregate viewership). Weekly television viewership: Simmons Market Research Bureau, Inc. vol M-11.

times the size of the magazine's stated circulation and over a much longer period of time than the average 22.5-minute nightly news broadcast.¹¹

The national audience for hostage crisis news was immense. Only four days after the embassy seizure, 93% of Americans polled had heard of the attack and the growing crisis in Iran. Within two weeks this number jumped to 97-98% and within five weeks it soared to 99%.¹² Almost immediately, some journalists and policy makers sensed the long-term impact of the prolonged crisis. When the hostage crisis was barely three weeks old, *Washington Post* columnist Don Oberdorfer justified calling it a "big event" that would fundamentally mold the public's worldview about Iran, Islam, and the Middle East at large. "There is growing evidence the long-running crisis may be one of those rare international 'hinge events' that change the way people think and governments act, therefore altering the course of history."¹³

Public reaction to the taking of the hostages was immediate and unforgiving. As early as November 29, just a few weeks after the onset of the crisis, 57% of Americans openly favored the overthrow of Khomeini – a figure whose political connection to the student-terrorists holding the embassy had not yet been revealed.¹⁴ Additionally, Massoumeh

¹¹ This figure can vary wildly, based on the relevant study. Publishers Clearinghouse 1977 study, for instance, measured intra-family pass-along, across all mass-market magazine subscribers, at 1.7 average people. This figure is significantly lower than MRI's estimated reach for *Time* in 2005, 5.34 people. The difference in these figures appears to recognize behavioral and subscription differences. For instance, a doctor's office subscribed to *Time* has an enormous potential readership compared to Publishers Clearinghouse's emphasis on intra-family habits.

¹² In order of use: These results are response to the survey question: "Have you read or heard anything about the situation in the country of Iran where about 60 Americans are being held hostage?" Conducted by ABC News and the Gallup Organization, November 8, November 15, and November 16-19, 1979 and based on telephone interviews and personal interviews with a national adult sample of 510 502, and 1,528 respectively. *Survey by ABC News, November 8, 1979, Survey by ABC News, November 8, 1979; Survey by ABC News, November 15, 1979; and Survey by Gallup Organization, November 16-November 19, 1979.* Retrieved April 16, 2006 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut. <<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu.proxy-remote.galib.uga.edu:2048/ipoll.html>>; Brigitte L. Nacos, *Terrorism and the Media: From the Iran Hostage Crisis to the World Trade Center Bombing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 68-9.

¹³ Don Oberdorfer, "Hinge Event" *Washington Post*, November 25, 1979.

¹⁴ These results are response to the survey question: "As a result of what has happened in Iran (the hostage crisis), would you favor or oppose the U.S.... Working to overthrow the Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran?" Conducted by ABC News/Louis Harris and Associates, November 26-November 29, 1979 and based on telephone interviews with a national adult sample of 1,496. Retrieved April 16, 2006 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut. <<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu.proxy-remote.galib.uga.edu:2048/ipoll.html>>.

Ebtekar, the spokeswoman for the hostage-takers, was quickly styled by many as “Mother Mary,” “Screaming Mary,” or “Typhoid Mary,” joining the ranks of Tokyo Rose and Hanoi Hannah before her – insidious, alien, tough, and rancorous.¹⁵

Indeed, a trend discernable over the course of the Iran hostage crisis was the American public’s transference of impressions regarding the minority of militants and student-terrorists to the totality of Iranians – even those living in the U.S. This was evidenced, physically, by public attacks on Iranian students studying stateside, the ejection of Iranian students and employees from universities and businesses, and the disintegration of Iranian-owned business because of declining patronage.¹⁶ It was further evidenced, psychologically, by the public’s change in favorability (*figure 4.2*¹⁷).

Whereas a combined 48% of Americans had

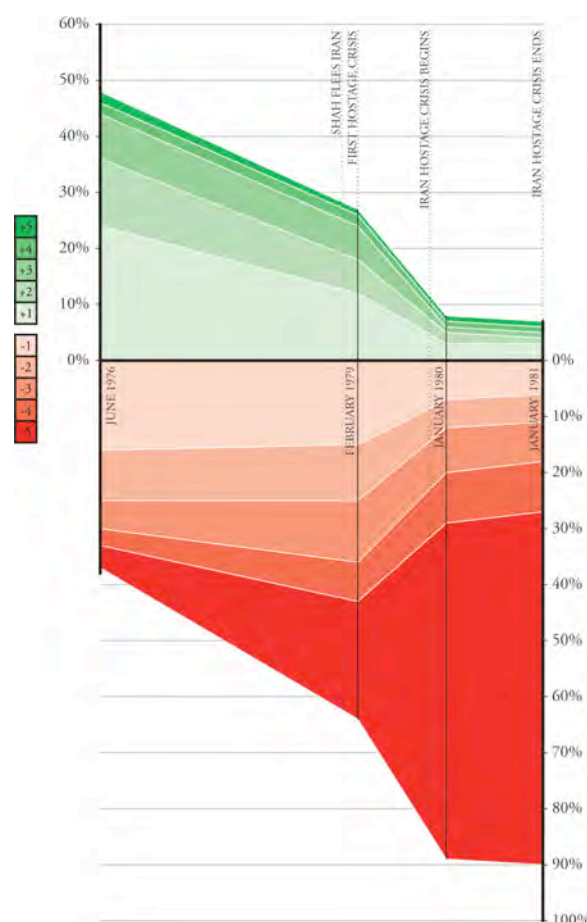


figure 4.2
FAVORABLE (GREEN) AND UNFAVORABLE (RED)
U.S. PUBLIC OPINION REGARDING IRAN, 1976-81

¹⁵ In order of use: Mark Bowden, “Among the Hostage-Takers,” (December 2004), <http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200412/bowden> (accessed March 26, 2006); Charles W. Scott, Personal interview. February 9, 2006; Christos P. Ioannides, *America’s Iran: Injury and Catharsis*, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), 218.

¹⁶ William O. Beeman, *The “Great Satan” vs. the “Mad Mullahs”: How the United States and Iran Demonize Each Other*, (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2005), 179.

¹⁷ These results are response to the survey question: “You notice that the 10 boxes on this card go from the highest position of plus five—for a country you have a very favorable opinion of—all the way down to the lowest position of minus five—for a country you have a very unfavorable opinion of. How far up the scale or how far down the scale would you rate the following nations? Iran.” Methodology: Conducted by Gallup Organization, June 25-June 28, 1976, February 23-February 26, 1979, January 25-January 28, 1980, and January 30-February 2, 1981 and based on personal interviews with a national adult sample of 1,544, 1,534, 1,597, and 1,609, respectively. Retrieved April 16, 2006 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut. <<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu.proxy-remote.galib.uga.edu:2048/ipoll.html>>.

a favorable opinion of Iran prior to the revolution, a combined 90% held the opposite opinion – 63% in the extreme – by the time of the hostages’ release in January 1981. And this a transition was not a gradual one. Rather, the number of Americans who held Iran in this most unfavorable opinion suddenly skyrocketed from 21% after the Valentine’s Day crisis to 60% after the November embassy seizure.

Certainly, the events of the crisis played a critical role in this transformation. It is hard to imagine a scenario where the illegal seizure of U.S. diplomats and their often-violent detention for more than a year does not result in similar animosity. Yet examples exist of other hostage crises before and after the Iranian situation that failed to evoke similar cross-cultural enmity. Of these other crises, the capture and detention of the crew *USS Pueblo* is the most noteworthy. On one hand, it was a situation with similar circumstances: the 82 crewmen of the *Pueblo* were captured by a hostile North Korean regime, the U.S. was accused of spying, some of the hostages were tortured, and the lot of them were held for almost a year – from January 23 through December 23, 1968.¹⁸ At least one of the Iranian hostages, Robert Ode, the oldest of the embassy hostages and only one of two known to have kept a diary during their captivity, identified himself with the *Pueblo* hostages and compared the length of his ordeal to that of the *Pueblo*’s crew.¹⁹

¹⁸ Mitchell B. Lerner, *The Pueblo Incident: A Spy Ship and the Failure of American Foreign Policy* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002) and Lloyd M. Butcher, *Butcher: My Story: Commander Lloyd M. Butcher USN Capn USS Pueblo*, (New York: Doubleday, 1970).

¹⁹ Diary, Robert C. Ode, October 4, 1980, “Diary”, Box 13, Ode Collection, Jimmy Carter Library. Robert Ode’s captivity diary is a 115-page typed and handwritten journal written during the Iran hostage crisis. In addition to the core 115-page text, the diary includes handwritten notes outlining the events of November 4, 1979 to June 12, 1980 and a supplemental conclusion, “My Love of and Life in the Foreign Service,” describing his last few days in Iran and his release. The diary was written under various conditions, most frequently on a Royal typewriter during Ode’s tedious captivity in the Chancery. Alternately, such as during his confinement in Evin Prison, Ode kept his diary by hand. David Harris suggests in *The Crisis* that Ode began keeping notes with a pencil given to him after his November 13, 1979 move to the Ambassador’s residence, long before his receipt of the typewriter on February 28, 1980. The other contemporary diary is that of Sgt. Rodney “Rocky” Sickmann, published shortly after his return to the U.S. Rocky Sickman, *Iranian Hostage: A Personal Diary of 444 Days in Captivity* (Topeka, Kansas: Crawford Press, 1982). The only other hostage crises to receive comparative attention in *Time* and *Newsweek* were the detention of U.S. civilians by Japanese forces in World War II, “Americans in Captivity”, *Time* (March 24, 1980), 55, and the little-known Hanafi Hostage situation in Washington, D.C. on March 9, 1977. “Memories Haunt Hanafi Hostages”, *Newsweek* (March 17, 1980), 14.

At face value, three factors account for the differing public reactions to the crises in Korea and Iran. The first is the established adversarial nature of the U.S.-North Korean relationship prior to the capture of the *Pueblo*. Second, those hostages captured on the *Pueblo* were military while most of those captured in Tehran were civilian. Third, the Iranian hostages were accessible to the international media – the current historiography does not suggest such access and associated coverage for the *Pueblo* incident. But a fourth factor may have more to do with the public's reaction than either of these: the visual depiction of the Iranians versus that of the North Koreans.

The media lens often focuses on one party at the expense of the other, granting credibility to the favored side while excising its antithesis.²⁰ The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a perfect example of this phenomenon – Israeli narratives completely overwhelm Western reporting, leaving little column space or broadcast time for coverage of the Palestinians.²¹ Yet the Iran hostage crisis defies this model. During the 444-day crisis, the American position was dramatically favored, yet the Iranian antagonists received equal and often excessive treatment in the media. While the U.S. media lacked access to the *Pueblo's* Korean antagonists, the U.S. and international press was given considerable access to the Iranian public, the government, and even the student-terrorists inside the embassy.

Iran and its revolution dominated the international press for much of the year before the embassy attack and the public audience for this pre-crisis coverage was equally large.

²⁰ Susan Dente Ross, "Unequal Combatants on an Uneven Media Battlefield: Palestine and Israel," in *Images That Injure: Pictorial Stereotypes in the Media*, Paul Martin Lester and Susan Dente Ross, eds (Westport, CN: Praeger, 2003), 57.

²¹ Odeh, Adnan Abu, "The American Image in the Arab Mass Media" in Edmund Ghareeb, *Split Vision: The Portrayal of Arabs in the American Media* (Washington, DC: American-Arab Affairs Council, 1983).

As far back as January 1979, 41% of Americans polled (*figure 4.3*²²) indicated that they were following the situation in Iran fairly closely, 40% were following it casually, and only 20% acknowledged that they were not paying much attention to the situation at all. The American audience's attention to the pre-crisis situation persisted through the mid-year lull in coverage, never abating once the hostage crisis began. Indeed, throughout the first eight months of the crisis, the total percentage of Americans following the situation in Iran never dropped below 94% and the number claiming to follow the situation closely never dropped below 68%.

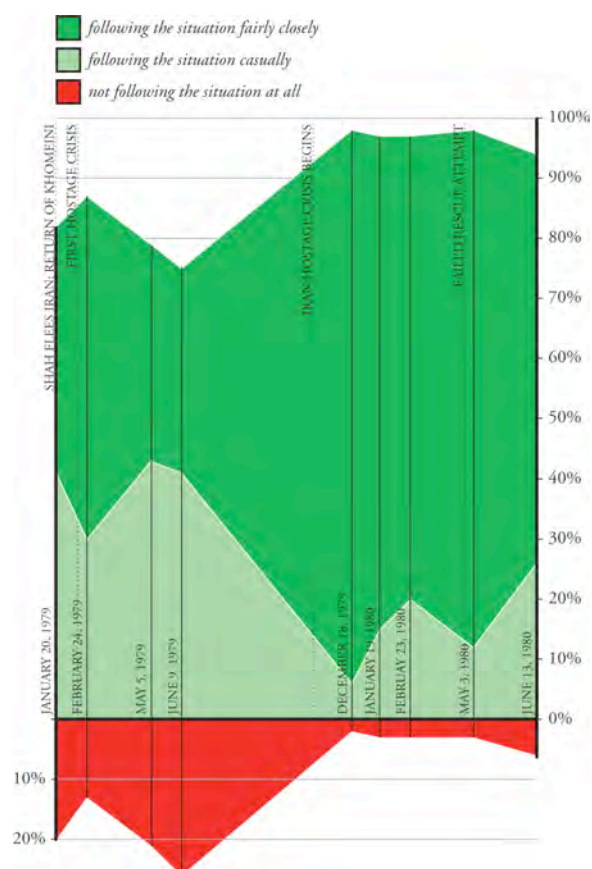


figure 4.3
PUBLIC ATTENTION TO THE SITUATION IN IRAN

But despite the public's overwhelming attention, and a December 1979 poll indicating that 91% of Americans felt that the press was doing a good job covering the hostage crisis, a significant minority of the population demonstrated an understanding of the

²² These results are response to the survey question: "(Of course, everyone is more interested in some things being carried in the news than in others.) Is news about... The situation in Iran... something you have recently been following fairly closely, or just following casually, or not paying much attention to?" Conducted by Roper Organization, January 6-20, February 10-24, 1979, April 28-May 5, 1979, June 2-9, 1979, December 16-18, 1979, January 5-19, February 9-23, 1980, April 26-May 3, July 7-13, 1980 and based on personal interviews with a national adult sample of 1,047-2,007. Retrieved April 16, 2006 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut. <<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu.proxy-remote.galib.uga.edu:2048/ipoll.html>>.

issue's background or of Iran's grievances.²³ A pair of polls (*figure 4.4*²⁴) conducted in 1975 and 1977, for instance, show that a respective 47% and 40% of surveyed Americans felt that they were unprepared to answer questions about the U.S.'s economic entanglement with the Shah's Iran before the revolution – three-quarters as many as felt unprepared to answer the same questions about British Rhodesia, another third world state frequently in the news during this period; three-to-four times as many respondents as felt incapable of answering the same questions about the U.S.'s critical Pacific ally Japan. As late as the end of February 1979 – after the departure of the Shah from Iran, Khomeini's triumphant return, and the abbreviated Valentine's day hostage crisis – media polls reveal that 55% of Americans continued to care very little about who ruled Iran.²⁵ This ignorance is

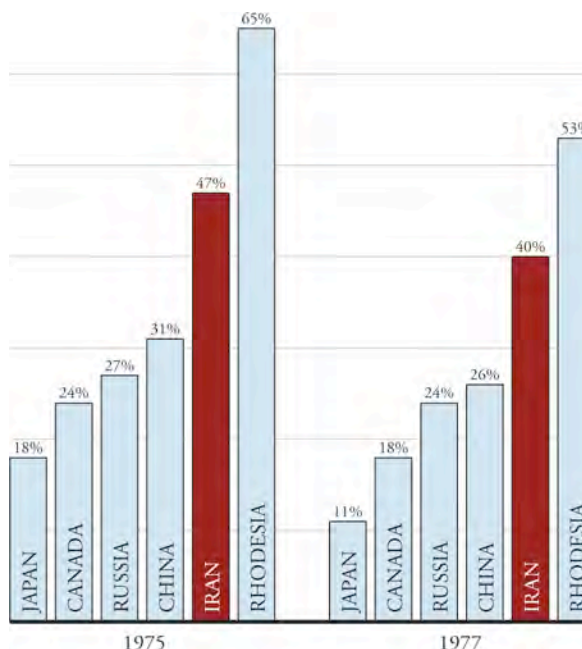


figure 4.4
PUBLIC IGNORANCE OF U.S.-IRAN
RELATIONSHIP BEFORE THE HOSTAGE CRISIS

²³ These results are response to the survey question: "(Now I'm going to read that list again and ask you how you would rate the press coverage of each story: has it been very good, fairly good, fairly poor, or very poor?) The situation in Iran." Conducted by Los Angeles Times, December 16-December 18, 1979 and based on telephone interviews with a national adult sample of 1,047. Retrieved April 16, 2006 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut. <<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu.proxy-remote.galib.uga.edu:2048/ipoll.html>>.

²⁴ These results are response to the survey question: "(Speaking of doing business abroad, we'd like to find out how much you think the United States should be trading with certain specific foreign countries.) At the present time, do you think we are trading too much now with...Iran... about the right amount, or not enough with...Iran?" Conducted by Roper Organization, June 14-June 21, 1975 and June 4-June 11, 1977 and based on personal interviews with a national adult sample of 2,004 and 2,001, respectively. Retrieved April 16, 2006 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut. <<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu.proxy-remote.galib.uga.edu:2048/ipoll.html>>.

²⁵ These results are response to the survey question: "Do you care or not care very much...who rules Iran?" Conducted by CBS News/New York Times, February 27-February 28, 1979 and based on telephone interviews with a national adult sample of 1,113. Retrieved April 16, 2006 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut. <<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu.proxy-remote.galib.uga.edu:2048/ipoll.html>>.

surprising when compared to a contemporary, early 1979 spike in news viewership and a 91% majority readership of Iran-related news.²⁶ But this apathy indicates that, while a significant percentage of the public followed the unfolding revolution in Iran closely, the majority of Americans held no opinion regarding its outcome except within the context of its favorability to U.S. interests. A 52% majority of Americans in this period admitted that they would rather see the Iranian military seize power, even if this meant that thousands of people would be killed or imprisoned, rather than let the popular Muslim religious leaders establish a government unfriendly to the United States.²⁷

Even by early January 1980, with the hostage crisis two months old, a survey exploring public knowledge of the shah's relationship with the U.S. found that only four percent of Americans felt they knew a great deal about this relationship while a whopping 52% admitted to knowing almost nothing about it.²⁸ Additionally, another survey showed

²⁶ In order of use: These results are response to a series of survey questions: "(Of course, everyone is more interested in some things being carried in the news than in others.) Is news about... The situation in Iran... something you have recently been following fairly closely, or just following casually, or not paying much attention to?" Conducted by Roper Organization between January and February 1979 and based on telephone interviews with a national adult sample of approximately 2,000. Retrieved April 16, 2006 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut. <<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu.proxy-remote.galib.uga.edu:2048/ipoll.html>>; These results are response to the survey question: "Have you heard or read anything about the political troubles in Iran?" Conducted by CBS News/New York Times, February 27-February 28, 1979 and based on telephone interviews with a national adult sample of 1,113. Retrieved April 16, 2006 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut. <<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu.proxy-remote.galib.uga.edu:2048/ipoll.html>>.

²⁷ These results are response to the survey question: "It is possible that the present government of Iran will be replaced by one dominated by extremist Moslem religious leaders which would be popular with the Iranian people. It is also possible that the army would then take over, eliminating the extreme religious leaders and left-wing elements. This could probably mean that thousands would be killed and imprisoned. If this country had to make a choice, would you favor our recognizing a government controlled by the religious leaders, who are likely to be unfriendly to the United States, or one headed by the military, who would likely be friendly to the United States?" Conducted by ABC News/Louis Harris and Associates, January 17-January 22, 1979 and based on telephone interviews with a national adult sample of 1,498. Retrieved April 16, 2006 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut. <<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu.proxy-remote.galib.uga.edu:2048/ipoll.html>>.

²⁸ These results are response to the survey question: "During the 38 years the Shah of Iran ruled his country, he had the strong support of the United States Government. How much do you feel you know about the relationship between the Shah and the U.S. Government during his 38 year reign--a great deal, some, only a little, or almost nothing?" Conducted by Roper Organization, January 5-January 19, 1980 and based on personal interviews with a national adult sample of 2,005. Retrieved April 16, 2006 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut. <<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu.proxy-remote.galib.uga.edu:2048/ipoll.html>>.

that, five weeks after the embassy attack, only 25% of Americans agreed with the statement, “Khomeini and his followers have a lot of right on their side when it comes to the accusations against the United States government and its support of the Shah’s regime” – a statement which has been taken by some researchers to mean that a minority of Americans were swayed by terrorist rhetoric but which might more accurately be interpreted to indicate that a minority of the audience understood the terrorists grievances and the crisis’s background.²⁹

[OF DIPLOMATS AND THE PRESS: THE FOREIGN POLICY PUBLIC AND THE NEWSWEEKLIES]

Why, if there was extensive coverage of the Iranian revolution and the political situation in Iran prior to the hostage crisis, was the public caught unaware on that fateful Sunday in November 1979? Surveys suggest that the duration of a news story, not its content, makes the most difference. For instance, a 1975 study by the Opinion Research Corporation shows that people knew little of the Panama Canal – even who owned it or where it was. But by 1978, after the issue had been prominently reported in the news for years, three quarters of Americans were not only aware of the canal and the issues surrounding it but many could cite provisions from the recently negotiated treaty.³⁰ It is possible that the sustained six months of coverage the situation in Iran garnered at the beginning of 1979, followed by the relative lull in coverage between May and November of that year, was not enough time to acclimate the adult news audience to the Persian crisis. Perhaps it was this factor combined with the quality of the coverage provided, which was described in the previous chapter.

But a 1964 study by the Survey Research Center of the University of Michigan suggests another answer. Looking at international news and audience demographics – specifically the combination of employment, income, and race – the Michigan study

²⁹ Nacos, *Terrorism and the Media*, 71-2.

³⁰ Davidson, et al., *News From Abroad and the Foreign Policy Public*, 48.

examined attitudes toward communist China and asked a series of questions to determine respondents' knowledge of the issues, not just their opinions. The study found that, in the mean, the most disadvantaged category of respondents, nonwhites from low-income households, did the worst while college graduates with white-collar jobs did the best.³¹

So the critical question in analyzing how the newsweeklies' Iran coverage was consumed becomes: Who are the consumers? Generic media statistics inform us about the consumption habits of the American public *en masse* but do little to describe the news media consumption of specific demographics. To accurately describe the consumption of mass-market newsweeklies and television news broadcasts one must turn to marketing and consumer analysis research. One such resource is the Simmons Market Research Bureau's³² 1979 Study of Media and Markets, a nationwide probability sample of 15,026: one adult per household – 7,215 men and 7,811 women – 18 years or older, residing in the contiguous 48 American states, and interviewed between October 14, 1978 and August 7, 1979. The study surveyed 96 metropolitan and 72 non-metropolitan areas in an effort to provide reliable and unbiased audience findings.³³ The resulting projection of a 15,026 sample onto a 155,803,200 national audience – 74,729,700 males and 81,073,500 females – accounts for all American adults, eighteen years or older, living in the contiguous United States including

³¹ Davidson, et al., *News From Abroad and the Foreign Policy Public*, 50.

³² By 1979, Simmons Market Research, now a component Experian, had more than twenty years of experience compiling media consumption data for print, radio, broadcast, and outdoor media. The massive 42-volume study covers media by both type and product. Mediamark Research, Inc (MRI) conducts similar surveys and even makes the current year's media audience data available online for free. Historical copies of both of these surveys are difficult to access, however. But a survey of numerous public and private sector media organizations reveals a surprising, and appalling, lack of historical data. For instance, in pursuit of historical readership surveys, such as those prepared annually by the non-profit auditors MRI, this researcher discovered that neither *Newsweek*, *Time*, nor *U.S. News and World Report* retained any archived research materials dating back further than ten years. Indeed, MRI admitted that, while certain the resources existed, that they were kept in an obsolete, unreadable electronic format and that no hard copies remained extant. Media educational institutions, such as the University of Georgia's Grady College of Journalism, home to the prestigious Peabody Award, admitted similar research myopia. Their research archives, what that existed, dated back no further than a year and were kept by individual researchers and not in a public forum.

³³ Simmons Market Research Bureau, Inc. *The 1979 Study of Media and Markets*, vol T-1 (New York: Simmons Market Research Bureau, 1979). Sampling areas were determined randomly but balanced against 1970 census data in an effort to proportionally reflect the national media audience. The SMRB study favors upper income markets – an unavoidable aspect, perhaps, of a study that's utility depends on its usefulness to advertisers.

college students and the 874,000 members of the armed forces not living in barracks or stationed overseas.³⁴

The Simmons study is especially valuable because of its comparable quantifications of television viewership and news magazine readership – a feature that allows for a more accurate comparison than Nielsen’s television shares and Audit Bureau of Circulation magazine figures otherwise allow. Basic audience data was gathered over two successive interviews, four or more weeks apart, measuring editorial interest in 44 publications – of which *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *U.S. News and World Report* were a part – and a less thorough measuring of 100 additional publications. Simmons tested interviewees’ repeat reading habits, readership turnover, and familiarity with the publications. Simmons simultaneously distributed television viewership diaries to homes with and without TV sets to estimate the total available television audience, not just the total actual set-owning audience.³⁵

To exploit this study to greatest effect, this essay compares demographics for television broadcasts and print publications on a weekly basis. That is, it compares the reach of one issue of *Newsweek*, *Time*, or *U.S. News and World Report* to the number of people exposed to any one of five consecutive weeknight broadcasts of *ABC World News Tonight*, *CBS Evening News*, or *NBC Nightly News*.³⁶ This basis for comparison was chosen for two reasons: first, magazines are published once a week, necessitating a weekly minimum time frame for audience attention and; second, weekend television news broadcasts were not constantly carried in some domestic markets. Special emphasis is be paid to the percentages of readers and viewers, not total populations, among different demographics. This emphasis

³⁴ This population projection attempts to reflect the realities revealed in the most recent national census and also adjust for the federal census’ undercount. This audience projection excludes institutional inmates, including hospitals and correctional facilities, or people living in group housing. Simmons Market Research Bureau, Inc., *The 1979 Study of Media and Markets*, vol T-1, 22.

³⁵ Simmons Market Research Bureau, Inc., *The 1979 Study of Media and Markets*, vol T-1, 7-8, 35-6, 94.

³⁶ This measurement does not require the television audience to have seen all five news broadcasts – a figure Simmon’s measures separately as *frequency* – but to have viewed any one of the five weekday broadcast.

will allow for a better comparison of consumption habits across often very disproportionate sectors of the total adult population.

While Simmons catalogues many comparable statistics about television and print audiences – including, but not limited to, age, locality, marital status, and buying habits – this essay focuses on measuring the media consumption by education, employment, and personal and household income demographics. Looking first at education (*figures 4.5³⁷ and 4.9³⁸*), the total adult American media audience were divided into three categories – those who attended college or more (47,058,000, or 30%), those graduated high school, (59,229,000, or 38%), and those who did not graduate high school (49,508,000, or 32%).³⁹ The television news, reflecting a trend demonstrated through many of these categories, was nearly consistent across all demographics, spiking by only a few percentage points among those who did not graduate high school – 11,731,000 (24%) in the lowest educated category watched CBS as opposed to 9,758,000 (21%) in the highest category. But among the newsweeklies there was no such consistency across the various education levels. Indeed, it is readily apparent that the news magazines were read by a disproportionate percentage of the best-educated Americans – 11,054,000, or 23% of those who attended college or more read *Time*, 9,839,000 (21%) *Newsweek*, and 4,864,000 (10%) *U.S. News and World Report*.

Audience occupation demographics were similarly descriptive (*figures 4.6⁴⁰ and 4.10⁴¹*). Simmons divides the total adult American media audience into five categories – professional/technical (16,309,000, or 10%), manager/administrator, (10,858,000, or 7%), clerical/sales (22,793,000, or 15%), other employment (45,197,000, or 29%), and

³⁷ Simmons Market Research Bureau, Inc., *The 1979 Study of Media and Markets*, vol M-3, 9-14.

³⁸ Simmons Market Research Bureau, Inc., *The 1979 Study of Media and Markets*, vol M-11, 98-103.

³⁹ Simmons defines college attendees as those who completed a minimum of one full year at a college-level institution. How much the 1960s surge in college attendance may have affected this demographic is unclear. Simmons Market Research Bureau, Inc., *The 1979 Study of Media and Markets*, vol T-1, 26.

⁴⁰ Simmons Market Research Bureau, Inc., *The 1979 Study of Media and Markets*, vol M-3, 29-38.

⁴¹ Simmons Market Research Bureau, Inc., *The 1979 Study of Media and Markets*, vol M-11, 118-27.

unemployed (60,638,000, or 39%).⁴² As before, the television news is nearly consistent across all demographics, spiking by only a few percentage points among the unemployed – 14,208,000 (23%) unemployed watched CBS as opposed to 3,498,000 (21%) professional/technical CBS viewers. And, as before, the newsweeklies were disproportionately read by the smaller, higher-ranking, categories: 4,283,000, or 26% of the professional/technical category – including accountants, lawyers, judges, doctors, nurses, religious workers, social scientists, teachers, writers, entertainers, and researchers – read *Time*, 3,500,000 (21%) *Newsweek*, and 1,837,000 (11%) *U.S. News and World Report*; and 2,537,000, or 23% of the manager/administrator category – including bank officers, financial managers, buyers and shippers, ship officer, public administration officials, public administrators, postmasters, sales department heads and managers, and college administrators⁴³ – read *Time*, 2,287,000 (21%) *Newsweek*, and 1,500,000 (14%) *U.S. News and World Report*.

Lastly, looking only at the 95,158,000 income-earning Americans (*figures 4.7⁴⁴ and 4.11⁴⁵*), the American media audience was broken-out into four income categories – those who annually earned \$25,000 or more (10,350,000, or 11%), those who annually earned between \$15,000 and \$24,999, (23,379,000, or 25%), those who annually earned between \$10,000 and \$14,999, (25,346,000, or 27%), and who annually earned less than \$10,000 (36,083,000, or 38%).⁴⁶ Television news was nearly consistent across all demographics,

⁴² Women and men – despite being combined in this adult total – were elsewhere in the study broken out according to different criteria, men as professional/technical and manager/administrator while women were counted in an aggregated professionals and managers category. Likewise, women made up the lion share of the unemployed category – Simmons explicitly counting female homemakers among the unemployed.

⁴³ Simmons Market Research Bureau, Inc., *The 1979 Study of Media and Markets*, vol T-1, 30-1.

⁴⁴ Simmons Market Research Bureau, Inc., *The 1979 Study of Media and Markets*, vol M-3, 15-22.

⁴⁵ Simmons Market Research Bureau, Inc., *The 1979 Study of Media and Markets*, vol M-11, 9-13.

⁴⁶ While the national total audience by income category includes both men and women, in Simmons' later breakout of income data by gender women were not counted in the highest individual income category, instead having a highest female individual income category of \$15,000 or more.

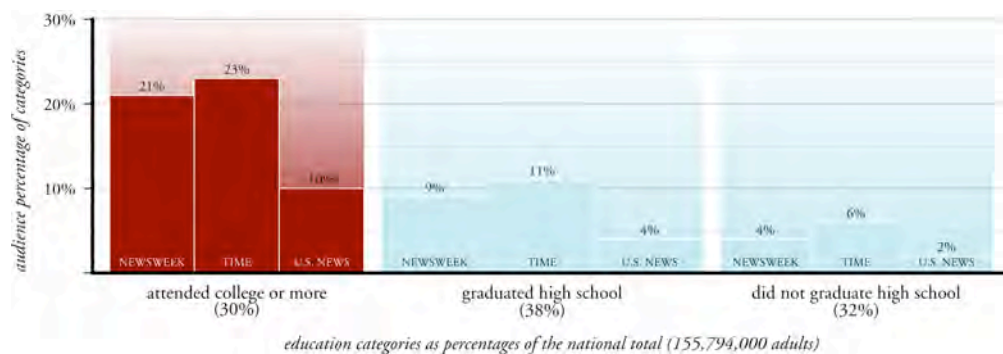


figure 4.5
NEWSWEEKLY READERSHIP BY EDUCATION

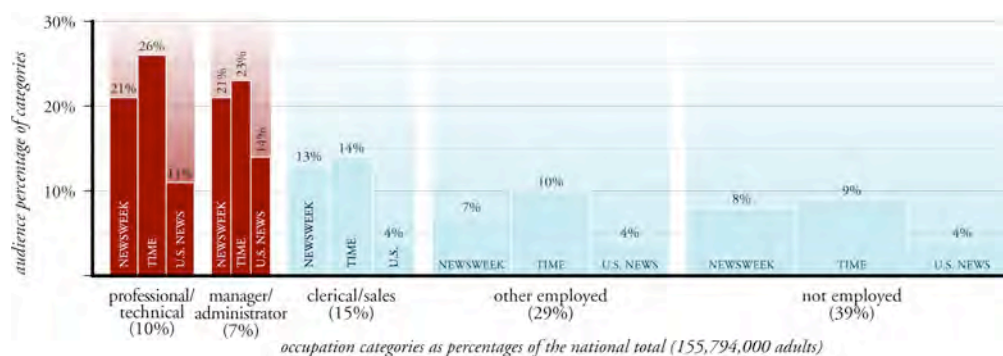


figure 4.6
NEWSWEEKLY READERSHIP BY OCCUPATION

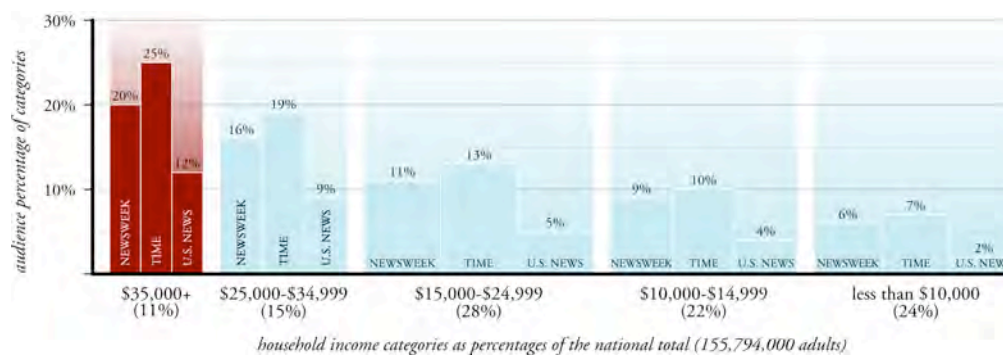


figure 4.7 and 4.8
NEWSWEEKLY READERSHIP BY INDIVIDUAL AND HOUSEHOLD INCOME

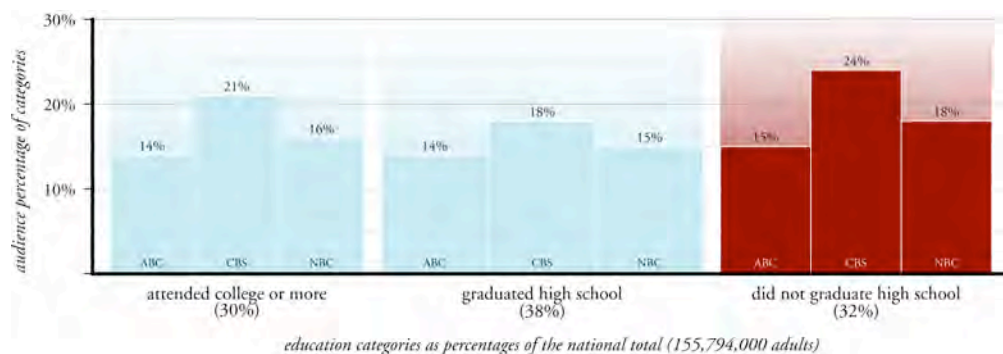


figure 4.9

TELEVISION NEWS VIEWERSHIP BY EDUCATION

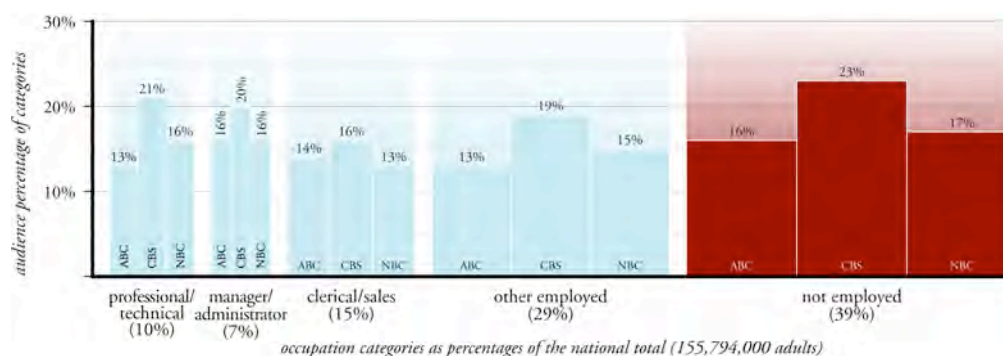


figure 4.10

TELEVISION NEWS VIEWERSHIP BY OCCUPATION

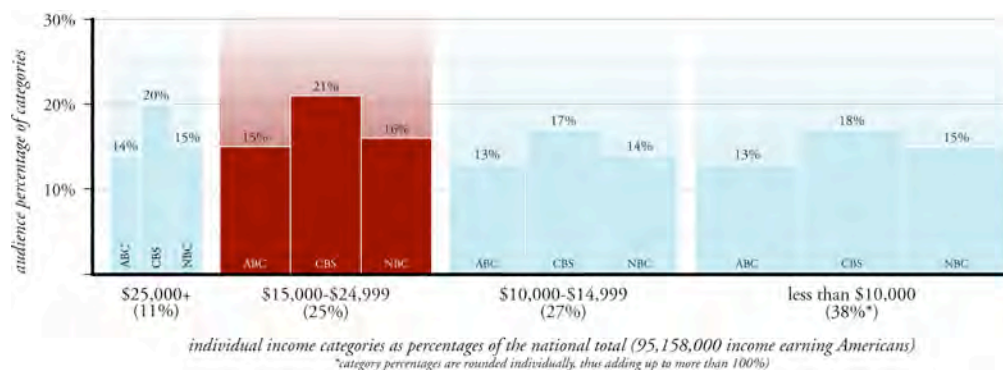


figure 4.11 and 4.12

TELEVISION NEWS VIEWERSHIP BY INDIVIDUAL AND HOUSEHOLD INCOME

spiking by only a few percentage points among the second highest demographic – 4,951,000 (21%) individual earning \$15,000-\$24,999 watched CBS while newsweekly readership was again greatest in the highest bracket – 2,507,000, or 24% of those who annually earned \$25,000 or more read *Time*, 2,391,000 (23%) *Newsweek*, and 1,583,000 (15%) *U.S. News and World Report*.

Meanwhile, household income figures that factor in the total national adult population regardless of employment status (*figures 4.8*⁴⁷ and *4.12*⁴⁸) further reinforce newsweekly readership among the most affluent Americans. Dividing the audience into five income brackets – households that annually earned \$35,000 or more (17,217,000, or 11%), households that annually earned between \$25,000 and \$34,999⁴⁹, (24,057,000, or 15%), households that annually earned between \$15,000 and \$24,999, (43,414,000, or 28%), households that annually earned between \$10,000 and \$14,999, (33,677,000, or 22%), and households that earned less than \$10,000 (37,429,000, or 24%). Once again, despite its approximate consistency across all categories, the most representative television audience was the lowest household income category – 8,979,000 (24%) of households in the lowest income category watched CBS as opposed to 3,535,000 (21%) CBS viewers in the highest category. Again, magazine readership was greatest in the highest income bracket – 4,325,000, or 25% of households annually earning \$35,000 or more read *Time*, 3,481,000 (20%) *Newsweek*, and 2,035,000 (12%) *U.S. News and World Report*. These demographics reveal that while television news was consumed by the broadest and most unspecialized majority of Americans, well-educated, well-employed, and higher-income audiences disproportionately read news magazines.

⁴⁷ Simmons Market Research Bureau, Inc., *The 1979 Study of Media and Markets*, vol M-3, 39-48.

⁴⁸ Simmons Market Research Bureau, Inc., *The 1979 Study of Media and Markets*, vol M-11, 128-37.

⁴⁹ Simmons' top two income categories are, technically, \$35,000 or more and \$25,000 or more. To better approximate the population shares of each income group, the author subtracted the former category's population statistics from the latter's, resulting in an accurately described \$25,000 to \$34,999 income category.

The media's total international news audience can be generally described as alternately inattentive, special interested, or the *foreign policy public*.⁵⁰ The idea of the foreign policy public is rooted in the assumption that, while popular interest and popular control of foreign policy is desirable in a pluralistic society, the complexities and subtleties of international relations are often far too great for the average democratic citizen to grasp. Thus, foreign affairs must, by necessity, be relegated to a professionally trained elite or, in an open society such as exists in much of the West, to a broadly defined interested and influential foreign policy public.⁵¹

Explicitly and demographically described, the foreign policy public matches many of the statistics identified among 1979 newsweekly readers. It is overweighted with affluent, educated, and politically active men and women of diverse interests. Members of this public are most often moneyed professionals and businesspeople "energetically on the climb from low- or middle-level threads on the economic-social stairway" – rarely clerical and skilled workers and almost never unskilled workers or farmers. Members of the foreign policy public are also well educated, the vast majority possessing college educations.⁵²

This public is informed by a yet smaller group of opinion leaders who are most often highly educated, wealthy, middle-aged, Protestant, and white. These opinion leaders owe their influence to a combination of their interest in foreign affairs, their reputations for good judgment and professional success, and their "high standing in the legal profession" or "high executive position in industry, banking, or commerce."⁵³ They often possess experience in Washington, overseas missions, or foreign capitals, travel abroad frequently, read widely among domestic and foreign periodicals, and maintain personal associations with elites in the

⁵⁰ The term *foreign policy public* is borrowed from Ernest R. May's *American Imperialism: A Speculative Essay* (New York: Atheneum, 1968).

⁵¹ Davidson, et al., *News From Abroad and the Foreign Policy Public*, 3.

⁵² May, *American Imperialism*, 22-3, 32-5, 40-2.

⁵³ Kenneth P. Adler and Davis Bobrow, "Interest and Influence in Foreign Affairs," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, XX (Spring 1956), 89-101.

worlds of journalism and politics.⁵⁴ And while a small number of the foreign policy public advocate their ideas by writing letters to editors and congressmen, foreign policy opinion leaders are sought out as intellectual resources by policy-makers and communicate with the wider public through books, television, articles, and speeches.⁵⁵

Historically, the foreign policy public has been estimated at wildly varying sizes. But regardless of their numbers, members of the foreign policy public were defined by their awareness of and rudimentary knowledge of international affairs.⁵⁶ It is important to distinguish knowledge from opinion – as many surveys show, people often possess opinions without possessing knowledge. Likewise, members of the foreign policy public care about foreign policy, not just foreign news. So while a majority of Americans may have been obsessed with the Iran hostage crisis, it should be assumed that the vast majority of these media consumers were interested in the human drama while only 16-17% of population focused on foreign policy issues.⁵⁷ This public possesses a rich background of knowledge and, as a result, is often resourced by the press. “Their ranks include journalists, publishers, active and retired government officials and military officers, business and professional leaders, heads of organizations, educators – peoples who speak or write about foreign affairs, whose views are listened to, and who can often affect public attitudes and sometimes even policy decisions in Washington.” Their influence in foreign affairs stretched far beyond their numbers and, perhaps most importantly to this study, they followed the international news habitually and in a variety of sources – the most important of which was print.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ May, *American Imperialism*, 32-5.

⁵⁵ In order of use: Davidson, et al., *News From Abroad and the Foreign Policy Public*, 52; May, *American Imperialism*, 33, 37-9.

⁵⁶ In order of use: May, *American Imperialism*, 41; Lester Markel et al., *Public Opinion and Foreign Policy* (New York: Harper, 1949), 49-56.

⁵⁷ V.O. Key, Jr., *Public Opinion and American Democracy* (New York: Knopf, 1961) 173-4; Alfred O. Hero, Jr., *Americans in World Affairs* (Boston: World Peace Foundation, 1959); Alfred O. Hero, Jr., *Mass Media and World Affairs* (Boston: World Peace Foundation, 1959); Alfred O. Hero, Jr., *Opinion Leaders in American Communities* (Boston: World Peace Foundation, 1959). Cited in May, *American Imperialism*, 22.

⁵⁸ Davidson, et al., *News From Abroad and the Foreign Policy Public*, 53-4.

The foreign policy public during the Iran hostage crisis frequented a number of specialized publications, including but not limited to, *Foreign Affairs*, with a circulation of approximately 75,000; *Foreign Policy*, circulated to 20,000 subscribers; the UN's *The Inter Dependant* with 30,000 subscribers until its suspension in 1979; and approximately 400 other specialized titles, published in the U.S. These publications, in conjunction with the newsweeklies, served the dual purpose of illuminating foreign policy issues and linking governments with interested foreign policy publics.⁵⁹

This is not to suggest that members of the foreign policy public did not watch television news. Indeed, mid-1970s studies of American television viewing habits show that Americans eighteen and older spent approximately three hours, eight minutes watching television daily – two hours, 31 minutes if they had a college education.⁶⁰ Yet the universality of television is tempered by the additional finding that nearly half of Americans who watched television news did not watch national news broadcasts but rather local news shows that were much less likely to carry any international stories.⁶¹ Furthermore, statistics show (*figure 4.1*) that in 1979 more Americans watched television news than read the leading newsweeklies – the leading television news program, the *CBS Evening News* with Walter Cronkite, has an estimated weekly reach of 32,270,000 compared to the leading newsweekly, *Time* magazine, which reached an estimated 20,181,000. But does the foreign policy public's news media consumption match this national statistic?

The most educated television viewers, especially those with college educations or more, supplemented their television news diets with printed news material from both newspapers and magazines. Some broadcast news advocates even advertised this phenomenon as a merit of television news – the nightly news served as a headline service for

⁵⁹ Davidson, et al., *News From Abroad and the Foreign Policy Public*, 42, 174.

⁶⁰ A Roper Organization survey conducted for the Television Information Office, cited in Davidson, et al., *News From Abroad and the Foreign Policy Public*, 44.

⁶¹ Davidson, et al., *News From Abroad and the Foreign Policy Public*, 45.

the most attentive public. Once alerted, television failed to provide the information and depth that the most educated sectors of the public required. A CBS national news editor commented on this phenomenon, “all we can do is whet people’s appetite It’s frightening to think that so many people rely on TV as their primary or sole source of news. If that’s the case, they aren’t very well informed.”⁶²

Another way of showing the confluence of wealth, employment, and education – so characteristic of the foreign policy public and the foreign policy elite – among the newsweeklies’ readership is through an examination of social status. Unlike Marxist classes, Simmons’ social classes (*figure 4.13*), based on A.B. Hollingshead’s class affiliation research, measure audience groups based on five education- and employment-based spectrums, divining through their coordination five distinct social classes ranging from the highest level of business people who possess graduate or professional training to a broadly defined unemployed and undereducated lowest class.⁶³ The result (*figure 4.14*⁶⁴) is the demonstration that the poorest-educated Americans with the least influential jobs, while constituting 65% of the total adult population (101,650,000 people), read weekly news magazines at the lowest rate. And, in synchronicity with the findings mentioned above, the most well-educated and most advantageously employed

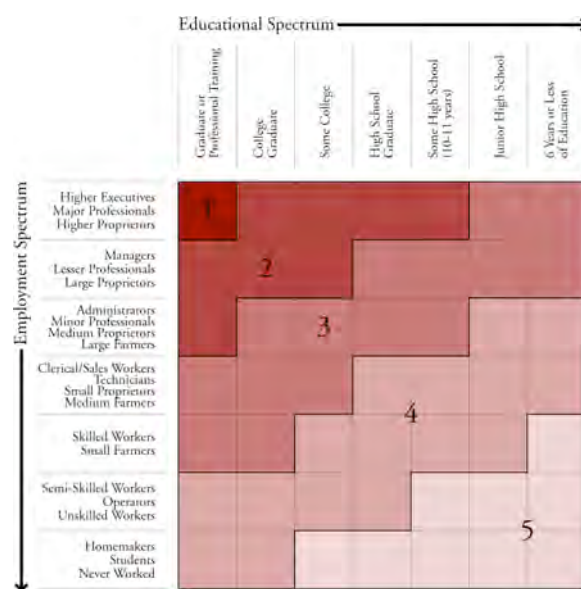


figure 4.13
HOLLINGSHEAD SOCIAL CLASS SPECTRUM

⁶² Davidson, et al., *News From Abroad and the Foreign Policy Public*, 51.

⁶³ Hollingshead generated this class system in the 1960’s at the Yale sociology department. SMRB used it to stratify print media consumption in their 1979 study. Simmons Market Research Bureau, Inc., *The 1979 Study of Media and Markets*, vol T-1, 27-8.

⁶⁴ Simmons Market Research Bureau, Inc., *The 1979 Study of Media and Markets*, vol M-1, 40-1.

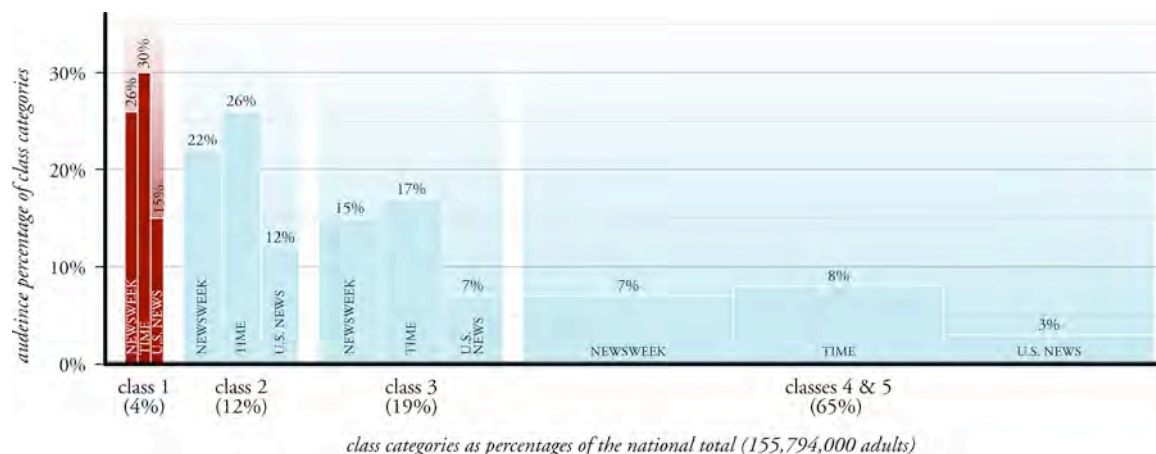


figure 4.14
NEWSWEEKLY READERSHIP BY SOCIAL CLASS

Americans, while constituting only 4% of the total adult population, read the newsweeklies at the highest rate – 30% of adults in class one read *Time* as opposed to only 8% of adults in classes four and five combined.

When combined with the above audience statistics, a handful of print-specific figures only better describe the foreign policy public of 1979. Racial audience data for the newsweeklies, for instance, reveals that 84% of *Newsweek* and *Time*'s readership, and 88% of *U.S. News and World Report*'s, was white. Meanwhile, the median age for newsweekly readers was 34, 36, and 42 for *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *U.S. News and World Report*, respectively, and more than half of each magazine's readership owned their own home, the plurality of which were worth more than \$50,000.⁶⁵ While television was the most widely and universally consumed media, the unique news consumption habits of the foreign policy public stress the importance of newsweeklies as formative and influential cultural products.

⁶⁵ Simmons Market Research Bureau, Inc., *The 1979 Study of Media and Markets*, vol M-1, 8-11, 28-9, 72-5.

[OF PRESIDENTS AND POLITICS: THE IMPACT OF CRISIS COVERAGE ON THE WHITE HOUSE]

Foreign news is only truly informative if one is equally aware of the contents of that news, the conditions under which it is reported, and the circumstances under which it is consumed and transformed into action.⁶⁶ This is especially true at the highest levels of government. During the hostage crisis, the media affected the Carter administration in two critical ways: first, the administration was frustrated by its inability to influence crisis coverage and, second, such coverage established the terms by which presidential success was measured.

On the surface, the Carter White House used the media in much the same way other members of the government and foreign policy public did – as the eyes and the ears of diplomacy and foreign policy. Most of the information collected by Western governments – the U.S. included – about conditions and situations worldwide came from wire services, newspapers, news magazines, radio, and television.⁶⁷ Indeed, the mass media often passed across policy-makers' desks first – supplementary information often arrived through diplomatic or intelligence channels hours, days, or even weeks later. Even then, much of the information flowing through official intelligence and diplomatic channels was originally culled from various mass-media sources.⁶⁸

Diplomats worldwide relied on the news media as their primary source of information. High-ranking foreign policy-makers often scanned half a dozen newspapers and weekly news magazines, listened to radio broadcast, and watched television news programs. Subordinates monitored an even broader field of media, recording radio and television broadcasts from which news summaries were derived and distributed among various offices and other government agents. Diplomatic offices even received wire service feeds and

⁶⁶ Davidson, et al., *News From Abroad and the Foreign Policy Public*, 4.

⁶⁷ State Department officials have admitted that the media continues to be the best source for immediate intelligence, *Newsweek*, Part 4: *War of Ideas (Frontline/World)*, Greg Barker, WGBH, Boston, March 27, 2007.

⁶⁸ W. Phillips Davidson, "News Media and International Negotiation" *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (Summer, 1974), 177.

assigned staff members to periodically monitor their outputs and foreign offices often rely on the native press – itself often informed by the American media, as will be shown in the next chapter – for on-the-ground intelligence and information.⁶⁹ These media habits continued within the Carter administration. National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, for instance, included print media clippings from domestic and foreign sources in his daily presidential briefings.⁷⁰ The staffs of various U.S. government agencies, including the White House and State Department, also monitored the press and broadcast reports not only to glean information but also in an attempt to anticipate what questions the press might ask.⁷¹

The Carter administration's efforts to influence the Iran hostage crisis story in the press, however, were frustrated by the development of an antagonistic relationship and the media reliance on non-administration news sources. By the time the Iranian students stormed the U.S. embassy in Tehran, many administration insiders felt that the relationship between the press and president was already at its most adversarial point since Watergate and Vietnam – an openly hostile relationship that Powell felt did a disservice to the press, the president, and the public.⁷² Carter has pointed to studies that show that his was the most negatively covered of any modern American presidency. And Chief of staff Hamilton Jordan – the target of a series of scathing unsubstantiated reports⁷³ – likewise claimed that the Carter-era press inherited a wholesale skepticism and “out-and-out cynicism about the

⁶⁹ Davidson, “News Media and International Negotiation,” 175-6.

⁷⁰ Zbigniew Brzezinski. *Foreign Policy II: The Middle East; Defense and Intelligence*, The Carter Presidency: Lessons for the 21st Century, University of Georgia; Athens, GA, 2007.

⁷¹ “Interview with Hodding Carter” in Edmund Ghareeb, *Split Vision: The Portrayal of Arabs in the American Media* (Washington, DC: American-Arab Affairs Council, 1983), 245.

⁷² Jody Powell. *Institutional Presidency: White House Organization and Interactions with Congress, Interest Groups, and the Media*, The Carter Presidency; Thompson, 25-6.

⁷³ In order of use: John Anthony Maltese, *Spin Control: The White House Office of Communications and the Management of Presidential News* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 168; Spragens, *From Spokesman to Press Secretary*, 88; David Harris, *The Crisis: The President, the Prophet, and the Shah—1979 and the Coming of Militant Islam* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2004), 57-8.

American political process generally and the Presidency specifically” as a result of Vietnam-era political deceptions and the press’s role in bringing down Nixon during Watergate.⁷⁴

But it is unfair to only criticize the impact Watergate and Vietnam may have had on the press’s attitude toward Jimmy Carter. The small-town Georgia politician with down-home probity won the presidency partially as a result of media opposition to the established Washington order.⁷⁵ In fact, the Carter White House contributed to its own negative image in the press. Early on in the emerging Iran crisis, comments made by George Ball, brought in temporarily to help compose a new Iran policy, gave the press the impression that the administration was profoundly divided on the Iranian issue. In particular, Ball’s comments helped to cement the emerging Brzezinski-Vance conflict that would emerge as a consistent media narrative throughout 1979 and early 1980.⁷⁶ But perhaps most damaging to the White House’s relationship with the press was its outsider status. Carter had campaigned as an outsider and carried into the White House a “certain contempt for all things established” including the media elite. Despite early affinities, the Carter team failed to develop friendly relations with the press and even, as media coverage of the administration soured, came to view the established press with contempt.⁷⁷

President Carter harbored a “deep distrust – even dislike – of the media.”⁷⁸ Yet at the same time the president was extraordinarily accessible to the press, frequently holding press conferences and even reorganizing the Office of Communications to proactively manage press access to the oval office and to use media contacts to measure the pulse and opinions of communities nationwide otherwise untenable because of presidential

⁷⁴ Hamilton Jordan, *Crisis: The Last Year of the Carter Presidency* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1982), 365.

⁷⁵ Harris, *The Crisis*, 50-1.

⁷⁶ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Advisor, 1977-1981* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983), 370.

⁷⁷ Maltese, *Spin Control*, 167-8.

⁷⁸ Maltese, *Spin Control*, 149.

remoteness.⁷⁹ But while the president enjoyed talking to the press, he took very little interest in the day-to-day operations of dealing with them. That job he left to the press secretary. The press and the press secretary manipulate each other, the latter by the giving and withholding of information to attempt to influence coverage, where stories run, and who runs them. While the press secretary's attempts to manipulate the media represent a more implicit than explicit process, it remains a process around which journalists must navigate and through which the administration attempts to influence its media image.⁸⁰

Initially, Powell's press office and the White House press corps appeared to work well together. Powell judged reporters – especially print reporters – to have fewer and less serious ego problems than most other influential people. The White House press corps likewise held Powell in high regard; Powell was a dramatic improvement over his Nixon- and Ford-era predecessors because of his closeness to the president, his character, and a casual demeanor one *Newsweek* commentator described as “a Southern breeze.”⁸¹ At the same time, however, Powell had only one job and it did not include being friends with the press.⁸² To this end, decisions to allow access to journalists were not influenced by the desire to make news, but rather to protect the president, to communicate the White House's message, to absorb the worst blows the press had to offer, and to soften the president's blows in return.⁸³

Powell's conflict with the press often led to frustration and mistrust. He was routinely irritated by the press's “double standard for judging what is acceptable behavior, and by extension, what is newsworthy” and by media attempts to distort White House

⁷⁹ The office even set up the first White House radio actuality service, competing with AP Radio and UPI Audio as a news service for the nation's 10,000 radio stations, and established the first rudimentary video-feed system for interviewing cabinet officials and staff remotely. Maltese, *Spin Control*, 149-58.

⁸⁰ Kenneth W. Thompson, ed., *Three Press Secretaries on the Presidency and the Press: Jody Powell, George Reedy, Jerry terHorst* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), 54, 64.

⁸¹ Powell often advised the press regarding stories, however, and on at least one occasion suggested the newsweeklies stop their presses so that they could report a breaking story from Camp David. In order of use: Powell, *The Other Side of the Story*, 20; William C. Spragens, *From Spokesman to Press Secretary: White House Operations* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1980), 82; Thompson, 3.

⁸² Powell, *The Other Side of the Story*, 84-7.

⁸³ Thompson, *Three Press Secretaries on the Presidency and the Press*, 8-9, 59.

messages. *Newsweek*, for instance, attempted to alter quotes from Brzezinski, changing their meaning to fit a story.⁸⁴ And the press's lack of self awareness, especially of its own profit motive, and its lack of accountability especially aggravated the press secretary: "neither decision makers [sic] nor reporters know what an action means in terms of its full context and consequences. Yet every night on the 6:00 news, they speak as if they knew. Responsibility for journalists should involve admitting their frailties and mistakes, much as they judge political leaders on this basis."⁸⁵

Both from the modern perspective and that of the previous Ford administration, it is surprising that Carter's media team did little to manage the press in the first years of his presidency. Little effort was made to manage White House communications or to create a unified image of the president or the administration for public consumption. Nor was the press office managed with a strong hand – several initiatives to corral cabinet and corporate public information officers suffered from the absence of Powell's attention. This lack of central communications direction left cabinet secretaries and administration insiders without communications control. The result was the communication of multiple messages to the press and a consequential media depiction of White House incoherence.⁸⁶

Once it became clear that the administration's image suffered from a lack of coherence and direction, Carter recreated the Office of Communication and appointed a director, campaign veteran and advertising executive Gerald Rafshoon. This appointment allowed the Carter team to start formulating long-term communications goals – goals otherwise untenable to Powell's reactionary press office. Rafshoon even tried to address the president's over-reliance on action and under-appreciation of image, writing in a summer 1979 memo, "ideology is not the issue in 1980 ... whether or not you are president for

⁸⁴ Powell, *The Other Side of the Story*, 18-19, 74-5.

⁸⁵ Thompson, *Three Press Secretaries on the Presidency and the Press*, 4, 88

⁸⁶ Maltese, *Spin Control*, 150-1.

another four years does not depend so much on what you do ... as how you do it ... *You're going to have to start looking, talking and acting more like a leader if you're going to be successful – even if it's artificial.*"⁸⁷

But, as Powell colorfully commented on the situation, "it's hard to drain the swamp when you're up to your ass in alligators."⁸⁸ Despite Rafshoon's best efforts, the president's media image improved little. Gasoline shortages associated with the Iranian revolution and massive inflation eroded gains otherwise earned by the publicized successes at Camp David and in the legislature. Nowhere was this phenomenon witnessed more clearly than in the president's diminishing public approval ratings. In late 1978, after the success at Camp David, Carter's approval rating reached only as high as 51%. By October 1979, after a long hot summer of fuel shortages and on the eve of the hostage crisis, the president's approval rating plummeted to a mere 14.98% – the lowest approval rating of any modern president. And as the day-to-day management of the hostage crisis took hold in the months that followed, long range communications planning was soon rendered moot.⁸⁹ The administration had lost control of its image and was poised to surrender control of the hostage crisis as well.

According to George Will, a *Washington Post* writer and *Newsweek* contributing editor, the embassy seizure was a result of the president's timid response to an attack by a swamp rabbit outside Plains in the spring of 1979. Will's accusation was satirical; constituting part of a weeklong "rabbit story" media assault on the president that frustrated the White House.⁹⁰ Front-page stories and evening news references to the rabbit blocked

⁸⁷ Maltese, *Spin Control*, 160-4, 168-9. Emphasis according to Maltese.

⁸⁸ Powell according Maltese, *Spin Control*, 162.

⁸⁹ Maltese, *Spin Control*, 167-76. The later Gallup poll took place on October 14, 1979.

⁹⁰ Powell, *The Other Side of the Story*, 106. Robert Novak (whom Powell refers to as "the Prince of Darkness") blamed the President's handling of the rabbit incident for inviting the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The stories all stem from an incident in Plains where the President shooed away a large rabbit from his small fishing boat. Relayed to the press by Jody Powell, the story was a surprise media fixation, only ending a year later when Reagan staffers found a photograph of the incident in a White House filing cabinet and leaked it to the press.

important energy policy and foreign policy news from reaching the public. Not for the first time, the media's agenda-setting authority hindered White House communications and reinforced an unfavorable image of the administration.

Presidential images are formed not by singular events or campaign ads but rather by collections of impressions, however trivial individually. Consider the seemingly frivolous series of publicized images of President Ford appearing either clumsy or dim-witted – images ranging from Ford falling down the Air Force One stairs or eating a tamale without removing the husk. Consider the weighty, highly publicized images of Carter that the rabbit story exacerbated: Carter impotently fighting inflation, giving his staff free reign to squabble, addressing the nation about its malaise, and inviting an international crisis by welcoming the exiled Iranian shah into the United States.⁹¹

At first the Iran hostage crisis boosted the media image of the president. Indeed, no president until George W. Bush benefited so greatly from a popular rally after a terrorist event. Carter experienced a six percent jump from the last pre-crisis poll and a thirteen percent increase between the first to second post-event polls. When Carter finally addressed the nation about the crisis, 24 days after the embassy attack, the public rally continued. Before this press conference, 67% of the public approved of Carter's handling of the crisis. In the press conference's wake, public approval of his Iran policy jumped to 77% in parallel with the thirteen-point rise in his overall approval rating to 51%.⁹²

But not all dramatic international events result in rallies behind the president. Rallies are most likely to occur if foreign policy opinion leaders, especially those who appear in the press, support the crisis management of the president. But if these experts are critical of the president, as occurred more and more frequently as the hostage crisis dragged on, the public most often responds to these critical messages by turning away from the president. This

⁹¹ Keneth L. Hacker, ed., *Candidate Images in Presidential Elections* (London: Praeger, 1995), 70.

⁹² Nacos, *Terrorism and the Media*, 99.

phenomenon was especially true during the Iran hostage crisis where, as in most prolonged terrorist spectacles, Washington lost the upper hand in shaping news coverage and instead found itself on the receiving end of the story.⁹³

Domestic criticism is then exacerbated by terrorist attempts to exercise influence over U.S. government officials through the intimidation of the public and the arousal of sympathy for the terrorists' social and political causes in the media. Violent acts of terrorism force people in the target nation to ask questions and, the terrorist hopes, rectify the situation to the terrorist's advantage⁹⁴ – rationale little different in its basic precept from that employed by radical civil rights demonstrators in the 1960s. Despite the fact that terrorists rarely sway American public opinion, they can erode the popular position of the sitting administration. Without widespread publicity, terrorists can achieve none of these effects.⁹⁵

If one of the functions of the news media is to provide a basis for direct conversation between negotiating parties then media coverage of the Iran hostage crisis is all the more germane to the formation of foreign policy.⁹⁶ The student-terrorists and Iranian government officials rarely spoke directly to the U.S. government or its agents, communicating instead with the American public through American reporters in Iran. The Ayatollah Khomeini, for instance, gave Mike Wallace of *60 Minutes* – the most highly rated news program on American television, and among the highest rated shows overall – an hour-long interview while simultaneously refusing to meet with U.S. negotiators.⁹⁷ Indeed, throughout the crisis “a great deal of routine communication among actors in the foreign policy making process” took place in newspapers, magazines, and the nightly news.⁹⁸

⁹³ Nacos, *Terrorism and the Media*, 105-6, 43, 46.

⁹⁴ Nacos, *Terrorism and the Media*, 8.

⁹⁵ Albert Bandura cited in Nacos, *Terrorism and the Media*, 1.

⁹⁶ Davidson, “News Media and International Negotiation,” 179.

⁹⁷ Patricia A. Karl, “In the Middle in the Middle East: The Media and U.S. Foreign Policy” in Ghareeb, 285-6.

⁹⁸ Robert A. Strong, *Working in the World: Jimmy Carter and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2000) 276.

This situation was not without precedent. Occasionally, foreign officials have chosen to make their interests known to U.S. decision-makers through journalists. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, for instance, a Soviet official passed his country's terms to the U.S. State Department through an ABC correspondent.⁹⁹ But Iran's expulsion of American reporters appears to have eliminated this journalistic back channel. The Tehran regime and student-terrorists' indirect communication with the Carter team through the mass media also may have contributed to numerous miscommunications. Repeated uninformed insinuations in the press that a solution to the crisis was at hand may have emboldened U.S. diplomats and tickled the public imagination, unwittingly giving the Iranians additional leverage and a stronger position from which to barter.

But critical media coverage and the lack of international dialogue are not the only ways the press impacts executive decision-making. Public opinions formed by crisis media coverage, especially the president's role in that crisis, often weighs more heavily. Carter's advisors have long argued that his administration was a trustee presidency and therefore immune to the highs and lows of public opinion. Instead, these advisors insist that Carter's focus was on serious policy analysis without pollsters' caveats.¹⁰⁰ Yet signs of the administration's sensitivity to public attitudes toward the Iran hostage crisis are plentiful. Powell describes public opinion pressure on executive decision-making as an eight hundred pound gorilla – something the president and his staff acknowledged but did not talk about.¹⁰¹ Carter's chief pollster, Patrick Caddell, was sensitive to the disintegration of the foreign policy consensus, a fear shared by the majority of Carter's inner circle of advisors. Caddell realized the president could not build an effective foreign policy without a solid domestic consensus among the foreign policy public and urged the president to pursue one

⁹⁹ Davidson, "News Media and International Negotiation," 185.

¹⁰⁰ Strong, *Working in the World*, 272.

¹⁰¹ Thompson, *Three Press Secretaries on the Presidency and the Press*, 15.

by refining his public image.¹⁰² Jordan was immediately concerned with the crisis's impact on the next election and when a French intermediary reminded Jordan not to forget the political pressures limiting the Iranian government's ability to negotiate with the U.S., Jordan is reported to have snapped back, "Don't forget the political pressures here President Carter will have to be able to publicly explain and defend our actions to the American people. Khomeini doesn't have to run for re-election."¹⁰³

The press does not make foreign policy nor does it directly cause policy to be made. But the press does establish the boundaries within which such policy is prepared.¹⁰⁴ Studies of television audiences have also shown that television coverage of terrorist attacks – monopolizing press coverage at the expense of almost all other foreign affairs stories – define the standards by which the public measured presidential success. Thus, viewers primed by non-stop coverage of the Iran hostage crisis were inclined to judge Jimmy Carter's presidential performance not on his success at Camp David or in Panama, but in light of his foreign policy problems with Iran.¹⁰⁵ And the hostage crisis's dominant position in the media compounded the administration's anxiety over securing the hostages' release. As President Carter recalls, the crisis "was a [sic] gnawing away at your guts No matter what else happened, it was always there"¹⁰⁶

Another study has shown that administration officials believed the media's influence on federal domestic and foreign policies was "so much part of policy-making as to be indistinguishable from it."¹⁰⁷ National Security Council member Gary Sick described the

¹⁰² Michael Ledeen and William Lewis, *Debate: The American Failure in Iran* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1981) 68.

¹⁰³ In order or use: Harris, *The Crisis*, 209; Jordan, 138.

¹⁰⁴ William A. Dorman, Mansour Farhang, "The U.S. Press and Iran: Foreign Policy and The Journalism of Deference" (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987) 2.

¹⁰⁵ Shanto Iyengar and Donald Kinder, *News that Matters: television and American Opinion* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987) cited in Nacos, 12.

¹⁰⁶ White Burkett Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia, Project on the Carter President, President Carter Session, November 29, 1982, 53.

¹⁰⁷ Martin Linsky, *Impact: How the Press Affects Federal Policymaking* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1986) cited in Nacos, 17.

press's impact on foreign policy decision making as transformative. "The media contribute to the process of transforming an international issue into a domestic political crisis for the president. There is perhaps no other type of situation that subjects the president to such intense public scrutiny, and the president is aware that his image as a decisive and effective leader is constantly at risk."¹⁰⁸

Sick's observation is, in fact, a quantifiable trend (*figure 4.15*). Both *Newsweek* and *Time* regularly categorized their stories into international, national, or special interest categories.¹⁰⁹ For a year preceding the embassy attack, both magazines almost universally positioned their coverage of the situation in Iran in their "International" and "World" sections, as would be expected. The only exceptions to this trend were *Newsweek's* special reports on the flight of the shah and the return of Khomeini, the Valentine's Day attack on the embassy, *Time's* special report "The World of Islam", and *Newsweek's* curious placement of a story about Ross Perot's rescue of two American employees held in an Iranian prison in the magazine's "National Affairs" category.¹¹⁰ Yet once the hostage crisis began, and it became apparent to journalists and editors that the crisis would be of a prolonged nature, the human drama of the crisis quickly transformed from an international to a national story. Coverage of the crisis in *Time* became overtly national in nature with its first report on November 19, 1979.¹¹¹ *Newsweek* at first covered the crisis as a special interest or cover story – what editors often refer to as a "back-of-the-book" story – before settling into a regular

¹⁰⁸ Gary Sick, "Taking Vows: The Domestication of Policy-Making in Hostage Incidents," in Walter Reich, ed., *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind* (New York: Cambridge University Press), 242.

¹⁰⁹ *U.S. News and World Report* did not consistently or clearly organize their stories into comparable categories.

¹¹⁰ The *Newsweek* special reports included "Iran at the Brink", *Newsweek*, (January 8, 1979); "Under the Guns", *Newsweek* (February 26, 1979). Perot's rescue mission was described in "Perot's Mission Impossible," *Newsweek* (March 5, 1979) 47-8.

¹¹¹ "Blackmailing the US", *Time* (November 19, 1979).

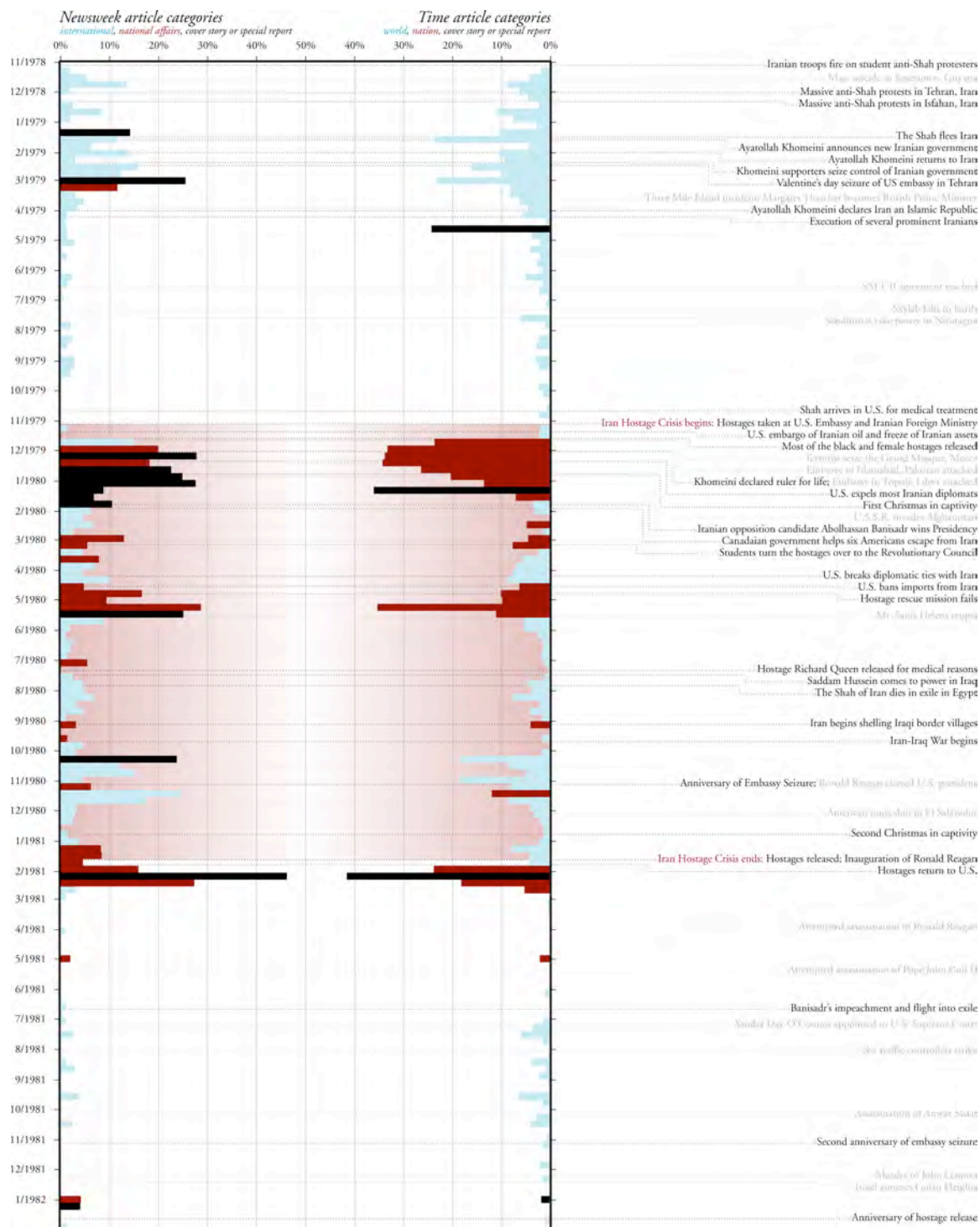


figure 4.15

THE IRAN HOSTAGE CRISIS AS INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL NEWS

alternation of crisis stories between the magazine's international and national categories. Nor was this transformation of international news to national news restricted to pieces concerning the hostages. Frequently stories about internal Iranian politics, the ayatollah in particular, were transposed into national news categories. Of special note were the magazines' extensive coverage of the rescue mission's failure in the Iranian desert, both of which appeared in the national sections of the magazines, and their coverage of the hostages' release, which warranted, unsurprisingly, special back-of-the-book coverage.¹¹² Indeed, almost any story about Iran that featured an American – regardless of the locale or emphasis of the article – became a national story. Once the crisis was concluded, however, President Ronald Reagan suffered from no such media conflation of Iran and domestic news. What Iranian news trickled into the newsweeklies after the hostages' return was clearly international in nature and editorial tenor.

Measured against the mounting national crisis, the White House felt impotent. Despite all the martial power and financial resources at its disposal, the Carter administration was unable to protect its citizens from a flagrant violation of international law. Press exposure of this impotence was overwhelming, the impulse to act overpowering.¹¹³ "The safety and well-being of the hostages became a constant concern for me, no matter what other duties I was performing as president," Carter recalls. "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 honor and security of our nation. I listened to every proposal, no matter how preposterous, all the way

¹¹² "A Mission Comes to Grief in Iran", "The Plan: How it Failed", "The Men Who Died", "And the Families Still Wait", "Valiant Try—or Bad Faith", "The Sticky War-Powers Issue", "Irans' Growing Turmoil" *Newsweek* (May 5, 1980); "Debacle in the Desert", "Days That Call for Daring", Shock, Anger—But Also Sympathy", "'A' for Effort, 'F' for Execution", "For the Families, a New Concern," "A Mother's Odyssey" *Time* (May 5, 1980). "Countdown to Freedom", "Fourteen Months of Futility", "After They Are Set Free" *Newsweek* (January 26, 1981); "Hostage Breakthrough", "The Long Ordeal of the Hostages" *Time* (January 26, 1980).

¹¹³ Gary Sick, *All Fall Down: America's Tragic Encounter with Iran* (New York: Random House, 1985), 207.

from delivering the Shah for trial as the revolutionaries demanded to dropping an atomic bomb on Tehran.”¹¹⁴ So obsessed was the president that throughout the crisis he reportedly “spent more time watching the three televisions sets simultaneously beaming the latest news about the crisis into the Oval Office than he did reading CIA cables containing the latest evaluations of how to deal with it.”¹¹⁵

Many critics have looked back at the Carter administration and found it guilty of succumbing to media and public pressure in its decision to launch the April 25, 1980 hostage rescue attempt.¹¹⁶ U.S.-Iranian diplomacy had failed for several reasons. The first reason, described above, was the Iranians refusal to speak directly with U.S. diplomats. The second reason was the relationship between journalists and statesmen. A 1974 study found that diplomats of all backgrounds, domestic and foreign, obtained much of their information from a standard set of American news media, among them the *International Herald Tribune*, *Time*, and *Newsweek*. Thus, international negotiations are often predicated on participants beginning with the same set of media-communicated facts.¹¹⁷ Given the nature of U.S. media coverage of Iran and the fact that all sides of the American-Iranian international dispute monitored American news outlets – print, broadcast, and wire – it would appear that the Iranian government should have been much better informed about public attitudes

¹¹⁴ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping the Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York: Bantam, 1982), 459.

¹¹⁵ According to Carter’s chief legal counsel Lloyd Cutler, cited in John P. Wallach, “Leakers, Terrorists, Policy Makers, and the Press,” in Simon Serfaty, ed., *The Media and Foreign Policy* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1991), 88.

¹¹⁶ Substantial literature exists on American decision- and policy-making during the hostage crisis: David Patrick Houghton, *US Foreign Policy and the Iran Hostage Crisis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Paul Ryan, *The Iran Hostage Rescue Mission: Why it Failed* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1985); Steve Smith, “Policy preferences and Bureaucratic Position: The Case of the American Hostage Rescue Mission”, *International Affairs* 61: 9-25, 1984/1985; Steve Smith, “Groupthink and the Hostage Rescue Mission”, *British Journal of Political Science* 15:117-23, 1985; Betty Glad, “Personality, Political and Group Process Variables in Foreign Policy Decision-Making: Jimmy Carter’s Handling of the Iranian Hostage Crisis”, *International Political Science Review* 10: 35-61, 1989; Rose McDermott, “Prospect Theory in Internal Relations: The Iranian Hostage Rescue Mission”, *Political Psychology*, 13: 237-63, 1992; Michael Link and Charles Kegley, “Is Access Influence? Measuring Adviser-Presidential Interactions in the Light of the Iranian Hostage Crisis”, *International Interactions* 18: 343-64, 1993; Scott Gartner, “Predicting the Timing of Carter’s Decision to Initiate a Hostage Rescue Attempt: Modelling a Dynamic Information Environment”, *International Interactions* 18: 365-86, 1993.

¹¹⁷ Davidson, “News Media and International Negotiation,” 174; William H. Read, *America’s Mass Media Merchants* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 113.

toward the hostage crisis in the United States than the U.S. government could have been about public attitudes in Iran. This is especially important to understanding the failure of U.S. negotiations. Without access to reliable, un-sensationalized information about Khomeini's politics and the opinions of the Iranian public, revolutionary or otherwise, it was much more difficult for U.S. negotiators to suggest a settlement that would satisfy the political needs of the Iranians while also liberating the American hostages.

The role of photography in affecting policy has been noted in the past: photographs of emaciated Union soldiers held in Confederate camps sparked public furor in the North and led to the execution of Southern camp commanders. Similarly, written accounts of the Nazi holocaust failed to convince a skeptical public until accompanying graphic photographs made their indisputable visual testimony. U.S. policy in Somalia was also affected by images of a mutilated American soldier dragged through the streets of Mogadishu.¹¹⁸ Thus it is easy to imagine how non-stop coverage of American failures in Iran, visually depicted nightly on television and weekly in news magazines, created a powerful impulse to act. A haunted Jimmy Carter was daily confronted by archived photographs of American hostages, images of Iranian mobs flaunting U.S. power, and an ayatollah reinforcing his new anti-American regime with every one of the president's missteps.

The hostage rescue mission was ordered after five months of tedious and, in the end, ineffective diplomatic contact and negotiation. Media coverage, public opinion, and elite opinion had turned against the president and the careful diplomatic approach advanced by Secretary of State Cyrus Vance. Likewise, a tough campaign for the democratic presidential nomination, and a tougher campaign ahead against Ronald Reagan, put increasing pressure

¹¹⁸ V. Goldberg, *The Power of Photography: How Photographs Changed Our Lives* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1991), 7, 33; Sally Stapleton, vice president of photography, international division, of the Associated Press according to Julianne H. Newton, *The Burden of Visual Truth: The Role of Photojournalism in mediating Reality* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2001), 79.

on Carter to, as Rafshoon advised, act “more like a leader ... even if it’s artificial.”¹¹⁹ Drastic action may have been unavoidable under such circumstances. As CIA director Stansfield Turner recognized, “Carter found it necessary to shift to a pro-active option because the pro-legal [sic] ones simply were not producing results; and he could not wait out Khomeini because the public, urged by the drumbeat of the media, was impatient with what it perceived as our national impotence.”¹²⁰

Using ground intelligence from a reconstituted CIA presence in Tehran and embassy blueprints, a mockup of the embassy compound was built in a remote location in the U.S. There, the observed routine of the student-terrorists was simulated and, in live-fire training, Delta Force commandos stormed the compound practicing to recognize the hostages and shoot only their Iranian captors. On occasion, mission commander Colonel Charles Beckwith even took the place of a hostage, sitting among the dummies as commandos stormed the compound around him.¹²¹

The complicated rescue mission would take two moonless nights to execute. On the first, a squadron of helicopters would meet with commandos on three C-130 cargo planes in the Iranian desert before flying to a mountain cave about fifty miles outside of Tehran. On the second night, a CIA operative posing as an Irish businessman in Tehran would bring trucks out to the cave and conduct the commandos into the capital. Once assault on the embassy began, the helicopters would descend from the mountains to provide air support. Surviving commandoes and hostages would meet at the stadium across the street from the embassy and evacuate to an unused airstrip outside Tehran where more commandos would be waiting with the C-130s, ready to fly out of Iran.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Maltese, *Spin Control*, 160-4, 168-9.

¹²⁰ Nacos, *Terrorism and the Media*, 148; Stansfield Turner, *Terrorism and Democracy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1991), 226.

¹²¹ Strong, *Working in the World*, 238-9.

¹²² Strong, *Working in the World*, 240-1

But the mission was not only complicated in terms of execution. It was likely very costly in terms of human life. According to a casualty estimate sent to CIA director Stansfield Turner just a month before the rescue attempt, no less than 60% of the hostages were likely to be killed in any rescue: 20% during the raid on the embassy compound, 25% during the location and identification of the hostages onsite, and 15% during evacuation. Indeed, the memo suggests, “it is presumed to be equally likely that the Amembassy [sic] rescue attempt would be a complete success (100% of the Amembassy hostage rescued), as it would be a complete failure (0% of the Amembassy hostages rescued).”¹²³

Casualties might not have been limited to the hostages or Delta Force. At the time of the rescue missions, some 200 Americans – mostly journalists – were in Iran who could have been taken as replacement hostages or otherwise threatened with reprisal.¹²⁴ In the days leading up to the rescue attempt, the president attempted to minimize the journalists’ risk of capture and retribution, publicly suggesting that American reporters leave Iran. But instead of evacuating the country at the president’s behest, the press besieged the White House with angry calls, accusing them of attempting to limit the first amendment and restrict access to a crisis. Powell recalls losing his temper with Sandy Socolow of CBS, saying, “I personally don’t give a good goddamn what you people do. If I had my way, I’d ask the fucking ayatollah to keep fifty reporters and give us our diplomats back. Then you people who have all the answers could figure out how to get them out.”¹²⁵

Throughout mission planning, the Carter administration successfully kept the hostage rescue mission secret, in part through skillful manipulation of the press. Carefully conceived and well-placed leaks concerning the president’s opposition to such a rescue mission were timed to distract reporters whose attention to the continuing crisis appears to

¹²³ Houghton, *US Foreign Policy and the Iran Hostage Crisis*, 7.

¹²⁴ Karl, “In the Middle in the Middle East,” 289.

¹²⁵ Powell, *The Other Side of the Story*, 229.

have been waning.¹²⁶ Examples of the administration's obfuscation strategy include the April 22, 1980 leak of comments made by Jordan to his staff, directly denying the possibility of an imminent attack or rescue. Powell also deflected the press, walking a fine line in his attempt to misinform the White House press corps without betraying their trust through outright deceit. Indeed, Powell recounts only one incident of explicitly lying to a journalist about the impending rescue. *Los Angeles Times* reporter Jack Nelson asked Powell directly about a military assault or rescue attempt just days before the mission was launched. Powell lied to him, citing all the reasons why such a rescue attempt was impractical – factors Carter and his team struggled with for four months before deciding to send in Delta Force.¹²⁷

This is not to suggest that Powell or other White House officials felt journalists would necessarily betray the secrecy of the rescue mission, threatening the lives of the commandos or the hostages just to break a hot story. During the hostage crisis, some journalists working in Tehran were aware that a handful of Americans had escaped capture at the embassy and were hiding at the Canadian embassy. But these reporters withheld this information, without need of official censure, because its release would have threatened the lives of not only the American escapees, but also their Canadian hosts.¹²⁸

In the end, the rescue mission was a failure. On April 24, 1980, eight Sea Stallion helicopters took off from the *USS Nimitz*, flying low across the Persian Gulf and into Iranian airspace. In complete radio silence and receiving only occasional communiqués from mission command in Egypt, the small fleet skimmed the Iranian desert south of Tehran, enduring equipment failures and two blinding sandstorms. Two of the pilots turned back before reaching the Desert One rendezvous where the remaining helicopter crews met three C-130

¹²⁶ Strong, *Working in the World*, 277-8.

¹²⁷ Powell, *The Other Side of the Story*, 230-2; Strong, *Working in the World*, 252. Powell later apologized the Nelson for the deceit.

¹²⁸ Brigitte L. Nacos, *Mass-Mediated Terrorism: The Central Role of the Media in Terrorism and Counterterrorism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 180-1.

transports carrying the Delta Force commandos. But one of the helicopters on the ground experienced a hydraulic fault and, with too few helicopters to safely proceed, Carter rebuffed Brzezinski's advice to carry on and allowed Beckwith to abort the mission. As the refueled helicopters lifted off the desert floor, one collided with a C-130. The resulting explosion lit up the desert and killed eight U.S. servicemen. In the commandos rush to evacuate the site, charred bodies and wrecked aircraft were left littering the Iranian desert. At the White House, a devastated president gave the CIA enough time to evacuate Tehran but responded quickly enough to beat the Iranians to the airwaves.¹²⁹

The public was besieged by a surge in hostage crisis coverage in the aftermath of the rescue attempt. Many hostages learned of the rescue attempt through American magazines, as well. Hostages report being shown pictures of wrecked helicopters and charred bodies as their captors gloated over the mission's failure. Elizabeth Ann Swift was given a copy of *Time* or *Newsweek* with the story about the rescue attempt torn out but inexplicitly stuffed behind the back cover.¹³⁰ Robert Ode learned about the aborted raid from the New York socialist newspaper *The Militant*, which his captors gave him in late July 1980.¹³¹

Despite pressures on the president to act, it is hard to imagine a religious, peace-loving president taking such a dramatic risk merely to leverage public opinion. Rather the leverage appears to have worked the other way around – “public opinion forced upon the president an act of sheerest adventurism.”¹³² Considering the risks to the hostages, their rescuers, and hundreds of other Americans and Westerners in Tehran, and the little material gain its success would have brought to the hostages or their families, it is hard to rationalize the president's order to launch the mission's without considering the frustration the

¹²⁹ Strong, *Working in the World*, 252-4.

¹³⁰ Robert McFadden, Joseph B. Treaster and Maurice Carrol, eds., *No Hiding Place* (New York: Times Books, 1981) 98, 111.

¹³¹ Diary, Robert C. Ode, July 26, 1980, “Diary”, Box 13, Ode Collection, Jimmy Carter Library.

¹³² Nacos, *Terrorism and the Media*, 173.

administration felt about the conduct of the crisis and the public's perception of Carter's efforts to resolve it – perceptions largely influenced by the mass-market press.

But to what degree did the administration create its own media prison? By focusing so much attention on the crisis in the early days of the long ordeal and by promising to refrain from campaigning until the hostages were released, the Carter administration may have enhanced the political importance of the issue and given greater voice to the student-terrorists and the Iranian government supporting them.¹³³ But even if the president wanted to keep the administration's response to the hostage crisis low-key, it is not clear that the American media or the president's critics would have allowed him to do so.¹³⁴ As the press's habits during terrorist spectacles and the press secretary's experience with journalists indicate, there were severe limits on the administration's ability to lower the hostage crisis on the national agenda – an agenda greatly influenced by the media's definition of the foreign policy dialogue.¹³⁵

Powell has since commented that the press made it hard for the administration to do its job, inexpertly sensationalizing some administration news while neglecting nearly all else.¹³⁶ Carter, too, has lamented his failure to manage the press – both in his inadequate White House communications structure and in his mismanagement of the crisis: “If I’ve had one major failure in my [political] life it’s a total incapacity to deal effectively with the American press, particularly the White House press when I was in office”¹³⁷

Newsmagazines and other media heavily influence the American foreign policy public, a sector of the larger national media audience that is both knowledgeable and influential in foreign policy decision-making. Members of this audience better absorb foreign

¹³³ Sick, *All Fall Down*, 221.

¹³⁴ Strong, *Working in the World*, 235.

¹³⁵ Sick, *All Fall Down*, 222.

¹³⁶ Jody Powell. *Institutional Presidency*.

¹³⁷ Jimmy Carter according to Maltese, *Spin Control*, 168.

news and better use is, as diplomats, negotiators, and politicians. Various services and branches of the government rely on the media for basic foreign intelligence, ranging from the mundane to the critical. But the flow of information is not a one-way street. Administration gatekeepers, such as press secretaries and communications officers, influence the outflow of information from the White House and its departments as much as possible. But in spectacular crises, such as the Iran hostage crisis, administration influence is limited. As the general and foreign policy publics consume copious amounts of crisis media, much of it supplied from outside Washington, the administration becomes inextricably bound to media images and public opinion. The press effectively sets the agenda for public discourse and, in the end, the measure of foreign policy success.



“All the rulers of Islamic countries are servants for foreigners ... and have left the entire Islamic heritage in the hands of foreigners ... whatever is necessary to destroy them must be carried out.”
– *Ayatollah Khomeini*¹

Chapter 5: Comparison THE IRAN HOSTAGE CRISIS IN THE ARAB PRESS

On July 27, 1980, at age 60, the exiled Shah of Iran – the self-styled *shahanshah* (شاهنشاه), king of kings, and *aryamehr* (آریامهر), light of the Aryans – died in Egypt of pneumonic complications of stage two lymphoma. Never again would Mohammad Reza Pahlavi sit upon the golden peacock throne, festooned in his pearl-encrusted cape, or his golden girdle with its egg-sized emerald buckle. Never again would he wield the “all-conquering” sword of his dynasty, its sheath covered with diamonds, emeralds, and rubies, or don the crown of his father, inset with 3,380 diamonds, 368 pearls, five emeralds, and two sapphires.

It had been seventeen months since the shah’s flight from Iran – a flight that had carried him to Egypt, Morocco, the Bahamas, Mexico, the United States, Panama, and then back to Egypt. In January 1979, when the shah had been forced from his throne, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat² invited his old friend to Egypt, receiving him with full military fan fare and an extravagant reception featuring massive posters of the Iranian monarch that

¹ Ayatollah Khomeini according to Uri Ra’anan et al, eds., *Hydra of Carnage* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1986), 480-2. Photo: Manoocher Deghati. “A Grim Postmortem Begins” *Newsweek* (May 12, 1980), 32.

² An accurate transliteration of Anwar Sadat’s name from Arabic into English should read Anwar Al-Sadat or Anwar As-Sadat (or Al-Sadat). But in this case the author has opted to use more familiar transliteration of the Egyptian president’s name from the U.S. press.

equaled or exceeded the gigantic images of Sadat and his predecessor Gamal Abdul Nasser littered across Cairo.

Thus there was little surprise to observers when Sadat greeted the shah's death with similar fanfare. The shah's funeral procession stretched for two miles through blistering Egyptian summer heat, winding from the sumptuous Abdeen Palace to the massive Al Rifa'i mosque. The shah's coffin, draped in the pre-revolutionary flag of Iran and borne on a horse-drawn military caisson, was escorted by a thousand-man contingent of Egyptian soldiers with a phalanx of Egyptian army helicopters overhead. The shah's empress, Farah, and their children, including their eldest son now known by supporters as Reza II, pretender to the peacock throne, followed in dark clothing accompanied by Sadat and former President Richard Nixon. Egyptian citizens lined the parade route in such numbers that police had to force them back with electric prods. Once at the Al Rifa'i mosque the former shah was interred in a crypt where his father's remains had once laid in exile, adjacent to that of his former brother-in-law, the last King of Egypt.³

This chapter explores the Arab press's depictions of Iran and hostage crisis news – including the death of the shah – focusing on two Arab dailies: Egypt's *Al-ahram* (الاهرام), one of the oldest and most widely read and circulated newspapers in the Arab world, and Algeria's *El Moudjahid* (المجاهد), the state-run newspaper of the nation that helped resolve the 444-day crisis.⁴ An examination of these publications reveals, first, that the Arab press's coverage of the situations in Iran, while critical of the U.S., demonstrated no sympathy for

³ This description of the shah's death and funeral are derived from *Al-Ahram* (August 28, 1980), 1, 2-6; *Al-Ahram* (August 29, 1980), 1, 3, 6; *Al-Ahram* (August 30, 1980), 1, 3-5; "After the Shah, No End to the Turmoil" *U.S. News and World Report* (August 11, 1980), 31-2; "An Exile Laid to Rest" *Time* (August 11, 1980), 34; "A Stateless Funeral" *Newsweek* (August 11, 1980), 38; Mark Bowden, *Guests of the Ayatollah: The First Battle in America's War with Militant Islam* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2006), 498-9; David Harris, *The Crisis: The President, the Prophet, and the Shah—1979 and the Coming of Militant Islam* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2004), 11, 21, 163, 370.

⁴ Both of these Arab dailies are readily accessible to U.S.-based scholars on microfilm. Other Arab news papers, however, are not so readily available. For instance archived editions of the world's most widely read Arab daily, the Saudi-owned and London-based *Asharq Alawsat* (The Middle East), were not available to the public at the time of this writing.

the Iranian revolutionary cause and, in the case of the Egyptian paper, demonstrated tremendous support for the shah. An examination of photo credits and a comparison with the U.S. press also shows that American and European news services provided the lion's share of international content for both the Egyptian and Algerian papers and that the conflict between this source of information and the newspapers' local foci combined to shape Arab reporting of the crisis, creating an aggregate coverage that differed from its American analogue little in substance but greatly in emphasis.

[KHOMEINI THROUGH ARAB EYES: ARAB PRESS PERSPECTIVES ON IRANIAN ISLAMISM]

On November 5, 1979, Egypt's leading daily newspaper, *Al-Ahram*, broke the story of the seizure of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran. But where American news publications ran this story on front pages, magazine covers, and at the top of the evening broadcasts, the Egyptian paper ran the story on page four. Embedded among other world news, *Al-Ahram's* first day of hostage crisis coverage began a trend that carried throughout the newspapers treatment of the 444-day crisis. A small photograph of Iranian students scaling the embassy fence ran unaccompanied by a story, buried beneath a headline about Chinese warnings to Western European nations. The only commentary was a brief Associated Press (AP – أ.ب.ى) caption.

Egyptian coverage of the crisis was scattered for the first week of the hostage drama. The occasional unaccompanied picture, including an image of the Iranian students holding aloft photographs of blindfolded hostage William Belk in front of a poster of the ayatollah, were the only reminders of the growing hostage crisis in the paper's large World Information (أخبار العالم) section. Indeed, significant coverage, both in text and imagery, did not begin until November 11 and 12, when the first comprehensive articles – addressing Carter, the exiled shah, Khomeini, Teddy Kennedy, and American demonstrators – appeared in

surprising volume. The first appearance of the crisis on the newspaper's cover did not come until November 15, ten news days after the embassy attack.

By the time of the failed American rescue mission, in late April 1980, the crisis warranted more attention in the Arab dailies. But where U.S. media coverage was sorrowful and sympathetic to the human cost of the rescue and desperate situation of the hostages as a result, the Arab press was critical of the aggressive American "military adventure" and highlighted international indignation.⁵ Algeria's *El-Moudjahid*, often more critical of the U.S. than its Egyptian counterpart, condemned the rescue mission as a provocative military action, destabilizing the Washington-Tehran crisis⁶ – a poignant comparison to the American newswEEKlies' proud descriptions of Delta Force's attempted resolution of the crisis. *Al-Ahram*, which previously carried the hostage drama on its cover infrequently, placed the story of the failed rescue on the front page for six consecutive days. It also dedicated whole pages and page spreads to in-depth coverage. The dedication of large amounts of newswHOLE – approximately 10% of all non-advertising space on April 26, 1980 – reinforced the image of American weakness and reminded Egyptian readers of the long American failure to free its people in Tehran.

Such descriptions and images of the United States and the hostage crisis reveal two aspects of the Arab press's coverage. First, the hostage crisis was not a story of critical importance to the newspaper's editors on a day-to-day basis, as it was in the U.S. – an issue that will be addressed in further detail below. Second, Arab coverage of the crisis revealed two conflicting representations of the United States, one positive, one negative.

This negative image, which in the early 1980s outweighed the positive, was primarily the result of coverage of America's highly partial political behavior in the region –

⁵ "L'aventure militaire US en iran et ses deboires: L'Egypt, base d'agression" *El-Moudjahid* (April 28, 1980), 1.

⁶ "La crise washington-tehran: Manœuvres de déstabilisation et provocations militaires" *El-Moudjahid* (April 30, 1980), 1.

particularly by the U.S. legislature and the U.S. press in relation to Israel. For 35 years prior to the hostage crisis, the Arab press was focused on the Palestinian issue and the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict, coloring the coverage of all other American political activity in the region. This negative image was also reinforced by the disconnect between the American and Arab worldviews – the Arabs did not see the Soviet Union as a threat. Rather, the Arab states saw Israel as a threat and were thus immune to U.S.-projected anti-Soviet rhetoric and inversely sensitive to U.S. pro-Israel actions.⁷

During the crisis, the U.S.'s image in the Arab press also suffered from hostage crisis-related impotence. The image of American weakness generated by month after month of humiliating setbacks and the failed, aggressive attempt to rescue the hostages had an ill affect on U.S. relations with other nations.⁸ Such a message may have been a goal of the hostage crisis's perpetrators. For while the students may have initially wanted a sit in to protest U.S. admission of the shah, once the crisis dragged on and once management of the embassy and the hostages was passed over to the government, the motives behind the crisis changed. Perhaps this was simply a domestic power play, as Gary Sick has suggested.⁹ Or perhaps it better fits the model of terrorist behavior described by Benjamin Netanyahu when he concluded, "whatever their specific motives or demands may be, the overriding consideration of all terrorist acts is to humiliate governments and expose their impotence. And this impotence is dramatized with special force and acuity when a handful of people are able to strike at anyone, anywhere, anytime."¹⁰

⁷ Adnan Abu Odeh, "The American Image in the Arab Mass Media" in Edmund Ghareeb, *Split Vision: The Portrayal of Arabs in the American Media* (Washington, DC: American-Arab Affairs Council, 1983), 355.

⁸ Brigitte L. Nacos, *Terrorism and the Media: From the Iran Hostage Crisis to the World Trade Center Bombing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 135.

⁹ Sick makes a number of claims about the motivations behind the crisis including a domestic political argument that the Ayatollah shanghaied the crisis to earn massive public support and cement his position in the new government, facilitating the approval of his contention constitution. Gary Sick, *All Fall Down: America's Tragic Encounter with Iran* (New York: Random House, 1985).

¹⁰ Benjamin Netanyahu, *Terrorism: How the West Can Win* (New York: Avon, 1986), 200.

Despite these negative factors, a positive image of the U.S. persisted in the Arab press, emanating from cultural and technological admiration, American values, democratic advocacy at home and abroad, and to international ideals of freedom, justice, and human rights. What is more, the quality of American life, much envied in the Arab world, was well communicated in film, television, and other cultural products consumed by even the illiterate among the Arab audience.¹¹ A dramatic example of these images in juxtaposition is *Al-Ahram's* simultaneous, and facing, coverage of the failed hostage rescue mission and U.S. achievements in outer space. On one two-page spread, opposing stories and images depict the rescue mission's failure in the desert, complete with photographs of wrecked aircraft and burnt bodies, in juxtaposition with detailed diagrams explaining the planned Hubble Space telescope and the enormous scientific benefits NASA's project would provide.¹²

But despite the Arab press's mixed precedent and critical crisis-era coverage of the U.S., the Arab dailies revealed no corresponding support for the ayatollah, the hostage takers, or the Iranian revolutionary cause. *Al-Ahram*, in particular, was critical of Khomeini's regime. A November 1979 article about Iran's revolutionary "variable winds" (الرياح المتغيرة) paints the Iranian revolution in a suspicious light and, in a surprising parallel of American coverage, features a map of the Gulf region in which Iran is illustrated by a photograph of street demonstrators.¹³ In fact, the Arab press had much to fear from Khomeini's brand of Islamism. In countries where some vestiges of journalistic independence remained, as arguably existed in Egypt, the Iranian regime's precedent with the press was ominous. The ayatollah called for a free and independent media – print and broadcast – but

¹¹ Odeh, "The American Image in the Arab Mass Media," 356.

¹² *Al-Ahram* (April 28, 1980), 4-5.

¹³ "Securing and stabilizing the Variable Winds in the Gulf" *Al-Ahram* (November 9, 1979), 3.

simultaneously, and without a hint of irony, purged all pro-shah and leftist voices from within that media, effectively tying the Iranian press to his interests.¹⁴

Al-Ahram's critical coverage fit into the trend of Egyptian government attitudes toward Khomeini's burgeoning government. Egyptian President Anwar Sadat was infatuated with the Iranian monarchy, a personal friend of the shah's, and hostile to the imam's Islamic revolution. Additionally, the Azhar, the foremost center of religious learning in Egypt and an institution of tremendous prestige throughout the Arab world, was often used as a vehicle for Sadat and his regime's condemnations of the Iranian revolution and Khomeini.¹⁵

Egypt's hostility toward political developments in Iran should not be a surprise. Arab states confronting the specter of Islamic revolution raised by the shah's downfall were in a predicament determined by two conflicting conditions: first, Western dominance of the Muslim world impressed upon the region Western secularism and institutional practices; second, the conflicting consequences of these Western influences existed in parallel with traditional Arab culture and Muslim institutions. The result was a bifurcated society wherein secular, Western-style universities existed alongside religious *madrassas* and in which foreign-installed, foreign-supported, or Western-styled leaders often found themselves at ideological odds with a populous suspicious and ignorant of Western institutions.¹⁶

These conditions put the Arab world in a vulnerable position wherein the greatest threat to regional security in the Middle East was not an Iranian attack across the Persian Gulf, as Saddam's secular baathist regime in Iraq would suffer after his failed invasion of Iran. Rather the threat lay in the possible exportation of Iran's Shī'a "religious zeal and political

¹⁴ Imam Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution*, trans. Hamid Algar (London: Kagan Paul, 2002), 292-3.

¹⁵ Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution*, 345 n12.

¹⁶ Khurshid Ahmad, "The Nature of Islamic Resurgence," in John L. Esposito, ed., *Voices of Resurgent Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 218-9.

revolution to more stable and conservative Moslem regimes”¹⁷ such as the U.S.-allied Saudi monarchy or the Egyptian government recently befriended by President Carter and at peace with Israel. These nations offered ripe targets for Khomeini’s brand of Islamism. In a September 1980 message to pilgrims, delivered in the tenth month of the hostage crisis, Khomeini implored Muslims the world over to “Repel the treacherous superpowers from your countries and your abundant resources! Rely on the culture of Islam, resist Western imitation, and stand on your own feet. Attack those intellectuals who are infatuated with the West and the East, and recover your true identity.”¹⁸ During a 1984 meeting of Iranian government leaders, during which Iran decided to form a brigade-sized terrorist unit to attack targets throughout the Middle East, Khomeini repeated his long-standing opinion of such quisling governments: “All the rulers of Islamic countries are servants for foreigners ... and have left the entire Islamic heritage in the hands of foreigners Whatever is necessary to destroy them must be carried out.”¹⁹

The threatened exportation of Khomeini’s revolution from without, and the threat of instability from within, placed incumbent Arab regimes in the precarious position of either pursuing a modernization strategy sensitive to their Islamic heritage or relying ever more strictly on authoritarian rule.²⁰ Nor was Khomeini vague in his accusations. In large part because of the Egyptian president’s willingness to provide asylum for the deposed shah and the critical coverage the Iranian revolution received in the Egyptian press, Khomeini often associated Sadat with American and Iraqi efforts against the Islamic Revolution.²¹

The particular religious nature of the Iranian revolution alienated it from much of

¹⁷ Jimmy Carter, *The Blood of Abraham: Insights into the Middle East, New Edition* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 1993), 173-4.

¹⁸ Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution*, 304.

¹⁹ Ayatollah Khomeini according to Ra’anan, *Hydra of Carnage*, 480-2.

²⁰ Richard W. Schaffert, *Media Coverage and Political Terrorists: A Quantitative Analysis* (New York: Praeger, 1992), 28.

²¹ Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution*, 302.

the Arab world's secular leadership. Khomeini argued that "a body of laws alone is not sufficient to ensure reform and happiness for the people To this end God laid down, in the holy Quran, a particular form of Islamic government." Many Arab critics attacked this rhetoric on both legislative and theological grounds. For instance, various Arab states, including Egypt, interpreted Khomeini's June 28, 1980 speech on the birthday of the 12th Imam to show that his revolution was incompatible with mainstream Sunni Islam, dominant in nearly all of the Arab states. These critics marginalized the revolution's appeal through the reinforcement of the centuries-old Shī'a-Sunni theological conflict, in this case centered on Khomeini's subordination of the prophet to the 12th imam.²²

Nor was Khomeini's hostility limited to the American- and European-allied Muslim regimes. Khomeini was also openly hostile to Soviet-allied regimes. Indeed, the ayatollah's rhetoric left no room for doubt. Because, in Khomeini's opinion, both superpowers were intent on destroying the oppressed peoples of the world it became Iran's duty to defend the oppressed and "strive to export our Revolution throughout the world For not only does Islam refuse to recognize any difference between Muslim countries, it is the champion of all oppressed people." Iran's failure to accomplish this task could only result in the nation's isolation and eventual defeat.²³

But while the Arab leadership rejected Khomeini's revolutionary ideology as a threat, and either used or encouraged Arab media outlets that supported this position, Islamism in its most generic form appealed to many Muslims. Such support for such Islamism was multivariate. Many scholars have argued that Islamism and the associated idea of international Muslim unity was merely a ploy to regain territory lost to the colonial powers and Muslim secular states. But the example of the Israeli victory in the 1967 war also

²² Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution*, 40, 317, n111.

²³ Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution*, 286.

weighed heavily on the Muslim world, discrediting the secular nationalists lead by Gamal Abdel Nasser and leading many Muslims to conclude that if Israeli reliance on Jewish ideology had contributed to their success at state-building and at war, so too might a Muslim commitment to an Islamic ideology help disentangle Muslim states from their neo-colonial ties to the West and facilitate the creation of more powerful, successful, and sophisticated states. Likewise, it has been observed that Muslims did not reject the West because of their faith, but rather that Muslims become Islamists because of their hostility toward the West – anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism lead Muslims into the Islamist fold, not the other way around.²⁴

These factors contributed to the popularity of the ayatollah and the Iranian revolution and contributed to public disdain for the shah among many Arab Muslims. This appeal was far from systemic and, in the case of Egypt and Algeria, was not reflected by the public depicted in the press. The Arab leadership and the intellectual elite in the press resisted the imam's rhetoric and routinely painted the revolutionaries in a skeptical or negative way. On the pages of *Al-Ahram*, the shah received very favorable attention while Khomeini, often the subject of cartoonist satires, was portrayed critically and as an upstart – in much the same light he appeared in the American newsweeklies. But whereas the U.S. press was responding to a current act of violence and terrorism, the Arab press was responding to the threat of such violence and revolution. While Arab sympathy for the U.S. plight was carefully hedged, criticism of the revolution was openly stated.

[THE INTERNATIONAL INFORMATION ORDER: THE ARAB PRESS AND THE NEWS SERVICES]

During the hostage crisis, U.S. news magazines were popular in many foreign countries. Throughout the 1970's, for instance, *Reader's Digest* was the most popular magazine in all

²⁴ Nikki R. Keddie, *Iran and the Muslim World: Resistance and Revolution* (London, MacMillan Press, 1995), 57-9.

Spanish-speaking countries and was the most widely read magazine in South Africa. *Time* was more popular in Canada than it was in the U.S. and the newsweekly's British circulation was more than double that of the native *Economist*.²⁵

Of all the newsweeklies, *Time* had the most extensive network for gathering and distributing of international news. In 1977, *Time* had 36 staff members in 17 foreign bureaus while *Newsweek* maintained 22 staff members in eleven international bureaus and *U.S. News and World Report* operated with a staff of eight editors abroad.²⁶ In addition to a larger international network, *Time* also had a more substantial international audience. A quarter of *Time*'s worldwide readership was outside the US – a 2:1 advantage over *Newsweek* outside of North America. *Time* produced a number of international editions for consumption in different parts of the world – such as the popular Canadian and European editions – while *Newsweek* focused its international efforts, starting in 1973, on the creation of a single international edition with a separate international staff and editorial agenda.²⁷

A 1973 survey of European newspapers also found that *Time* and *Newsweek* were quoted or mentioned approximately 3,385 and 2,649 times, respectively, compared to Britain's *Economist* which was only referred to 555 times.²⁸ But while the news magazines were read abroad, and while foreign journalists often used them as sources, the international news services had a far greater impact on the content of foreign news publications, providing 90% of international news published worldwide.²⁹ The American news services Associated Press and United Press International supplied filterable and customizable news feeds that bypassed cultural barriers that stood in the way of conventional printed media. By the

²⁵ William H. Read, *America's Mass Media Merchants* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 96-7; Jim Richstad and Michael H. Anderson, *Policy Context for News and a "New Order"* in Jim Richstad and Michael H. Anderson, eds, *Crisis in International News: Policies and Prospects* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 16.

²⁶ Richstad and Anderson, *Crisis in International News*, 228.

²⁷ Read, *America's Mass Media Merchants*, 121, 131-3. The European edition of *Time* magazine was effectively a British edition also distributed, in English, on the continent.

²⁸ Read, *America's Mass Media Merchants*, 146.

²⁹ Rosemary Righter, *Whose News? Politics, the Press and the Third World* (New York: Times Books, 1978), 50.

1970s, for instance, even most communist news service received Associated Press feeds. The only comparable international media sources were Britain's Reuters, Agence France Presse, and the Soviet Union's Tass – none of which approached the ubiquity of the American media product abroad.³⁰

In the mid-1970s, Egypt's *Al-Ahram* and 10,000 other foreign newspapers and broadcast stations worldwide, serving one-third of the world's population, received AP's news and photo services. As AP's internal guidebook of the period, *World Service Signposts*, reminded staffers, "over one billion people a day make their value judgments on international developments on the basis of AP news." Except for its Spanish Latin-America service, all of AP's news was distributed in English. But local AP bureaus tracked native editor decisions, creating profiles of regions and publications to better identify what types of news and media they should provide and in what format. Thus, these bureaus re-filed New York's transmissions to many local subscribers based on their knowledge of different native media outlets' interests and needs. Some bureaus even provided national or local reports about a country for that country – as in 1970s Argentina, France, and West Germany – but AP preferred to avoid such local services and was often prohibited from doing so.³¹

France's Agence France Presse, the primary source of international news for Algeria's *El-Moudjahid*, maintained 171 foreign correspondents in 108 foreign bureaus. Both as part of a corps of Paris-based roving reporters and working abroad alongside 1,200 stringers, these correspondents reported on 167 countries to 1,200 clients in 147 nations – including 69 national news agencies and with a near monopoly on reporting to African news outlets.³²

³⁰ Read, *America's Mass Media Merchants*, 97. Tass, the Soviet information service, was often used as an international news service in the Soviet world but Tass's appeal to the Third World and Europe was limited by its acknowledged role as a PR service of the Moscow regime.

³¹ Read, *America's Mass Media Merchants*, 98-9, 101-3.

³² Righter, *Whose News?*, 26, 67.

The near monopoly these news services had on international news in the 1970s and 1980s is a component of the North-South, West-East trend in nearly all cultural communications. Citizens of less developed nations of the Third World – of which the Middle East in this period assuredly qualified – relied to a significant degree on U.S. media outlets for the books they read, the TV shows and movies they watched, and news they consumed.³³ It is thus fair to characterize the world information order during the Iranian crises as a one-way trajectory with the Western nations controlling media distribution and, as Third World critics often complained, affecting the selection and tone of news content.

At the time of the hostage crisis, objections were surfacing among third-world states and their news agencies about this international information order. Specifically, the complaints were that so much more news flowed from the industrialized West than to it and that what news of the Third World did reach Western audiences was largely superficial, negative, and distorted. Critics of this media imbalance pointed to the frequency with which news concerning Third World disasters, coups, and exotic customs appeared in the Western press as opposed to stories about Third World progress, achievements, and shared interests.³⁴ Developing nations in this period placed much of the blame for the unbalanced state of world news distribution on the four major Western news agencies: the Associated Press, United Press International, Reuters, and Agency France Presse.³⁵ Critics argued that the international wire services' selection of news was entirely shaped by their home markets or by their national values – a claim that at certain times in history was not far from the truth. Likewise, these services set the international agenda according to markets, cultures, economies, and systems fundamentally alien to the Third World, its interests, and its literate audience. International news thus became an extension of Western imperialism – a form of

³³ Read, *America's Mass Media Merchants*, 164.

³⁴ W. Phillips Davidson, Donald R. Shanor and Frederick T.C. Yu, *News From Abroad and the Foreign Policy Public* (New York: Foreign Policy Association, 1980) 11-2.

³⁵ Davidson, et al, *News From Abroad and the Foreign Policy Public*, 13.

cultural aggression aimed at furthering the goals of Western consumers and industrialists.³⁶ Western observers did not argue the point, however, that most news ran on a North-South trajectory, reflecting the global distribution of power by the global distribution of information.³⁷ But news service advocates had long argued that world, not the nations of the services' headquarters, were their "local assignment."³⁸

Agence France Presse did not deflect Third World criticisms easily. The French wire service was, in 1976, 70% subsidized by the Paris government and often accused of painting the international news in a francophone light.³⁹ The American wire services were better able to resist claims of American bias in their reporting. AP preferred to operate in direct distribution with publications instead of national news services and, as of 1976, was able to maintain this relationship with many Middle Eastern news publications because AP's reporters were instructed to stay out of local politics and because AP refused foreign investment offers. Additionally, only one-tenth of AP's 800 employees abroad were American, strengthening the news service's unbiased and international professional character. And while foreign subscribers could not vote at AP's general meetings – a right enjoyed by their domestic counterparts – and foreign nationals could not sit on the AP's board, in accordance with U.S. non-profit organization law, the news service remained responsive to the needs of its foreign customers out of necessity. In 1974, AP's World Services operated at a profit and its foreign subscribers accounted for 20% of its annual \$82 million budget, an amount equal to the value of all of AP's broadcast clientele.⁴⁰

³⁶ Righter, *Whose News?*, 30-2. One such example is Reuters, which in the late 19th and early 20th centuries often only exported critical or negative views of the United States to foreign subscribers while downplaying any such news from the extended British Empire.

³⁷ Righter, *Whose News?*, 53.

³⁸ Steven Vincent Benet, *Fortune*, May 1933 cited in Read, 108-9.

³⁹ Righter, *Whose News?*, 26.

⁴⁰ Read, *America's Mass Media Merchants*, 105-8.

At the same time, 2,000 of UPI's 7,000 subscribers were abroad, supplying 25% of the news service's 1975 \$65 million annual budget. And in many ways UPI's service was more sensitive to foreign interests than was AP's. When AP created its World Service, UPI already had 340 foreign clients and by 1973 UPI translated its feeds into 48 languages as opposed to AP's two. By 1975, two of UPI's senior executives were non-American and, while the service produced personalized news for American consumption, it focused on impartial fact-based reporting for foreign consumption, allowing the local outlets to draw their own conclusions and craft their own editorial styles.⁴¹

AP and UPI reporters had to balance the need to find stories that were meaningful for readers in Atlanta and Arabia – but file these reports to different domestic, regional, and international markets. This journalistic schizophrenia required overseas reporters to keep various international needs in mind. While critics of the American services were quick to criticize the Western criteria that determined what stories were marketable to what market, AP reporters were quick to jump to their own defense. American and foreign audiences, they argued, both wanted sensational stories about whether or not Idi Amin cannibalized his enemy instead of balanced reporting about educational progress in Latin America.⁴²

Third World frustration with the international information order was further confounded by the frequent absence of even the most basic news-gathering infrastructures in the developing world. Not only were the wire services the only way developing nations got news about the West; they were frequently the main source of information upon which developing states relied for information about their regional neighbors.⁴³

But one does not have to accept the charges of Western cultural imperialism to appreciate the reluctance of a country to have its international image drawn almost entirely

⁴¹ Read, *America's Mass Media Merchants*, 109-14.

⁴² Righter, *Whose News?*, 59.

⁴³ Davidson, et al, *News From Abroad and the Foreign Policy Public*, 13.

by foreigners who were, as best, sympathetic and knowledgeable but, at worst, cynical and adversarial. Nor does one have to accept these charges to realize that in the Third World, and the Arab world, the media's chief duty was not to inform, as it was in the West, but to assist the state in developing its natural and human resources. Thus many developing nations, such as Algeria, combated Western-oriented media imperialism by establishing their own national news agencies.⁴⁴ And even in Arab countries where such national news agencies were absent, radio, television, and the printed press were often government sponsored or, more explicitly, government controlled.⁴⁵

Western journalists who have reviewed the output of Third World media have characterized it as heavily loaded with government press releases that show the world as government officials wish it were.⁴⁶ This claim is especially ironic in light of similar accusations that the U.S. press, in the years leading up to the hostage crisis – and, indeed, throughout it – painted a picture of Iran that was closer to Washington's wishes than to reality. Likewise, Western critics claim that many Third World complaints are not about the facts behind stories or even the Third World's information needs. Rather, they argue that these criticisms stem from the choice of stories the services carry, specifically that they present unfavorable pictures of many oppressive and impoverished nations.⁴⁷

[ALL NEWS IS LOCAL NEWS: THE HOSTAGE CRISIS AS LOCAL NEWS IN THE ARAB PRESS]

At a 1973 meeting of the Hong Kong Foreign Press Club, a *Newsweek* executive described the cosmopolitan "Newsweek man" – the nationally indistinct, elite global stereotype of a *Newsweek* reader. He was a rising figure in business or government with a global perspective

⁴⁴ Davidson, et al, *News From Abroad and the Foreign Policy Public*, 12-4.

⁴⁵ Odeh, "The American Image in the Arab Mass Media," 360.

⁴⁶ Davidson, et al, *News From Abroad and the Foreign Policy Public*, 13.

⁴⁷ Righter, *Whose News?*, 33.

and an analytical mind that made important decisions based on facts – facts he needed packaged in an easily and quickly digestible form such as *Newsweek International*.⁴⁸

Evidence for this transnational and skeptical “*Newsweek* man” is circumstantial. Foreign readers of American-exported media, of which the newsweeklies were a part, typically represented the top of their local social ladder and belonged to what some have called an “international information elite.” According to a U.S. Information Agency study, this foreign audience for American media tended to be highly educated – particularly in the technical sciences – and spoke English. And while the majority of news consumers abroad did not read American news media, its consumption was highest among well-educated foreign opinion leaders, mirroring news magazine readership habits in the U.S. And like the newsweeklies’ typical foreign policy public reader in the U.S., foreign consumers of American news media were on average thirty-something executives earning more than \$13,000 annually who owned their own car, had insurance, and frequently traveled.⁴⁹

The majority of foreign news consumers got their international news from local sources, such as *Al-Ahram* in Egypt and *El-Moudjahid* in Algeria. Estimating the exact readership of these newspapers is impossible – readership statistics are either non-existent or inaccessible – but it can be assumed that these publications reached a wider audience of Egyptian and Algerians than did American publications.⁵⁰

Egypt’s *Al-Ahram* newspaper is one of the Middle East’s oldest regular news publications. Founded during the Egyptian cultural renaissance of the 1860s and 1870s by two Syrian-Lebanese expatriates, the newspaper was initially more heavily inspired by

⁴⁸ Righter, *Whose News?*, 212.

⁴⁹ Read, *America’s Mass Media Merchants*, 14-6.

⁵⁰ American media measurement bureaus, such as Simmons and MRI, do not gauge foreign media consumption. What data that exists about the foreign press often limits itself to European and, very occasionally, Japanese media. The Arab news services may keep their own circulation statistics but do make these figures readily available and, in the case of Algeria’s national information service, do not respond to foreign inquiries about historical readership data.

literature than Western-style journalism. But once journalistic independence was achieved after the 1890s ascension of the Ottoman Young Turks, and despite the daily newspaper's nationalization by Gamal Abdul Nasser, the Egyptian daily grew into one of the region's most widely read Arabic-language publications.⁵¹ By 1980 44 million Egyptians – of which 54% of men and 25% of women were literate⁵² – and untold foreign readers had access to this state-sponsored newspaper. Algeria's *El-Moudjahid* – the warrior – was a French-language newspaper established with a distinct anti-colonial, pro-Marxist agenda in 1956.⁵³ By 1980, the state-run publication served an audience of 18 million Algerians of which 49% of men and 24% of women over the age of 15 were literate.⁵⁴

As discussed above, these newspapers were surprisingly silent on the hostage crisis in the first months of the long ordeal. While the U.S. media saturated the American public with hostage crisis coverage, *Al-Ahram* and *El-Moudjahid's* coverage was spotty, responding only to major developments such as the hostage rescue and the hostages' eventual release. Indeed, despite a delayed burst of coverage in the second week of the crisis, coverage almost immediately dropped off, appearing only as events unfolded and without any of the regularity observed the American press. In the second half of November, for instance, the hostage crisis only garnered page space in *Al-Ahram* when the first batch of black and female hostages were released and as diplomatic developments teased a possible end to the crisis. The day-to-day updates that ran in the Egyptian publication were often brief and insubstantial.

The Associated press and Agence France Presse supplied much of the news that ran in *Al-Ahram* and *El-Moudjahid*. One of the most striking overlaps in U.S.-Arab media

⁵¹ Said Essoulami "The press in the Arab world: 100 years of suppressed freedom" Al-Bab.com, <http://www.al-bab.com/media/introduction.htm> (accessed, March 21, 2007).

⁵² World Resources Institute/EarthTrends Country Profiles, "Population, Health, and Human Well-Being – Algeria" <http://earthtrends.wri.org> (accessed March 21, 2007).

⁵³ Essoulami, "The press in the Arab world."

⁵⁴ World Resources Institute/EarthTrends Country Profiles, "Population, Health, and Human Well-Being – Algeria" <http://earthtrends.wri.org> (accessed March 21, 2007).

coverage is the use of AP photography. Both *Al-Ahram* and *Time*, for instance, featured the iconic image of an American flag consumed by flames and billowing smoke held aloft amid the cheers and raised fists of Iranian demonstrators atop the embassy walls (*figure 5.1*⁵⁵). But more importantly, the crisis-related stories these papers carried revealed a local emphasis. Just as Americans became more interested in the situation in Iran as it affected first their geopolitical position and second the lives of their captive diplomats, so too



figure 5.1
IRANIAN DEMONSTRATORS
IN *AL-AHRAM* AND *TIME*

did the literate Arab news consumers in Cairo and Algiers become interested in the hostage drama as it variously affected their communities.

Not surprisingly, both papers responded dramatically to the failed rescue mission in April 1980 and to the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war in September. Following standards outlined above for the American and Western press, Egyptian and Algerian editors and reporters flooded their newspapers with stories and images of these military conflicts in the Muslim World. Likewise, both newspapers provided significant coverage for the contentious 1980 U.S. presidential election.

But while the U.S. press reported the death of the shah as a minor development in the ongoing crisis, and while the Algerian press paid his passing only marginal attention, *Al-Ahram's* pages were awash in full-page stories and large page-spanning photo montages, and large dramatic images. For three days the shah's death and its associated ceremonies dominated the front page. On July 30, the day after the exiled monarch was laid to rest, four

⁵⁵ Photo: AP. *Al-Ahram* (November 10, 1979) 4; "The Long Ordeal of the Hostages", *Time* (January, 26, 1981), 20.

whole pages, including the cover, were dedicated to the funeral and its attendees – approximately 30% of the 16-page newspaper's newsworld. Special attention was paid to regal images of the shah, his empress, and his heir-apparent as well as the legitimizing attention paid to his passing by Anwar Sadat and Richard Nixon.⁵⁶

This imbalance of coverage between *Al-Ahram* and *El-Moudjahid* is further reflected in the Algerian newspaper's coverage of the release of the hostages in January 1981. Both newspapers covered the final release and return of the American hostages alongside their coverage of Reagan's inaugural. But while *Al-Ahram* only covered the release of the hostages on the days immediately preceding and during their flight from Iran, *El-Moudjahid's* coverage of the crisis's resolution began almost a month earlier. Starting in early January, *El-Moudjahid's* crisis coverage changed its tone. Where before the United States had been discussed with suspicion and depicted aggressively, suddenly the U.S. became an Algerian partner in peace. As Warren Christopher and his negotiating team increasingly relied on Algerian intermediaries to maintain a dialogue with the Iranian government, the Algerian newspaper increasingly depicted the American-Algerian effort as noble and decisive.⁵⁷ Images of the crisis negotiating team far outnumbered all other images of the crisis. Indeed, when *El-Moudjahid* presented its hostage drama retrospective, all of the photos included were of Christopher, of Algerian doctors examining the hostages in Iran, or of the hostage's arrival in Algiers before meeting Carter in Germany. The resultant impression of such self-congratulatory coverage was echoed by *El-Moudjahid's* own headlines: "The diplomatic resolution is the most spectacular of modern times."⁵⁸

⁵⁶ *Al-Ahram*, July 28-30.

⁵⁷ For more information about the negotiations to free the hostages, see Russell Moses, *Freeing the Hostages: Re-Examining the US-Iranian Negotiations and Soviet Policy, 1979-1981* (Pittsburg, PN: University of Pittsburg Press, 1985) and Pierre Salinger, *America Held Hostage: The Secret Negotiations* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981).

⁵⁸ "La press mondiale: 'La réussite diplomatique la plus spectaculaire des temps modernes,'" *El-Moudjahid* (January 20, 1981) 5.

The reason for these different emphases in coverage is plain: all news is local news. As hostage crisis events affected the Egyptian and Algerian audiences – and their governments by extension – those events warranted increased coverage. And in situations where those events held particular meaning for the local administrations, as the shah's passing had for Sadat's friendly government and the resolution of the hostage crisis had for the prestige of the Algiers regime, those stories were carried with distinctly positive voices. These local events also allowed the international story to break out of the AP or Agence France Presse's monopoly, giving local reporters a chance to inject the hostage drama with a native voice.

The result of this comparison is the creation of a far more complex image of the Arab press than is often imagined by its American counterpart. While the U.S. is often shown critically and even adversarially, its image remains complicated of in the Arab World – one that cannot, between 1979 and 1981, be declared uniformly negative. Nor does Arab media suspicion of the U.S. translate into support for the Tehran regime. And as events unfolded, and the local Arab states became more invested in the ongoing crisis, so too did their coverage change, breaking away from the restrictions inherent in the international information order. The hostage crisis became local news and, as such, increasingly dominated the Egyptian and Algerian press.



“The decision to admit the shah created the biggest problem of my life”
– *President Jimmy Carter*¹

Chapter 6: Conclusion IRAN, THE PRESS, AND CULTURAL HISTORY

“Fuck the shah,” growled President Carter at National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski at one of their Friday morning foreign policy breakfasts. Ever since the shah’s January 1979 expulsion from Iran, former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, Council on Foreign Relations chairman David Rockefeller, and eventually Brzezinski and Vice President Walter Mondale, had been pressing the president to admit the shah into the country as refuge. As summer turned to fall In 1979 Carter only became more and more frustrated with this campaign of persuasion – the repeated phone calls from without the White House and Brzezinski’s daily pestering from within it.

By the time Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and Chief of Staff Hamilton Jordan sided with Brzezinski, Carter was left isolated as the only member of the administration’s inner foreign policy circle opposed to the idea of admitting the shah. But the revelation that the shah was ill and in desperate need of medical attention – attention the president’s advisors assured him that the shah could not receive in Mexican exile – swayed the president more than any harassment by his advisors and critics ever could.

¹ Jimmy Carter. *Foreign Policy II: The Middle East; Defense and Intelligence*, The Carter Presidency: Lessons for the 21st Century, University of Georgia; Athens, GA, 2007. Photo: “The Hostages Return,” *Newsweek* (February 2, 1981), 38.

At his October 19, 1979 Friday foreign policy breakfast the president finally relented. But the president did not like being ganged up on, and showed his displeasure with a scathing flash of teeth. “What are you guys going to advise me to do if they overrun our embassy and take our people hostage? ... On that day, we will sit here with long drawn white faces and realize we’ve been had.”²

Barely three weeks later, on the sixth day of the Iran hostage crisis, as Carter and his team, wrestled with the fallout of their decision to admit the shah, Robert Ode lay on the hard floor of the U.S. Embassy warehouse, a small cushion for a pillow, his hands tied behind his back. Despite the cold autumn weather outside, it was oppressively hot in the warehouse – a windowless, unventilated, and damp facility the hostages referred to as the “Mushroom Inn.” The air was thick with the stench of mildew and unwashed bodies.

Before moving Ode to the Mushroom Inn, the student-terrorists occupying the captured U.S. Embassy in Tehran had confiscated the hostages’ personal possessions, among them Ode’s gold band wedding ring. The 64-year old retired State Department diplomat had tried to hide his ring by sitting on his hands but was quickly discovered, the simple band forcibly wrested from him. So deprived on his wedding anniversary, Bob Ode was forced to beg for his wedding ring from his young Iranian captors. But he did so to no avail. Later, in protest of his treatment – and no doubt stung by the student-terrorists’ refusal to return his wedding band – Ode said nothing as he flipped the bird to an Iranian television crew.³

Meanwhile, across the embassy compound in the Chancery, Colonel Chuck Scott spent his sixth day of captivity in a sixteen-hour interrogation session. Days before Scott had been stripped to his underwear while student interrogators tore apart his clothing, looking for hidden pockets and CIA secrets. When Scott refused to admit he was a CIA agent they

² David Harris, *The Crisis: The President, the Prophet, and the Shah—1979 and the Coming of Militant Islam* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2004), 188, 191, 193. The quote is attributed to Carter by Harris..

³ Diary, Robert C. Ode, November 6, 1979.

took him out in front of the Chancery and brutally beat him, at one point slamming his face against the trunk of a tree. Half naked, bruised, and perched on a uncomfortable stool before a trio of interrogators, Scott accused his captors of being bad Muslims – of not living up to the teachings of the Quran – and of being cruel terrorists. One of his interrogators snapped back at Scott’s accusation. “We are not terrorists. If we were, you would already be dead.” Scott could hear protestors outside shouting, “death to the *guerenganha* [sic]” – the hostages. And after a sixteen-hour day of interrogation – the first of five such consecutive days – Scott would also hear the sound of his teeth breaking against a 1-inch metal pipe.⁴

For Americans, the Iran hostage crisis is more than the root of the current diplomatic epoch. It is a case study in the invention of *the other* by the collective public – the formation of an antithetical, binary opposite of the United States. Over the course of the 444-day crisis, Americans invented a new adversarial Iran defined by irrational, unprovoked, half-crazed Islamic fanatics who, through ceaseless media coverage, daily infiltrated American homes, humiliating and terrifying the most powerful country on Earth.⁵ As Edward Said observed of this phenomenon, “It is one thing to know that the country’s diplomats have been seized and that Americans seem incapable of freeing them; it is quite another thing to watch that taking place night after night on prime time television.”⁶ The resulting anger with Iran, the inescapable grievance of a nation wronged, “has colored every decision made about Iran ever since” and contributed to a lasting “deep mutual estrangement.”⁷

This estrangement was not the product of a simple or monolithic American press, however. Reporters and photojournalists of many nationalities and backgrounds covered the

⁴ Scott, Col. Charles W. *Pieces of the Game: The Human Drama of Americans Held Hostage in Iran* (Atlanta: Peachtree Publishers, 1984), 33-61.

⁵ Bowden, Mark. “Among the Hostage-Takers,” (December 2004), <http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200412/bowden> (accessed March 26, 2006).

⁶ Edward Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 81.

⁷ In order of use: Kenneth M. Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict Between Iran and America*, (New York: Random House, 2004), 172; William A. Dorman, Mansour Farhang, “*The U.S. Press and Iran: Foreign Policy and The Journalism of Deference* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), 1.

crisis on the streets of Washington, Tehran, and the dozens of American towns the hostages called home. That these American, European, and Iranian journalists combined to bring the story to the American news audience runs contrary to contemporary criticisms advanced by critics who either reviewed incomplete samples of the crisis press or ignored the role of photojournalism in communicating the situation in Iran. What is more, the frequency with which Iranian journalists appeared in the U.S. press and the consistency with which they and their Western colleagues represented the Iranian crises challenge previous assumptions about crisis-era media – that it lacked native voices and that such voices would have been inherently sympathetic to Khomeini’s revolution. This thorough examination the entire lifecycle of hostage crisis media – not isolated to a few months or overlooking the conditions under which crisis-era media was created – demonstrates fallacies perpetuated by modern historians’ reliance on crisis-era critics such as Said. In criticizing the generalities and mischaracterizations inherent in the U.S. crisis-press, these contemporaries committed the self-same sin, simplify and misrepresenting the press they purported to scrutinize.

This study’s emphasis on quantification also reveals the presence of significant pre-crisis news coverage – at times reaching hostage crisis levels of media saturation. This realization challenges established historical perspectives advanced by academics and administration officials alike. It refutes Said’s objection, “Were there no events taking place in Iran *before* the embassy takeover that might illuminate things?”⁸ This study not only renders such questions moot but begs the more remarkable question: If pre-crisis Iranian media coverage was so significant, why was the American public – and its government – so ill prepared to cope with their new Islamic adversary in Tehran? Is this a fault of the consumer, the press, or even American Cold War attitudes toward the Third World?

⁸ Said, *Covering Islam*, 104.

The hostage crisis story the U.S. press told was complicated and dynamic, reporting both the personal drama of men and women held captive and the intrigues of a helpless superpower wrestling with an antagonistic upstart regime. That the crisis narrative was more complicated and more varied than often recognized may speak more clearly to the crisis's role in capturing the public imagination and in bringing down President Carter. Likewise, the image of the Muslim world was more sophisticated and layered than previous historians have acknowledged. Even a cursory examination of crisis-era press reveals that the negative and antagonistic representations of Iranian Islamism existed alongside contradictory positive representations of progressive Egyptians, freedom-loving Afghans, and secular Iraqis. Indeed, earlier analyses of the hostage crisis's cultural impact were themselves monolithic, downplaying or ignoring many other newsworthy stories about the Islamic World that appeared in the American press but in which no universally negative impression of Islam was communicated. And while the crisis's appeal to news consumers was not consistent the world over – as a comparison with the Arab press shows – the crisis's tentacles reached out into many nations, inspiring contempt, pity, despair, and pride.

But the crisis's coverage was more than just the longest-running news story in the history of television. It was also a stunning commercial success for American advertisers piggybacking on regular crisis coverage, both on television and in print. It may never be known how many tubes of toothpaste or new cars were sold to the captive news audience as a direct result of crisis coverage, but it must be assumed that the figures were substantial. Perhaps therein lies the great genius of the American media industry: the transformation of political disaster into a commercial bonanza.⁹

The media also transformed the 1980 presidential contest and shaped the decision making of the Carter White House. Despite administration claims to the contrary, the

⁹ Gary Sick, *All Fall Down: America's Tragic Encounter with Iran* (New York: Random House, 1985), 220.

overwhelming weight of evidence reveals that presidential politics are, of course, shaped by pressures associated with public perception and that presidential success is measured in terms defined not by its own communications office but instead by media outlets that set the national agenda and moderated the national policy dialogues. After negotiations fell through on the eve of the election, and President Carter admitted as much during a televised statement carried live by the evening news, the bottom the electorate fell through. Hamilton Jordan was the first member of the Carter administration to hear the news. At 2:00 am on November 4, Election Day, a pollster called him at his Washington apartment and told him that he had the results of the final Election Day poll, taken after the prime-time news broadcasts. The pollster told Jordan, succinctly, “It’s all gone The sky has fallen in. We are getting murdered. All the people that have been waiting ... have left us. I’ve never seen anything like it in polling. Here we are neck and neck with Reagan up until the very end and everything breaks against us. It’s the hostage thing.” Carter lost the election by 10 points.¹⁰

Photography – and its broadcast cousin, videography – provided the primary vehicle through which the otherwise distant and obtuse world of Iranian demonstrations and diplomatic quarrels became human, emotional, and personal for the American audience. Through images the American public, in all its varieties, witnessed hostages and their captors, weeping family members, and seemingly powerless cadres of politicians. Photojournalism meaningfully affected human behavior on the national level – the combination of action, photography, editorial selection, and audience absorption contributed to a national conversation that changed perceptions and decided agendas.¹¹ More powerfully and more succinctly than words could convey, images of the hostage crisis made the 444-day ordeal real and important.

¹⁰ Harris, *The Crisis*, 408-9.

¹¹ Julianne H. Newton, *The Burden of Visual Truth: The Role of Photojournalism in mediating Reality* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2001), 102.

But the lack of cultural depth among many journalists and among their audience contributed to the sense that the public knew all they needed to know of Islam. This initial multicultural religious education appears to have contributed to a nearly systemic American misunderstanding of Islam that the current generation of journalists – again focused on the Islamic world after the Gulf Wars, the war on terror, and the Iranian nuclear weapons dispute – is working to correct. Age-old biases and prejudices formed during the crisis in Iran are now public obstacles to informed and objective reporting in the twenty-first century.¹²

The “mad mullah” characterization of Iran is not simply a product of U.S. reporting, however. It is a co-creation of American journalists and viewers seeing only those things that meet their expectations of Iranian religious leaders and of Iranian leaders who continued to fuel American’s worst expectations. Indeed, some have argued that the creation of this mutual misunderstanding works to both sides’ benefit, helping to facilitate the ongoing international feud – Iran wanting to be a thorn in the U.S.’s side, the U.S. wanting a regional adversary.¹³

Since the crisis-era’s revocation of diplomatic relations, Iran and the U.S. have continued to use the media as their primary communications vehicle. And while this dialogue now takes place as frequently on websites, 24-hour cable news networks, and weblogs as it once did in magazines, newspapers and on the evening news, it continues to follow a media pattern established in the troubling days following the November 4, 1979 seizure of the US embassy in Tehran.¹⁴

¹² S. Venkatraman, *Media in a Terrorized World: Reflection in the Wake of 9/11* (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2004), 102-3.

¹³ William O. Beeman, *The “Great Satan” vs the “Mad Mullahs”: How the United States and Iran Demonize Each Other* (London: Praeger, 2005), 89.

¹⁴ Beeman, *The “Great Satan” vs the “Mad Mullahs,”* 165.

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