



Image from: [Iranian students outside the American Embassy in... in Encyclopedia of Leadership](#)

Summary Article: **Iran hostage crisis**

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

in U.S. history, events following the seizure of the American embassy in Tehran by Iranian students on Nov. 4, 1979. The overthrow of Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlevi of Iran by an Islamic revolutionary government earlier in the year had led to a steady deterioration in Iran-U.S. relations. In response to the exiled shah's admission (Sept., 1979) to the United States for medical treatment, a crowd of about 500 seized the embassy. Of the approximately 90 people inside the embassy, 52 remained in captivity until the end of the crisis.

President Carter applied economic pressure by halting oil imports from Iran and freezing Iranian assets in the United States. At the same time, he began several diplomatic initiatives to free the hostages, all of which proved fruitless. On Apr. 24, 1980, the United States attempted a rescue mission that failed. After three of eight helicopters were damaged in a sandstorm, the operation was aborted; eight persons were killed during the evacuation. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, who had opposed the action, resigned after the mission's failure.

In 1980, the death of the shah in Egypt and the invasion of Iran by Iraq (see Iran-Iraq War) made the Iranians more receptive to resolving the hostage crisis. In the United States, failure to resolve the crisis contributed to Ronald Reagan's defeat of Carter in the presidential election. After the election, with the assistance of Algerian intermediaries, successful negotiations began. On Jan. 20, 1981, the day of President Reagan's inauguration, the United States released almost \$8 billion in Iranian assets and the hostages were freed after 444 days in Iranian detention; the agreement gave Iran immunity from lawsuits arising from the incident.

In 2000 former hostages and their survivors sued Iran under the 1996 Antiterrorism Act, which permits U.S. citizens to sue foreign governments in cases of state-sponsored terrorism. The following year they won the lawsuit by default when Iran did not offer a defense. The U.S. State Dept. sought dismissal of the suit, arguing it would hinder its ability to negotiate international agreements, and a federal judge dismissed the plaintiffs' suit for damages in 2002, ruling that the agreement that resulted in their release barred awarding any damages.

See Sick, G. , *All Fall Down* (1985).

APA

Chicago

Harvard

MLA

Iran hostage crisis. (2018). In P. Lagasse, & Columbia University, *The Columbia encyclopedia* (8th ed.). New York, NY: Columbia University Press. Retrieved from



The Columbia Encyclopedia, © Columbia University Press 2018



The Columbia Encyclopedia, © Columbia University Press 2018

APA

Iran hostage crisis. (2018). In P. Lagasse, & Columbia University, *The Columbia encyclopedia* (8th ed.). New York, NY: Columbia University Press. Retrieved from https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/iran_hostage_crisis

Chicago

"Iran hostage crisis." In *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, by Paul Lagasse, and Columbia University. 8th ed. Columbia University Press, 2018. https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/iran_hostage_crisis

Harvard

Iran hostage crisis. (2018). In P. Lagasse & Columbia University, *The Columbia encyclopedia*. (8th ed.). [Online]. New York: Columbia University Press. Available from: https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/iran_hostage_crisis [Accessed 13 November 2019].

MLA

"Iran hostage crisis." *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, Paul Lagasse, and Columbia University, Columbia University Press, 8th edition, 2018. *Credo Reference*, https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/iran_hostage_crisis. Accessed 13 Nov. 2019.