

BEWARE, A HOSTAGE DEAL MIGHT HURT THE U.S.

The New York Times

October 29, 1980, Wednesday, Late City Final Edition

Copyright 1980 The New York Times Company

Section: Section A; Page 31, Column 1; Editorial Desk; op-ed

Length: 893 words

Byline: By **Daniel Pipes**

Body

6CHICAGO - If the Administration is not careful in dealing with Iran to get the hostages back, it could take steps that would result in damage to our national security in two vital ways.

Iraqi military successes against Iran have given President Carter new hopes of bringing the 52 hostages home by Nov. 4. He has declared that if they were released, "I would drop the embargo against trade with Iran and work toward a resumption of normal commerce." Officials have said that the Administration would consider meeting formal conditions, including a possible request to free \$400 million worth of military spare parts that the Shah's Government bought and that Iran desperately needs. Release of the hostages would salvage American dignity, boost chances of Mr. Carter's re-election, and revitalize Iran's military machine, thus reducing the likelihood of Iraq's acquiring hegemony over the Persian Gulf. What could be neater?

Daniel Pipes op-ed comment analyzes how hurried efforts to negotiate with Iran for return of hostages could hurt US national security

Unfortunately, the neatness is only superficial. First, a deal would undermine a longstanding principle: Washington does not negotiate with extortionists, whether they hijack airplanes or storm embassies. The Administration invoked this principle in November when the embassy was seized and stuck to it for a few months. Both the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Democratic primaries diminished the value of this principle for Mr. Carter. He eventually indicated a willingness to discuss the hostages with Teheran, though this meant in effect negotiating directly with terrorists. This set an ominous precedent. If we gave in and bargained even once, others would surely be inspired to strike against our interests in the future. Americans suffered an indignity the other day when their President expressed willingness to talk with Iran's Prime Minister, Mohammed Ali Rajai, who was visiting the United Nations, and was rewarded with a curt "no, never."

Second, an implied offer to release the spare parts in exchange for the hostages comes at a turbulent, hazardous time for the Persian Gulf region. By accepting such a deal, Iran could end American neutrality in its war with Iraq and bind us to its side. Iranian leaders - not ours - potentially could decide our Persian Gulf policy; what should be a cautious American choice would be forfeited to them.

Tilting toward Iran could gravely affect our relations with all the Arab countries, especially Iraq, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. It is not a move to be undertaken lightly; it may be the proper course of action; but the decision should be made calmly after the election is over.

Besides being unprincipled and possibly dangerous, American eagerness to negotiate with Iran might backfire. The hostages' fate depends upon developments in Iranian domestic politics, where their presence is a powerful weapon for the Islamic Republican Party against the nationalists led by President Abolhassan Bani-Sadr. These two factions are concerned primarily with control of the Government; everything else comes second - including economic

BEWARE, A HOSTAGE DEAL MIGHT HURT THE U.S.

conditions, relations with the United States, even the war with Iraq. It therefore seems likely that the hostages will be freed only after resolution of internal Iranian struggles.

The more attention we pay the hostages, the more reason their captors have to keep them. The captors have made great gains in recent weeks; America's public abasement comforts them and strengthens their hand in the anti-American world of Iranian politics. Further, they can probably extract especially favorable terms for the hostages' release, adding to their prestige within Iran. Whether or not the militants choose to make a deal before Nov. 4 - on the whole this seems unlikely - they have profited immensely from the hostages having become a campaign issue in America.

Feverish attention to the hostages during the last weeks before the election fits into a larger pattern of Administration foreign policy. To an unprecedented degree, Mr. Carter has made America's international relations an instrument of his re-election effort. The SALT negotiations and the defense budget were earlier casualties of domestic politics, and the hostages played an important role for him in the primaries against Senator Edward M. Kennedy. Cyrus R. Vance, a Secretary of State of high principle, resigned after Mr. Carter sent the rescue mission to Teheran in April; by this, he protested not so much against the failed mission as against the growing politicization of foreign policy.

But Mr. Carter's past transgressions pale beside the possibility of a deal with Iran now. With Election Day at hand, he appears prepared to do almost anything to bring the hostages home. In the process, he might treat with extortionists, recklessly involve us in a remote war, and strengthen our enemies in Iran. The re-election of even a competent President would not be worth all this.

Daniel Pipes, a historian at the University of Chicago, is writing a book on Islam in current world politics.

End of Document