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## **Background Guide**

### **The United Nations Security Council**

### **Historic Crisis Committee**

**Agenda: The Iranian Revolution and the  
Iran Hostage Crisis, 1979: Responding to  
the Events of 5 November**

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## **Letter from the Executive Board**

### **Distinguished Delegates,**

It is our distinct privilege to welcome you to this emergency session of the United Nations Security Council, convened as an Historic Crisis Committee. We are met at a moment of extraordinary global peril. The date is November 5, 1979. Yesterday morning, a group of militant student revolutionaries scaled the walls of the United States Embassy in Tehran, overrunning the compound and taking dozens of American diplomats, military guards, and civilian personnel hostage. This act represents an unprecedented breach of the foundational principles of international relations. Today, the crisis has taken a dramatically more volatile turn. We are receiving reports that the British Embassy in Tehran has been briefly overrun, and the moderate Iranian administration, which has struggled to maintain order amid revolutionary fervor, is on the verge of complete collapse. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini has delivered a radio address endorsing the embassy seizure, effectively aligning the revolutionary state apparatus with an unprecedented violation of international law. This committee is not merely tasked with resolving a bilateral diplomatic dispute. We are here to defend the very foundation of international intercourse. The concept of diplomatic immunity and the absolute inviolability of foreign missions are the ancient, non-negotiable prerequisites for communication between sovereign states. If these principles are allowed to dissolve under the pressure of revolutionary anger, the rules-based international order will cease to function.

As members of the Security Council, your task is extraordinarily complex. You must navigate the rigid geopolitical alignments of the Cold War, balance the legitimate historical grievances of a nation recovering from decades of foreign-backed dictatorship, and find a way to secure the safe release of the hostages without plunging the Middle East into a catastrophic war. The options before us are fraught with danger. Economic pressure, military intervention, and diplomatic mediation each carry severe trade-offs that could alienate key players, trigger regional instability, or lead to the loss of innocent lives. We demand that you approach this simulation with the highest degree of academic rigor, historical accuracy, and diplomatic nuance. You must step out of the contemporary era and fully immerse yourselves in the strategic, ideological, and political realities of late 1979. Your speeches, caucuses, and draft resolutions must reflect the authentic foreign policies of your assigned states while demonstrating a sophisticated understanding of international law, regional dynamics, and crisis management. We look forward to witnessing your debate and seeing if this Council can rise above geopolitical division to preserve global peace and security.

Sincerely,

The Executive Board of the United Nations Security Council Historic Crisis Committee,

## **1. Committee Overview**

### **1.1 Mandate and Scope**

The United Nations Security Council is established under Article 24 of the United Nations Charter as the principal organ responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security. Unlike other organs of the United Nations, which are limited to making recommendations to member states, the Security Council possesses the unique authority to issue legally binding decisions that all member states are obligated to accept and implement under Article 25 of the Charter. The mandate of the Security Council is broadly divided into two operational frameworks. Under Chapter VI of the Charter, the Council is authorized to facilitate the peaceful settlement of disputes. This involves calling upon parties to resolve their differences through negotiation, inquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, or resort to regional agencies. Under Chapter VII, the Council acts as a facilitative and recommendatory body, seeking to defuse tensions before they escalate into open conflict.

When a situation degenerates to the point of presenting a clear threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression, the Council may invoke its authority under Chapter VII of the Charter. Chapter VII grants the Council expansive enforcement powers. It may determine the existence of a threat to peace and call upon the parties to comply with provisional measures. If these measures prove inadequate, the Council may authorize non-military sanctions, including complete or partial interruption of economic relations, rail, sea, air, postal, telegraphic, radio, and other means of communication, as well as the severance of diplomatic relations. Should economic and diplomatic pressures fail, Article 42 of Chapter VII empowers the Council to authorize military action by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to restore international peace and security.

The historical evolution of the Council since 1945 demonstrates a gradual expansion of what constitutes a threat to international peace and security. Initially focused primarily on overt interstate military aggression, the Council has increasingly recognized that severe internal conflicts, humanitarian disasters, and systemic breakdowns of international legal norms can also threaten global stability. The protection of diplomatic channels is viewed as an essential prerequisite for the maintenance of international peace, as it provides the communicative infrastructure required to prevent and resolve disputes.

### **1.2 Relevance to the Agenda**

The crisis unfolding in Tehran on November 5, 1979, falls squarely within the mandate and scope of the Security Council. The hostage-taking of diplomatic personnel and the occupation of sovereign embassy premises represent a direct and immediate challenge to

the global security architecture. The international system relies on the assumption that diplomatic agents can operate safely within foreign territories, serving as essential channels of communication even during times of intense bilateral tension.

By permitting, tolerating, and ultimately endorsing the seizure of the United States Embassy, the revolutionary authorities in Iran have challenged the validity of the treaties that govern international intercourse. This creates a dangerous precedent where state sovereignty is invoked to shield non-state actors who violate international law. The potential for this crisis to trigger a broader regional war is immense. The United States is actively contemplating military options, including a naval blockade, the mining of Iranian ports, or a direct rescue mission. Such unilateral actions could draw in the Soviet Union, which shares a long land border with Iran, thereby transforming a bilateral dispute into a direct superpower confrontation. Furthermore, the domestic instability within Iran, marked by the imminent resignation of the moderate provisional government, threatens to create a power vacuum. An anarchic Iran could tempt external intervention from neighboring states or subversion from internal separatist movements, destabilizing the vital oil-producing corridors of the Persian Gulf. The Security Council is the only international body with the legal authority and structural capacity to intervene, mediate, and enforce a peaceful resolution to this multi-layered crisis.

### **1.3 Powers and Limitations**

While the Security Council possesses unparalleled legal authority, its operational efficacy is severely constrained by its structural design. The primary limitation is the voting mechanism established under Article 27 of the Charter. Decisions on substantive matters require an affirmative vote of nine members, including the concurring votes of the five permanent members: China, France, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States. This structural requirement grants each of the permanent five a unilateral veto power over any resolution. In the context of 1979, the Council is deeply divided by the geopolitical realities of the Cold War. This period of bipolarity and ideological competition means that any attempt by the United States to secure a binding Chapter VII resolution authorizing punitive measures against Iran is highly likely to face a Soviet veto. The Soviet Union is highly suspicious of any Western-led effort to impose economic sanctions or authorize military intervention near its southern border, especially as Moscow contemplates its own geopolitical maneuvers in neighboring Afghanistan. Another significant limitation is the principle of non-intervention in the domestic jurisdiction of states, as articulated in Article 2, Paragraph 7 of the UN Charter. The revolutionary authorities in Iran argue that the embassy seizure is an internal matter, a

legitimate domestic reaction to decades of oppressive foreign interference and espionage. They assert that the United Nations has no right to interfere in their sovereign revolutionary process. The Council must therefore constantly navigate the delicate balance between enforcing international legal obligations and respecting the sovereign rights of member states.

## **2. Introduction to the Agenda**

### **2.1 Importance of the Issue**

The crisis of November 5, 1979, represents a watershed moment in the history of modern diplomacy. For the first time in the post-Second World War era, a sovereign state has actively supported the armed seizure of a foreign embassy and the detention of its diplomatic staff. This act strikes at the absolute core of the international system. Since the ancient world, the person of the diplomat has been regarded as sacred. The codification of this custom in the mid-twentieth century was intended to guarantee that states could maintain contact even during times of armed conflict.

If the Security Council fails to respond decisively to this crisis, the security of every diplomatic mission in the world will be compromised. Any state experiencing domestic unrest could allow mobs to overrun foreign embassies, using the hostages as bargaining chips to extract political or financial concessions. The immediate economic consequences are equally severe. The Persian Gulf is the throat of the global energy market, supplying a vast portion of the oil that fuels the industrial economies of North America, Western Europe, and Japan. The threat of military escalation in the region has already sent oil prices soaring, threatening to plunge the global economy into a deep recession characterized by high inflation and rising unemployment.

### **2.2 Conceptual Framing**

To understand the nature of this crisis, delegates must examine the competing conceptual frameworks of legitimacy that clash in Tehran. The Western powers, led by the United States, view the situation through the lens of a rules-based legalist paradigm. In this view, the state is the primary actor in international law, and its legitimacy is derived from its compliance with international treaties, particularly the Vienna Conventions. The seizure of the embassy is seen as a clear, inexcusable violation of these treaties, an act of international terrorism that must be met with immediate, unconditional release and legal accountability. In contrast, the revolutionary leadership in Iran operates under a revolutionary anti-imperialist paradigm. In this view, conventional international law is

not neutral; it is a structural tool designed by Western powers to legitimize their imperialism and dominance over the developing world. The revolutionaries argue that the United States used its embassy in Tehran not for legitimate diplomacy, but as a command center for espionage, subversion, and the suppression of the Iranian people. They point to the joint British-American coup d'etat of 1953 as historical proof that the United States will use any means necessary to destroy Iranian sovereignty. From this perspective, the seizure of the embassy is a legitimate, defensive act of self-determination, a revolutionary measure to prevent another foreign-sponsored counter-revolution.

### **2.3 Nature of the Problem**

The fundamental problem facing the Security Council is the hybrid nature of the threat. The embassy was not seized by the regular armed forces of the Iranian state, but by an organized group of militant students calling themselves the Muslim Student Followers of the Imam's Line. Under traditional international law, a state is not automatically liable for the unauthorized acts of private citizens, provided the state takes immediate and effective measures to protect foreign nationals and punish the perpetrators. However, the situation in Iran is unique. The formal state apparatus, represented by Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan and his cabinet, is completely powerless. Parallel revolutionary power centers, including local revolutionary committees, the newly formed Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and the clerical-dominated Revolutionary Council, hold actual control over the streets. On November 5, Ayatollah Khomeini formally endorsed the students' actions, declaring the embassy to be a nest of spies and forbidding any Iranian official from negotiating with American representatives.

This state endorsement transforms a private act of lawlessness into an official act of state policy. The Security Council is therefore dealing with a government that has adopted a policy of violating its own treaty obligations while claiming that its revolutionary legitimacy places it above international jurisdiction. This creates an extraordinary challenge: how does one negotiate with a sovereign state that rejects the very rules and language of international diplomacy?

## **3. Substantive Issue Analysis**

### **3.1 How the Issue Works**

The mechanics of the hostage-taking on November 4, 1979, and the rapid escalation on November 5, demonstrate a highly calculated fusion of popular mobilization, media manipulation, and political opportunism. The operation was initiated by a core group of student activists from Tehran's major universities. These students, operating under a highly structured committee system, spent weeks planning the assault, conducting

surveillance on the embassy compound, and stockpiling supplies. When the students scaled the gates of the embassy, their stated intention was to conduct a limited, symbolic sit-in lasting no more than forty-eight hours. They sought to voice their outrage over the decision of United States President Jimmy Carter to allow the deposed Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, into the United States for cancer treatment on October 22, 1979. The students genuinely feared that the Shah's arrival in New York was a prelude to a second American-sponsored coup to overthrow the young revolution, a direct repeat of the events of 1953.

However, the domestic political dynamics in Iran transformed this symbolic protest into a prolonged international crisis. The table below illustrates the critical timeline of events surrounding the weekend of the takeover, highlighting how a student demonstration rapidly consolidated into a state-endorsed geopolitical stand-off:

| <b>Date and Time</b>       | <b>Event</b>                                              | <b>Strategic Significance</b>                                                                                                   |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| October 22, 1979           | The deposed Shah arrives in New York.                     | Triggers widespread fear in Iran of an imminent, American-backed counter-revolution.                                            |
| November 3, 1979           | Bazargan meets Brzezinski in Algiers.                     | Radicals utilize photos of this meeting to accuse the provisional government of treason and plotting with the United States.    |
| November 4, 1979 (Morning) | Students storm the United States Embassy.                 | Overrun the compound, take more than sixty Americans hostage, and begin systematically piecing together shredded documents.     |
| November 5, 1979 (All Day) | Khomeini endorses the takeover; British Embassy attacked. | Marks the definitive shift of official state support to the militants; triggers the immediate collapse of the moderate cabinet. |

| Date and Time    | Event                                  | Strategic Significance                                                                             |
|------------------|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| November 6, 1979 | Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan resigns. | Cedes uncontested domestic authority to Khomeini and the clerical-dominated Revolutionary Council. |

On November 5, the crisis expanded beyond the American compound. A group of revolutionaries launched a brief attack on the British Embassy in Tehran. Although they withdrew quickly after searching for weapons and hidden Americans, the incident sent a clear signal that no Western diplomatic mission was safe. The regular police forces and security guards assigned to protect these embassies simply vanished, demonstrating that the formal state had ceased to exercise its monopoly on the legitimate use of force.

The students quickly realized that their control of the American hostages gave them immense political leverage. They began parading blindfolded hostages in front of international television cameras, using the global media to bypass conventional diplomatic channels and speak directly to the American public. This media strategy was designed to humiliate the United States government, demonstrate its impotence, and rally the Iranian masses around the radical clerical faction.

The ideological campaign inside the embassy compound also involved the systematic reconstruction of shredded documents. Using local carpet weavers and meticulous student labor, the militants began piecing together thousands of classified documents that embassy staff had attempted to destroy in the final hours of the takeover. These documents, published in a series of volumes titled Documents from the US Den of Espionage, were utilized by the radicals to accuse moderate Iranian politicians of collaborating with the CIA, effectively weaponizing intelligence archives to reshape the domestic political landscape.

### 3.2 Structural Factors

The explosive events of November 1979 are the product of deep-seated structural factors that have shaped modern Iranian history. The primary structural factor is the profound legacy of foreign intervention. Throughout the twentieth century, Iran was a vital geopolitical prize, rich in oil and strategically located between the Russian Empire, later

the Soviet Union, and the British Empire, later the sphere of influence of the United States. The definitive turning point in modern Iranian consciousness occurred in August 1953. The democratically elected Prime Minister, Mohammad Mossadegh, had nationalized the country's oil industry, which was then controlled by the British-owned Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. In response, the intelligence services of the United Kingdom and the United States orchestrated a covert coup that overthrew Mossadegh, dismantled Iran's nascent parliamentary democracy, and restored the young Shah to absolute power.

For the next twenty-five years, the Shah ruled Iran as a highly repressive, pro-Western autocrat. His regime stood as a crucial pillar of American foreign policy in the Middle East, serving as a listening post on the southern border of the Soviet Union and a reliable supplier of oil to the Western world. To maintain his grip on power, the Shah relied heavily on his notorious secret police, the SAVAK. This organization, trained by American and Israeli advisors, became synonymous with the systematic surveillance, arrest, torture, and execution of political dissidents, including secular liberals, Marxists, and religious clerics.

In the 1960s, the Shah launched a sweeping modernization program known as the White Revolution. This top-down reform package included land redistribution, infrastructure development, and secular educational reforms. While the program succeeded in modernizing parts of urban Iran, it had devastating socio-economic side effects. Land reform disrupted traditional agricultural patterns, forcing millions of impoverished peasants to migrate to the rapidly expanding slums of Tehran and other major cities. These displaced rural migrants, deeply religious and culturally alienated by the Westernized lifestyle of the urban elite, became a highly volatile urban underclass.

The rapid economic growth of the 1970s, fueled by the massive surge in oil revenues, also led to rampant inflation, corruption, and widening economic inequality. The traditional merchant class, operating in the historic bazaars, felt threatened by the rise of state-backed corporate monopolies and Western consumer imports. The bazaars had historically maintained close financial and social ties with the Shia clergy. Together, these two traditional institutions formed a powerful opposition network that could bypass the state's surveillance apparatus.

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, a prominent Shia cleric who had been exiled in 1964 for his vocal opposition to the Shah's policies, managed to unite these disparate opposition forces. From his exile in Turkey, Iraq, and eventually France, Khomeini smuggled audio cassette tapes of his speeches into Iran. His message was simple and powerful. He accused the Shah of betraying Iranian sovereignty, selling the country's oil to the Zionist regime

and Western imperialists, and corrupting the Islamic culture of the nation. Khomeini proposed a radical new political model based on the concept of Velayat-e Faqih, which asserted that in the absence of the hidden Imam, the state must be governed by a supreme Islamic jurist. When the revolution finally erupted in late 1977, it was a broad, heterogeneous coalition. Secular intellectuals, leftist students, communist parties, liberal nationalists, bazaar merchants, and traditional religious groups all marched together in the streets of Tehran. They were united by a single, powerful objective: the overthrow of the Pahlavi dynasty. However, they possessed fundamentally different, and ultimately incompatible, visions for the future of Iran.

### **3.3 Evolution of the Issue**

The collapse of the Pahlavi monarchy was remarkably rapid. In early 1978, anti-government demonstrations grew larger and more confrontational. The Shah's security forces responded with iron-fisted repression. A key turning point occurred on August 19, 1978, when a devastating fire at the Cinema Rex in the city of Abadan killed hundreds of working-class citizens. Although the fire was likely set by radical Islamists seeking to target a symbol of Western culture, the public blamed the SAVAK, triggering massive nationwide riots.

On September 8, 1978, a day remembered as Black Friday, the Shah declared martial law and security forces opened fire on a massive demonstration at Tehran's Jaleh Square, killing hundreds of peaceful protesters. This massacre marked the point of no return. It shattered any hope of a peaceful compromise and triggered a wave of nationwide strikes that paralyzed the country's economy, halting oil production and starving the regime of its financial lifeblood.

Realizing that his position was untenable, the Shah appointed a reformist government under Shapour Bakhtiar, a veteran opposition figure, and left Iran on January 16, 1979, ostensibly for a vacation. Two weeks later, on February 1, 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini returned from his fifteen-year exile. Millions of ecstatic Iranians lined the streets of Tehran to welcome him. Bakhtiar's government collapsed within days as the regular military declared its neutrality, refusing to fire on the revolutionary masses. To manage the transition, Khomeini appointed Mehdi Bazargan, a highly respected engineer and veteran of Mossadegh's National Front, as the Prime Minister of a transitional administration on February 4, 1979. Bazargan's task was to establish a democratic, constitutional republic that would restore order, rebuild the economy, and manage foreign relations. However, from its inception, the provisional government was a knife without a blade. Actual power rested with the Revolutionary Council, a shadow cabinet of clerics appointed by Khomeini, and the network of local revolutionary committees that

sprang up across the country. These committees, acting independently of the formal ministries, carried out their own revolutionary justice, executing hundreds of former military officers, SAVAK agents, and political rivals in summary trials. Armed militias patrolled the streets, ignoring the directives of the national police force.

This internal power struggle between secular moderates and clerical radicals reached a crisis point in the autumn of 1979. The draft constitution, originally written by liberal scholars to establish a parliamentary democracy, was systematically rewritten by the Assembly of Experts, a body dominated by clerical allies of Khomeini. They inserted the concept of Velayat-e Faqih, granting the Supreme Leader veto power over all state decisions and the military command. On October 22, 1979, the United States allowed the Shah into New York. This decision was a disaster for the moderate provisional government. Bazargan and his foreign minister, Ebrahim Yazdi, had been working quietly to normalize relations with the United States, recognizing that Iran needed American spare parts for its military and access to global financial markets. On November 3, 1979, Bazargan met face-to-face with United States National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski at the celebration of the anniversary of the Algerian Revolution in Algiers. When photos of Bazargan shaking hands with Brzezinski were broadcast in Iran, the radical clerical faction and leftist students seized on them as definitive proof of treason. They claimed that the provisional government was preparing to sell the revolution back to the United States. The storming of the embassy on November 4 was the direct, tactical response to this meeting. On November 5, the crisis reached its explosive climax. Prime Minister Bazargan, realizing that his authority had been completely bypassed and that he could not guarantee the safety of foreign diplomats, decided to submit his resignation. His departure marked the definitive end of the moderate, pluralistic phase of the Iranian Revolution. Uncontested power passed to Khomeini and the Revolutionary Council, transforming the hostage crisis from a student protest into an official instrument of a radicalizing state.

#### **4. Geopolitical / Stakeholder Context**

The crisis of November 5, 1979, is set within a highly complex, multipolar geopolitical landscape. Each of the major stakeholders and members of the Security Council approaches the situation with distinct national interests, domestic political constraints, and strategic calculations.

##### **The United States of America**

The United States enters this crisis in a position of acute vulnerability. The presidency of Jimmy Carter is under severe pressure. Domestically, the American public is struggling with high inflation, energy shortages, and a growing sense of national decline following

the military defeat in Vietnam. The seizure of the embassy in Tehran is viewed as a direct, humiliating assault on American honor. Within the Carter administration, a deep ideological rift has emerged regarding how to respond. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance advocates for a cautious, diplomatic approach. He stresses that the primary objective must be the safe return of the hostages, which can only be achieved through peaceful negotiations and multilateral diplomatic channels, such as the United Nations. Vance warns that any military action, such as a naval blockade or a rescue attempt, would likely result in the immediate execution of the hostages and could draw the Soviet Union into a dangerous military confrontation.

In contrast, National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski favors a highly aggressive response. He views the crisis not just as a humanitarian issue, but as a critical test of American power and credibility in the Cold War. Brzezinski argues that the United States must show immense resolve, utilizing military posture, economic coercion, and covert operations. He fears that a prolonged, passive negotiation will make the United States look weak and encourage further challenges to Western interests across the globe. He is actively pushing for plans to prepare a military rescue mission and is contemplating punitive airstrikes if the hostages are harmed.

### **The Islamic Republic of Iran**

The new Iranian state is not a monolith, but a chaotic battlefield of competing revolutionary factions.

- **The Secular Moderates:** Led by Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan and Foreign Minister Ebrahim Yazdi, this faction represents the Westernized, professional middle class. They want to preserve the revolution but channel it into a stable, constitutional democracy. They recognize that Iran is highly dependent on global trade and needs to maintain diplomatic relations with both superpowers. On November 5, they were completely paralyzed, realizing that the student militants had effectively hijacked the state's foreign policy.
- **The Clerical Radicals:** Led by figures like Ayatollah Mohammad Beheshti and Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, this faction views the hostage crisis as a heaven-sent opportunity. By endorsing the embassy seizure, they can mobilize the nationalist, anti-Western feelings of the masses, marginalize the secular moderates, and permanently consolidate a theocracy. They have no interest in a quick resolution to the crisis, as the ongoing confrontation with the Great Satan serves as the perfect ideological fuel to complete their internal cultural revolution.
- **The Leftist and Marxist Factions:** Groups like the Mujahedin-e Khalq and the

Tudeh Party support the embassy seizure from an anti-imperialist perspective. They seek to push the revolution in a socialist, anti-capitalist direction, and they view the confrontation with the United States as a way to sever Iran's economic ties with the Western capitalist world.

### **The Soviet Union**

The Soviet Union views the Iranian Revolution with a mixture of strategic opportunism and deep ideological caution. On one hand, the fall of the Shah is a massive geopolitical blow to the United States, dismantling a key American listening post and military ally on the Soviet southern border. The Kremlin welcomes the anti-imperialist rhetoric of the new regime and is eager to see American influence permanently expelled from the region.

On the other hand, the rise of a militant, populist Islamic fundamentalist state presents a direct threat to Soviet security. The Soviet Union contains a large, rapidly growing Muslim population in its Central Asian republics. The Kremlin is deeply concerned that the revolutionary ideas of Ayatollah Khomeini could cross the border and destabilize these regions. Furthermore, the Soviet Union shares a long land border with Iran, and any American military intervention in the Persian Gulf would bring US forces directly to the Soviet doorstep. In late 1979, the Soviet Union was also navigating a highly delicate international environment. The Kremlin is quietly preparing to send troops into neighboring Afghanistan to shore up a shaky communist regime. The Soviets do not want an active war in Iran that could disrupt their plans or lead to an unpredictable escalation. Therefore, while Moscow formally supports the principle of diplomatic immunity in public, it will block any attempt by the United States to secure binding UN sanctions or authorization for military force against Iran.

### **The United Kingdom**

The United Kingdom has a deep, highly complicated history in Iran, largely centered on its historic control of the oil industry. The attack on the British Embassy in Tehran on November 5 has forced London into a posture of high alert. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who was elected earlier in 1979, is committed to a strong, pro-Western foreign policy and stands in absolute solidarity with the United States. However, the British government must also protect its own substantial interests. Thousands of British citizens remain in Iran, and British companies have significant commercial investments in the country. London is highly concerned that an immediate severance of diplomatic ties or a military escalation would put these citizens and assets in direct jeopardy. The British ambassador in Tehran, John Graham, is urging caution, arguing that the Council must maintain open communication channels to facilitate a peaceful resolution.

## Regional Stakeholders

- **Iraq:** Led by Saddam Hussein, Iraq is watching the developments in Iran with growing alarm and opportunistic interest. Saddam is terrified that Khomeini's populist Shia message will trigger an uprising among Iraq's own majority-Shia population, which has long been marginalized by the secular, Sunni-dominated Ba'athist regime. However, Saddam also views the revolutionary chaos and international isolation of Iran as a historic opportunity to establish Iraq as the undisputed dominant power in the Persian Gulf and to seize control of the oil-rich, Arab-majority province of Khuzestan.
- **Saudi Arabia:** The Saudi monarchy views the anti-royalist, revolutionary rhetoric of Ayatollah Khomeini as an existential threat to its own legitimacy. The Saudis fear that Iran will seek to export its revolution across the Gulf, destabilizing the oil-producing eastern provinces of Saudi Arabia, which contain a substantial Shia minority. Riyadh is pushing for a quiet containment strategy, seeking to mobilize an Islamic consensus to isolate the radical regime while avoiding a direct military conflict that could disrupt global oil markets.

## Security Council Non-Permanent Members

- **Bolivia:** As the holder of the rotating presidency of the Council in November 1979, Bolivia is committed to maintaining a position of strict neutrality. Under the leadership of Ambassador Sergio Palacios de Vizzio, the Bolivian delegation seeks to demonstrate that small, developing nations can act as responsible mediators in major international crises. Bolivia's primary interest is defending the principles of state sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the peaceful settlement of disputes, while preventing the superpowers from using the crisis to bypass the United Nations.
- **Kuwait:** Kuwait is in an extraordinarily delicate position. As a small, oil-producing state sharing a maritime border with Iran, Kuwait is directly exposed to any political or military shock in the Persian Gulf. The Kuwaiti leadership is terrified of the revolutionary threat but must also navigate the pro-Iranian feelings of its own Shia minority and the anti-American sentiment of its wider population. Kuwait favors a highly cautious, diplomatic approach, urging the Council to utilize Chapter VI mediation and the good offices of the Secretary-General.
- **Czechoslovakia:** Strictly aligned with the Soviet bloc, Czechoslovakia acts as a voice for socialist solidarity in the Council. The Czechoslovak delegation will echo the Soviet position, formally condemning the violation of diplomatic immunity to preserve international legal norms, while focusing its rhetorical attacks on the

historic crimes of American imperialism and the SAVAK in Iran.

- **Norway:** Norway is a highly committed member of the Western alliance and a major maritime nation. The Norwegian delegation prioritizes the defense of international law, the inviolability of embassies, and the security of global shipping lanes. Norway will strongly support US-led efforts to demand the immediate, unconditional release of the hostages and will push for international legal accountability.
- **Bangladesh, Gabon, Nigeria, Portugal, Zambia:** These nations represent the diverse spectrum of the Non-Aligned Movement. While they are deeply committed to the principles of anti-colonialism and state sovereignty, they also recognize that small and developing nations are the most dependent on the protections of international law. They are highly reluctant to support Western-led sanctions or military intervention, which they view as a threat to national sovereignty, but they will vote in favor of resolutions that call for the peaceful release of the hostages and respect for diplomatic protocols.

## 5. Legal / Policy Framework

The crisis of November 5, 1979, represents a complex legal puzzle that challenges some of the most fundamental treaties in the international system.

### 5.1 Core Principles

The legal arguments in this crisis center on two core principles of international law:

- **Diplomatic Immunity:** This ancient principle, which has existed for thousands of years, asserts that diplomatic agents are not subject to the civil or criminal jurisdiction of the host state. This immunity is not a personal privilege for the individual diplomat; rather, it is designed to ensure that the diplomat can perform their official duties of representation, negotiation, and communication without fear of harassment, arrest, or coercion by the receiving government.
- **Inviolability of Embassy Premises:** This principle establishes that the land and buildings occupied by a foreign diplomatic mission are sacred and off-limits to the host state. The receiving government is under a strict, absolute obligation to prevent any intrusion, damage, or disturbance of the peace of the mission. Local police and security forces are forbidden from entering the embassy grounds for any reason, including to serve legal warrants or arrest suspects, unless they have received the explicit, voluntary permission of the head of the foreign mission.

Historically, these concepts evolved from customary international law, where diplomatic protection was viewed as a sacred compact between sovereigns. In the modern era, the growth of international institutions and the codification of international law have transformed these customary practices into binding, statutory obligations that form the bedrock of global stability.

## **5.2 Doctrines / Policy Approaches**

These core principles are formally codified in several key international treaties and bilateral agreements:

### **The Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (1961)**

This treaty is the primary legal instrument governing the dispute. Both the United States and Iran are state parties to this convention. The key articles relevant to the crisis include:

- **Article 22:** This article establishes the absolute inviolability of the mission premises. It states that the agents of the receiving state may not enter them except with the consent of the head of the mission. It further places a special duty on the receiving state to take all appropriate steps to protect the premises of the mission against any intrusion or damage and to prevent any disturbance of the peace of the mission or impairment of its dignity.
- **Article 29:** This article governs the personal inviolability of the diplomat. It states that the person of a diplomatic agent shall be inviolable. He shall not be liable to any form of arrest or detention. The receiving state shall treat him with due respect and shall take all appropriate steps to prevent any attack on his person, freedom, or dignity.
- **Article 41:** This article outlines the duties of the sending state. It states that it is the duty of all persons enjoying such privileges and immunities to respect the laws and regulations of the receiving state. They also have a duty not to interfere in the internal affairs of that state. It further specifies that the premises of the mission must not be used in any manner incompatible with the functions of the mission.

The Iranian revolutionary authorities utilize Article 41 to justify their actions. They argue that the United States systematically violated this article by using its embassy to conduct espionage, harbor CIA agents, and interfere in Iran's internal affairs. They claim that because the United States breached its duties under Article 41, Iran is no longer bound by its obligations under Articles 22 and 29.

However, international law does not permit such a reciprocal breach of diplomatic protection. The Vienna Convention is designed as a self-contained legal regime. If a host state believes that a foreign diplomat is violating local laws or engaging in espionage, the convention provides a specific, exclusive remedy under Article 9: the receiving state may at any time, and without having to explain its decision, declare the diplomat to be *persona non grata*. The sending state must then either recall the diplomat or terminate his functions. If the sending state refuses to do so, the host state may simply refuse to recognize the individual as a member of the diplomatic mission. The convention does not, under any circumstances, permit the host state to arrest, detain, or hold the diplomat hostage.

### **The Treaty of Amity, Economic Relations, and Consular Rights (1955)**

This bilateral treaty, signed between the United States and the Shah's government in 1955, remains in force in late 1979. The treaty was designed to encourage trade, investment, and friendly relations between the two peoples.

The key legal significance of this treaty lies in Article XXI, Paragraph 2. This clause specifies that any dispute between the two parties regarding the interpretation or application of the treaty that cannot be satisfactorily resolved through diplomacy shall be submitted directly to the International Court of Justice, unless the parties agree to settlement by some other peaceful means. This clause provides the United States with a clear, indisputable jurisdictional basis to haul Iran before the World Court.

### **5.3 Existing Frameworks**

The primary international legal body available to resolve this dispute is the International Court of Justice, located in The Hague. On November 29, 1979, the United States formally filed an application instituting proceedings against Iran, relying on the jurisdictional clauses of the Vienna Conventions and the 1955 Treaty of Amity. Under Article 41 of the Statute of the Court, the ICJ has the authority to indicate provisional measures to preserve the respective rights of either party while the case is pending a final decision. On December 15, 1979, the ICJ issued a unanimous Order of Provisional Measures, declaring that the Government of Iran must immediately restore the embassy premises to the possession of the United States, release all hostages without exception, and restore full diplomatic protections. If a state fails to comply with an order or judgment of the World Court, the recourse is governed by Article 94 of the United Nations Charter. Under Article 94, Paragraph 2, if any party to a case fails to perform the obligations incumbent upon it under a judgment rendered by the Court, the other party may appeal to the Security Council. The Security Council may, if it deems necessary, make recommendations or decide upon measures to be taken to give effect to the judgment.

## 5.4 Gaps and Limitations

The legal framework of 1979 features a critical, highly problematic gap when applied to a revolutionary situation. The Vienna Conventions are designed to govern relations between stable, functioning states that exercise unified, centralized control over their territories. They assume that the government that signs the treaty has the actual power to enforce it inside its borders. The convention is completely unprepared for a situation where the formal government is bypassed by revolutionary committees, armed student militias, and a supreme religious leader who holds de facto power but operates outside the formal state apparatus. On November 5, Prime Minister Bazargan's moderate cabinet was legally responsible for protecting the American Embassy, but it has no actual power to do so. The groups that hold actual power, the militant students and the Revolutionary Council, are not formal state officials, and they claim they are not bound by the "bourgeois" treaties signed by the Shah.

This creates an extraordinary challenge for enforcement. If the Security Council issues a resolution demanding that the "Government of Iran" release the hostages, the moderate officials in the foreign ministry may agree, but they cannot enforce the order. If the Council then imposes punitive sanctions, it will punish the entire Iranian population and the moderate cabinet, while potentially strengthening the radical clerics who do not care about international legal norms.

To further detail the legal mechanics and contradictions inherent in this crisis, the table below dissects the primary treaties involved, highlighting the specific obligations, the violations alleged, and the core legal conflicts that delegates must debate:

| <b>Legal Instrument</b>                                 | <b>Key Article / Clause</b> | <b>Core State Obligation</b>                                                                                        | <b>Alleged Violation / Core Conflict</b>                                                                                               |
|---------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (1961)</b> | Article 22                  | Absolute inviolability of embassy premises; host state must prevent intrusion, damage, or disturbance of the peace. | Militants occupied the US Embassy compound on November 4; local security forces disappeared, violating the special duty of protection. |
| <b>Vienna</b>                                           | Article 29                  | Personal inviolability of                                                                                           | Dozens of American                                                                                                                     |

| <b>Legal Instrument</b>                                                | <b>Key Article / Clause</b> | <b>Core State Obligation</b>                                                                                                                | <b>Alleged Violation / Core Conflict</b>                                                                                                       |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Convention on Diplomatic Relations (1961)</b>                       |                             | diplomatic agents; prohibition of any form of arrest, detention, or assault on their dignity.                                               | diplomats and military guards are held in active captivity, blindfolded, and paraded before television cameras.                                |
| <b>Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (1961)</b>                | Article 41                  | Duty of diplomatic personnel to respect local laws and refrain from interfering in the internal political affairs of the host state.        | Iran alleges the US Embassy served as a command center for SAVAK coordination, espionage, and plotting a counter-revolutionary coup.           |
| <b>Treaty of Amity, Economic Relations, and Consular Rights (1955)</b> | Article XXI, Paragraph 2    | Compulsory submission of any unresolved bilateral disputes directly to the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice.              | Iran refuses to participate in ICJ proceedings, claiming the court lacks jurisdiction to isolate the hostage issue from historic US crimes.    |
| <b>United Nations Charter (1945)</b>                                   | Article 2, Paragraph 7      | Prohibition of the United Nations from intervening in matters that are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any sovereign state. | Iran claims its revolutionary transition and domestic efforts to bring the Shah to justice are internal matters shielded from UN interference. |

## 6. Role of International / Institutional Actors

In the high-stakes environment of November 5, 1979, several international and institutional actors are working behind the scenes to defuse the crisis, negotiate a settlement, or enforce international legal standards.

### **The UN Secretary-General**

The UN Secretary-General, Kurt Waldheim, is utilizing the full range of his good offices to establish communication channels between Washington and Tehran. Because Ayatollah Khomeini has forbidden any direct, face-to-face negotiations with American emissaries, Waldheim acts as a vital intermediate link.

Waldheim's strategy is to seek a peaceful, diplomatic compromise that addresses both the immediate crisis and the underlying historical issues. He is proposing the creation of an international commission of inquiry under the auspices of the United Nations. This commission would be tasked with investigating the human rights abuses, financial corruption, and illegal interventions conducted by the Shah's regime, as well as the role played by the United States government in supporting his dictatorship. In exchange for the establishment of this commission, Iran would release the hostages and allow them to leave the country safely. However, Waldheim's efforts are constantly undermined by the radicalization of the internal political scene in Iran. Any moderate Iranian official who attempts to work with Waldheim is immediately accused of weakness by the student militants. Furthermore, the United States is highly reluctant to agree to any commission that looks like a concession to blackmail, insisting that the unconditional release of the hostages must be a non-negotiable precondition for any wider discussion of Iranian grievances.

### **The International Court of Justice**

As the principal judicial organ of the United Nations, the International Court of Justice is the ultimate guardian of international legal norms. By accepting the United States' application and issuing its unanimous Order of Provisional Measures on December 15, 1979, the ICJ seeks to demonstrate that the rules of diplomatic law are absolute and cannot be suspended even during times of intense bilateral dispute. However, the ICJ faces a severe challenge to its institutional authority. The Government of Iran has refused to participate in the proceedings, sending two letters to the Court asserting that the hostage crisis is not a self-contained legal dispute but rather a minor, secondary element of a wider historical conflict involving twenty-five years of American intervention in Iranian affairs. Because the Court has refused to examine this wider context, Iran claims the ICJ has no jurisdiction. The refusal of a major state to comply with the Court's orders

threatens to expose the limitations of the international judicial system, which lacks any direct enforcement mechanism and must rely entirely on the political will of the Security Council.

### **The Non-Aligned Movement**

The Non-Aligned Movement, representing over one hundred developing nations across Asia, Africa, and Latin America, is attempting to play a constructive, mediating role. Many NAM members are highly sympathetic to the anti-imperialist rhetoric of the Iranian Revolution, having experienced their own histories of colonial exploitation and foreign-backed intervention. However, the NAM leadership, including countries like Yugoslavia, Algeria, and India, also recognizes that the safety of diplomatic personnel is essential for the survival of small states, which cannot protect themselves through raw military power. They are working quietly to convince Tehran that holding foreign diplomats hostage is a strategic mistake that will isolate Iran from its natural allies in the developing world and play into the hands of Western hawks who want to crush the revolution. They are advocating for a compromise centered on the extradition of the Shah's personal wealth, rather than his person, combined with an international declaration affirming the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of sovereign states.

### **The International Committee of the Red Cross**

The International Committee of the Red Cross is the only international humanitarian organization with potential access to the hostages inside the embassy compound. The ICRC's primary focus is to verify the physical safety, mental well-being, and humanitarian treatment of the detained personnel. The ICRC is working quietly to negotiate regular visits to the hostages, seeking to facilitate the exchange of letters between the captives and their families. The organization's role is strictly non-political, and its representatives must maintain a position of absolute neutrality, refusing to comment on the legal or political disputes between Washington and Tehran. However, even this limited humanitarian access is fraught with difficulty, as the student militants view any international visitor with intense suspicion, fearing they are CIA agents seeking to gather intelligence for a rescue operation.

## **7. Impact Analysis**

The crisis of November 5, 1979, is not a self-contained diplomatic dispute; rather, it is a geopolitical earthquake that is reshaping the social, economic, and political structures of Iran, the United States, and the wider Middle East.

### **7.1 Social Impact**

Within Iran, the hostage crisis is triggering a rapid, intense radicalization of civil society. The occupation of the American Embassy has become a massive social filter. Anyone who advocates for moderation, constitutional procedure, or compromise is immediately labeled a traitor, a Westernizer, or an agent of the CIA.

This ideological climate has led to:

- **The Purging of Secular and Leftist Elements:** The clerical radicals are utilizing the crisis to permanently marginalize their former revolutionary allies. Secular intellectuals, liberal politicians, and independent journalists are being systematically removed from university faculties, government ministries, and the media.
- **The Suppression of Minority Rights:** Ethnic and religious minorities, including the Kurds, Arabs, and the Bahá'í community, are facing intense suspicion. The state accuses them of being utilized by foreign powers to destabilize the revolution, leading to increased security crackdowns and the suspension of civil liberties.
- **The Flight of the Professional Elite:** Thousands of highly educated doctors, engineers, professors, and technocrats, realizing that the country is sliding into a repressive theocracy, are fleeing the country. This brain drain is creating a severe shortage of skilled personnel to manage the country's infrastructure, factories, and social services.

## 7.2 Economic Impact

The economic consequences of the crisis are severe and immediate, affecting both the domestic Iranian economy and global financial markets.

### Domestically in Iran

On November 14, 1979, President Carter signed Executive Order 12170, freezing approximately twelve billion dollars in Iranian government assets held in United States banks and their foreign branches. This freeze represented the first historic use of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act of 1977.

This asset freeze, combined with the subsequent implementation of a complete trade embargo, has:

- **Immobilized Iran's Foreign Exchange Reserves:** The state is unable to access its international assets, making it exceptionally difficult to pay for vital

imports, including food, medicine, and industrial machinery.

- **Starved the Military of Spare Parts:** The Iranian military is almost entirely equipped with highly advanced American weaponry purchased by the Shah. Without access to American spare parts and technical support, the country's air force, radar networks, and armored divisions are rapidly deteriorating, leaving the nation highly vulnerable to external attack.
- **Devastated the Oil Infrastructure:** The oil fields, which provide the state with almost all of its revenue, rely on highly advanced Western technology and foreign engineers. The departure of these engineers and the inability to import spare parts have led to a sharp drop in oil production.

## Globally

The threat of a military conflict in the Persian Gulf has triggered a massive panic on global energy markets. Oil prices have doubled within a few months, sparking a major energy shock in Western consumer countries. This shock is fueling a deep global economic crisis characterized by:

- **Stagflation:** High inflation combined with stagnant economic growth and rising unemployment.
- **Currency Instability:** The US dollar is under severe pressure, forcing central banks around the world to raise interest rates, which further slows down economic activity.

## 7.3 Institutional / Political Impact

The political structures of both primary disputants are undergoing a profound transformation.

### Iran

The crisis serves as the ultimate crucible for the creation of the modern Islamic Republic. By forcing the immediate resignation of Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan on November 6, the crisis removed the last organized political obstacle to clerical dominance.

Uncontested authority passes to the Revolutionary Council, which systematically:

- **Drafts a Highly Theocratic Constitution:** The document encodes the concept of Velayat-e Faqih, granting Ayatollah Khomeini absolute, unchecked power as the

Supreme Leader.

- **Consolidates Revolutionary Institutions:** The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps is rapidly expanded, serving as a highly ideological parallel military force designed to defend the revolution against internal coups and external subversion.
- **Launches the Cultural Revolution:** Universities are shut down for several years to be systematically cleansed of Western influence, and strict Islamic codes of conduct and dress are enforced across all aspects of public life.

## The United States

The hostage crisis is deeply reshaping American domestic politics and foreign policy.

- **The Paralysis of the Presidency:** The daily coverage of the hostages, showing blindfolded Americans surrounded by chanting mobs, dominates the national media, making the Carter administration look weak, indecisive, and ineffectual.
- **The Transformation of Foreign Policy:** The crisis marks the definitive end of the post-Vietnam era of American foreign policy, which had prioritized human rights and a reluctance to intervene militarily abroad. It triggers a major shift toward a more hawkish, interventionist posture, setting the stage for the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980.
- **The Restructuring of the Military:** The spectacular failure of the military rescue mission, Operation Eagle Claw, in April 1980, which resulted in the deaths of eight US service members, will lead to a profound reorganization of the American military, resulting in the creation of a unified Joint Special Operations Command.

## 7.4 Distributional Effects

The regional balance of power in the Middle East is shifting dramatically. The collapse of the alliance between the United States and Iran has shattered the security architecture of the Persian Gulf.

This shift has:

- **Empowered Radical Non-State Actors:** The successful defiance of the United States by a group of militant students has sent a shockwave of inspiration across the Middle East, encouraging radical movements, both Shia and Sunni, to challenge their own pro-Western regimes.

- **Accelerated Sectarian and Geopolitical Polarization:** The rise of a militant Shia theocracy has triggered a severe, highly dangerous counter-reaction from the Sunni-dominated monarchies of the Gulf, led by Saudi Arabia.
- **Paved the Way for the Iran-Iraq War:** Saddam Hussein, viewing Iran as weak, isolated, and militarily vulnerable due to the lack of American spare parts, launched a full-scale invasion of Iran in September 1980. This war, which will last for eight years and result in over a million casualties, is the direct, tragic consequence of the geopolitical isolation triggered by the hostage crisis.

The table below summarizes these multi-layered impacts, showcasing how the events of November 5, 1979, have triggered a cascade of systemic changes across various sectors:

| Sector               | Immediate Impact<br>(Within Days)                                  | Intermediate Impact<br>(Within Months)                                    | Long-term Systemic<br>Impact (Years Later)                                 |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Social</b>        | Complete paralysis of moderate political parties in Tehran.        | Purging of secular liberals and Marxist intellectuals from universities.  | Systematic institutionalization of a highly repressive theocratic culture. |
| <b>Economic</b>      | Sudden rise in global oil prices; US freezes Iranian state assets. | Complete US trade embargo; Iran's military spare parts dry up.            | Severe, prolonged domestic inflation in Iran; onset of regional oil wars.  |
| <b>Institutional</b> | Resignation of Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan on Nov 6.             | Rewriting of the Iranian Constitution to encode Velayat-e Faqih.          | Uncontested dominance of the Revolutionary Guards and clerical elite.      |
| <b>Geopolitical</b>  | Immediate suspension of US-Iran diplomatic communication.          | Deepening of Cold War tensions as the USSR prepares to enter Afghanistan. | Outbreak of the devastating eight-year Iran-Iraq War in Sept 1980.         |

## 8. Case Studies

To understand the practical application of these legal and political principles, delegates should examine two critical historical case studies that directly shape the motivations and strategies of the actors in late 1979.

### Case Study 1: The 1953 Coup (Operation Ajax)

The joint British-American coup of August 1953, codenamed Operation Ajax, is the single most important historical event for understanding the psychology, motivations, and fears of the Iranian revolutionaries in 1979.

In 1951, the democratic parliament of Iran, under the leadership of Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh, voted unanimously to nationalize the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. Mossadegh argued that it was unacceptable for a foreign corporation to control Iran's natural resources and keep the vast majority of the profits while the local population lived in poverty.

The British government, viewing this nationalization as a direct theft of its state-owned assets, responded by imposing a complete naval blockade on Iranian oil exports and launching a campaign of international legal pressure. When these measures failed to break Mossadegh's resolve, the British Secret Intelligence Service joined forces with the newly created United States Central Intelligence Agency to orchestrate a covert coup.

The coup, directed on the ground by CIA operative Kermit Roosevelt, involved:

- **Buying the Press:** The CIA paid local journalists to write articles accusing Mossadegh of being a communist, an atheist, and a traitor.
- **Paying Mob Leaders:** The agency hired street thugs and criminal gang leaders to organize violent riots in Tehran, creating a false impression of complete societal breakdown.
- **Bribing Military Officers:** Key generals were paid to revolt against the Prime Minister and declare their loyalty to the Shah, who had briefly fled the country.

The operation succeeded. Mossadegh was arrested and spent the rest of his life under house arrest. The Shah returned in triumph, consolidated an absolute dictatorship, and signed new agreements granting American oil companies a forty-percent share of Iran's oil production.

### Relevance to the 1979 Crisis

The memory of 1953 is an open wound in Iran. When President Carter allowed the Shah into the United States on October 22, 1979, the militant students did not view it as a humanitarian or medical gesture. They were absolutely convinced that the CIA was utilizing its embassy in Tehran to coordinate a second coup, working with moderate Iranian generals and Prime Minister Bazargan to overthrow the revolution and restore the Shah. The student takeover of the embassy was a direct, preemptive attempt to prevent another Operation Ajax. By storming the compound and systematically reassembling the shredded documents found in the CIA offices, they sought to expose the ongoing espionage and subversion conducted by the United States government.

**Debate Application:** The Iranian delegation can utilize the 1953 coup to build a powerful defense based on the principle of self-preservation. They can argue that the seizure of the embassy was a necessary, defensive act to prevent a foreign power from once again subverting their sovereignty and nationalizing their resources, demonstrating that the United States has historically utilized the shield of diplomatic immunity to conduct illegal, covert interventions.

### **Case Study 2: The Events of November 5, 1979 (The Collapse of the Moderate Cabinet)**

The timeline of November 5, 1979, represents a unique, highly localized study of a political system undergoing a sudden, irreversible radicalization.

Throughout the morning of November 5, Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan and his cabinet ministers held a series of emergency meetings in Tehran. They realized that their authority had completely evaporated. The students holding the American Embassy were receiving hundreds of thousands of supporters outside the compound walls, and the regular police forces were refusing to intervene. At the same time, a group of revolutionaries launched a brief attack on the British Embassy in Tehran. While the local revolutionary guards eventually escorted the attackers out of the compound, the incident demonstrated that the formal government could not guarantee the safety of any foreign mission. The critical turning point occurred when Ayatollah Khomeini delivered a nationwide radio address. Instead of calling for order and demanding that the students respect international law, Khomeini formally validated the seizure, describing the American Embassy as a nest of spies and calling the event a second revolution, even greater than the first. He declared that any attempt by the provisional government to negotiate with American emissaries was a betrayal of the Islamic faith. Realizing that he had been completely marginalized and that he could not perform his constitutional duties, Prime Minister Bazargan decided to submit his resignation to Khomeini. His departure, which was officially accepted on November 6, marked the definitive collapse of the

moderate, constitutionalist phase of the revolution.

### **Relevance to the 1979 Crisis**

This case study demonstrates the extreme fluidness and danger of the crisis on November 5. The Security Council is not dealing with a stable, predictable state actor. The formal channels of diplomacy have dissolved. By understanding that Bazargan's cabinet is on the verge of collapse on this specific day, delegates can appreciate the high risk of any miscalculation.

### **9. Challenges to Cooperation**

Resolving the crisis of November 5, 1979, is exceptionally difficult due to several profound, highly complex structural challenges to cooperation.

#### **The Breakdown of Communication**

The primary obstacle is the complete lack of direct, trusted communication channels between the primary disputants. Ayatollah Khomeini has forbidden any Iranian official from engaging in direct talks with United States representatives. He has refused to receive personal emissaries sent by President Carter, including former Attorney General Ramsey Clark. This lack of direct communication forces both sides to rely on indirect, highly public channels, such as television broadcasts, radio speeches, and third-party messages passed through Swiss or Algerian diplomats. This public format makes it almost impossible to conduct delicate, confidential negotiations. Every statement is immediately dissected by domestic audiences, forcing both Carter and the Iranian clerics into rigid, uncompromising positions to avoid looking weak to their respective publics.

#### **Domestic Political Pressures**

Both President Carter and Ayatollah Khomeini are severely constrained by intense domestic political pressures.

- **In the United States:** Carter is entering an election year, facing a strong primary challenge from Ted Kennedy and a rising conservative movement led by Ronald Reagan. The American public is highly angry, demanding immediate, aggressive action to restore national honor. Any sign of compromise or willingness to negotiate on Iranian terms is viewed as weakness, making it politically impossible for Carter to offer concessions regarding the Shah or frozen assets.
- **In Iran:** The radical clerics are utilizing the crisis to mobilize the masses and defeat their secular domestic rivals. Any moderate Iranian politician who attempts to

advocate for a peaceful compromise is immediately targeted, accused of being a CIA spy, and forced out of public life. The ongoing confrontation with the United States serves as the ultimate source of revolutionary legitimacy, making the clerical establishment highly reluctant to resolve the crisis quickly.

## **Cold War Rivalry**

The structural rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union prevents the Security Council from adopting a cohesive, binding response. While the Soviet Union formally supports the principle of diplomatic immunity in public, it views the crisis as a historic opportunity to weaken American influence in the Middle East. The Kremlin will systematically block any attempt by the United States to secure binding economic sanctions or authorization for military force against Iran under Chapter VII. The Soviets fear that any American military intervention near their southern border would bring US forces directly to their doorstep, especially as Moscow prepares its own military operations in neighboring Afghanistan. This superpower deadlock prevents the Council from presenting a unified, credible threat of enforcement, allowing the Iranian authorities to defy the international community with impunity.

## **10. Key Policy / Strategic Dilemmas**

The Security Council faces several profound, highly complex strategic dilemmas, each featuring severe trade-offs.

### **Dilemma 1: Negotiation versus Law Enforcement**

Should the international community prioritize peaceful negotiations to secure the safe release of the hostages, or should it focus on enforcing international law to preserve systemic stability?

The trade-offs are illustrated below:

- **Prioritizing Peaceful Negotiation:** This approach focus on protecting the lives of the hostages and avoiding a devastating regional war. However, by negotiating with a state that has violated its treaty obligations, the Council risks showing that hostage-taking is a highly effective tool of statecraft, thereby encouraging other radical regimes and non-state actors to target foreign embassies to extract concessions.
- **Prioritizing Law Enforcement:** This approach insists on the immediate, unconditional release of the hostages and demands that the Council impose severe, binding sanctions under Chapter VII if Iran refuses to comply. However, this

aggressive posture is highly likely to trigger a Soviet veto, exposing the impotence of the Council. If the sanctions are somehow implemented, they will play directly into the hands of the clerical radicals, who will use the external threat to crush the moderate opposition and permanently radicalize the state, while potentially leading to the immediate execution of the hostages.

### **Dilemma 2: Unilateral Action versus Multilateral Consensus**

Should the United States wait for the slow, highly uncertain process of securing a multilateral consensus through the United Nations, or should it act unilaterally to protect its citizens and restore national honor?

The trade-offs are illustrated below:

- **Waiting for UN Consensus:** This approach preserves the institutional authority of the United Nations, maintains the cohesion of the Western alliance, and avoids a dangerous superpower confrontation. However, the UN process is slow and highly vulnerable to a Soviet veto. A prolonged, passive negotiation will make the United States look weak, damage Carter's political position, and allow the radical clerics to consolidate their grip on power in Tehran.
- **Acting Unilaterally:** This approach allows the United States to utilize its full economic and military power immediately, including freezing assets, implementing a naval blockade, or launching a covert rescue mission. However, these actions will violate international law, alienate key Western allies, devastate global oil markets, and potentially draw the Soviet Union into a direct military confrontation, transforming a bilateral dispute into a catastrophic global war.

### **Dilemma 3: State Sovereignty versus International Intervention**

How does the Security Council balance the sovereign rights of a member state undergoing a historic revolution with the need to enforce international treaties inside its borders?

The trade-offs are illustrated below:

- **Prioritizing State Sovereignty:** This approach recognizes that the Iranian Revolution is a legitimate expression of national self-determination, a reaction to decades of foreign-backed dictatorship. It warns against any external intervention that would violate Article 2, Paragraph 7 of the UN Charter. However, by failing to intervene, the Council permits a sovereign state to shield non-state actors who are violating the most fundamental treaties of international relations, thereby undermining the rules-based international order.

- **Prioritizing International Intervention:** This approach asserts that the absolute protection of diplomatic personnel is a universal obligation that overrides any claim of domestic sovereignty. It justifies the use of international pressure to enforce the Vienna Conventions. However, this intervention will be viewed by the Iranian masses as a direct continuation of Western imperialism, triggering a massive nationalistic backlash that will permanently isolate Iran and drive it into a highly aggressive, anti-Western foreign policy.

**Analytical Insight for Debate:** These dilemmas are the core strategic choices that delegates must make. A successful working paper will not attempt to avoid these trade-offs; rather, it will explicitly address them, proposing creative compromises that balance the defense of international law with respect for national sovereignty, and utilizing indirect, multilateral mechanisms to bypass the superpower deadlock.

## 11. Conclusion

As the night falls on November 5, 1979, the United Nations Security Council stands at a historic crossroads. The crisis in Tehran has escalated to a point of extreme danger. The United States Embassy has been occupied for over twenty-four hours, the British Embassy has just been raided, and Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan's moderate cabinet is on the verge of complete collapse. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's decisive endorsement of the takeover has transformed a student protest into an official instrument of a radicalizing, anti-Western theocracy. The stakes could not be higher. The very survival of the rules-based international order, which relies on the absolute inviolability of diplomatic missions and the safety of diplomatic personnel, is under direct threat. The potential for a catastrophic regional war that could draw in both superpowers and devastate global energy markets is immense.

The Security Council is the only international body with the legal authority and structural capacity to intervene, mediate, and enforce a peaceful resolution. To succeed, this Council must rise above the rigid divisions of the Cold War and the simplistic rhetoric of bilateral confrontation. You must find a way to design a creative, multi-tiered diplomatic strategy that:

- Secures the immediate, safe release of the hostages and restores full diplomatic protections.
- Establishes a highly structured, indirect negotiation mechanism utilizing neutral, third-party intermediaries to bypass the communication breakdown.
- Balances the defense of international law with a constructive, non-imperialist forum

to address Iran's legitimate historical grievances regarding foreign intervention.

- Avoids any aggressive escalation that would play into the hands of the radical clerics, accelerate the internal destruction of the moderate opposition, or trigger a superpower confrontation.

The world is watching. The fate of sixty-six innocent hostages and the stability of the global security architecture rest in your hands.

## **12. Questions to Consider**

To guide your preparation and refine your strategies for the upcoming debate, delegates should carefully consider the following questions:

1. How does your assigned country balance the absolute defense of diplomatic immunity with the principle of state sovereignty and non-intervention in the domestic affairs of other nations?
2. In what ways can the Security Council utilize the non-aligned members of the Council to draft a resolution that the Soviet Union cannot veto, while still providing a credible mechanism for enforcement?
3. What are the strategic advantages and disadvantages of establishing an international commission of inquiry to investigate the historical crimes of the Shah's regime in exchange for the release of the hostages?
4. How can the international community protect the physical safety and humanitarian treatment of the hostages while diplomatic negotiations are ongoing?
5. If Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan's moderate cabinet formally resigns, who is the legitimate, legally binding authority in Iran with whom the international community can negotiate?
6. How can your delegation design economic pressures that target the radical clerical elite in Tehran without devastating the civilian population or accelerating the domestic radicalization of the state?
7. What are the legal implications of a state formally endorsing and adopting the unauthorized, illegal acts of private citizens under international law?
8. How does the ongoing Cold War rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union shape your assigned country's voting strategy and policy options in this

crisis?

9. In what ways can neutral, third-party countries, such as Algeria, Sweden, or Switzerland, be utilized as diplomatic intermediaries to facilitate confidential, deniable negotiations?
10. If the Iranian authorities refuse to comply with a unanimous Order of Provisional Measures from the International Court of Justice, what concrete enforcement options are available to the Security Council under Article 94 of the UN Charter?

### 13. Glossary

- **diplomatic immunity:** A principle of international law that exempts foreign diplomatic agents from the civil and criminal jurisdiction of the host state, ensuring they can perform their duties safely and without coercion.
- **SAVAK:** The notorious secret police, domestic security, and intelligence service established by Iran's Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi with the assistance of the United States and Israel, synonymous with the systematic surveillance and torture of political dissidents.
- **Velayat-e Faqih:** A political theological framework developed by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, which asserts that in the absence of the hidden Imam, the state must be governed by a supreme Islamic jurist who holds absolute veto power over all political decisions.
- **inviolability:** The absolute legal protection granted to diplomatic missions and personnel under international law, prohibiting the host state from entering embassy premises or arresting diplomatic agents for any reason without explicit permission.
- **provisional government:** The newly established, temporary national administration of Iran formed after the collapse of the Pahlavi monarchy, headed by Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan, which sought to establish a stable, democratic constitutional republic.
- **sovereign equality:** The fundamental principle of international relations, enshrined in Article 2, Paragraph 1 of the United Nations Charter, which asserts that all states possess equal sovereign rights and obligations under international law, regardless of their size, wealth, or military power.
- **hostage-taking:** The illegal seizure or detention of an individual combined with the threat to kill, injure, or continue to detain them in order to compel a third party,

such as a state or international organization, to do or abstain from doing any act as an explicit condition for release.

- **charge d'affaires:** A diplomatic official who temporarily acts as the head of a diplomatic mission in the absence of the ambassador, serving as the primary channel of communication with the host government.
- **persona non grata:** A formal declaration by a host state that a foreign diplomatic official is no longer acceptable within its territory, requiring the sending state to either recall the individual or terminate their diplomatic functions.
- **Treaty of Amity:** A bilateral agreement signed in 1955 between the United States and Iran to encourage trade, investment, and friendly consular relations, which establishes the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice for dispute resolution.
- **White Revolution:** A sweeping modernization program launched by Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi in 1963, featuring land redistribution, infrastructural development, and secular reforms, which led to significant socio-economic dislocations in rural and urban Iran.
- **imperialism:** A policy or ideology of extending a nation's rule or authority over foreign countries, often through direct military conquest or covert political and economic subversion, which the Iranian revolutionaries accused the United States and United Kingdom of practicing in Iran.
- **good offices:** The diplomatic services and mediation efforts provided by a neutral third party, such as the United Nations Secretary-General, to facilitate communication, reduce tensions, and encourage a peaceful settlement between disputing states.

#### 14. Further Readings

- <https://www.icj-cij.org/case/64>
- <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/9656>
- <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/9637>
- <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/>
- [https://treaties.un.org/pages/viewdetails.aspx?src=treaty&mtdsg\\_no=iii-](https://treaties.un.org/pages/viewdetails.aspx?src=treaty&mtdsg_no=iii-)

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- <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-iranian-revolution-a-timeline-of-events/>
- <https://www.britannica.com/event/Iran-hostage-crisis>
- <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/iran/2019-11-04/1979-iran-hostage-crisis-recalled>
- <https://www.un-ilibrary.org/content/books/9789210010627c066>

