International security crisis negotiations: finding the balance between engagement and confrontation

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INTERNATIONAL SECURITY CRISIS NEGOTIATIONS: FINDING THE BALANCE BETWEEN ENGAGEMENT AND CONFRONTATION

by

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A Thesis
Submitted to the University at Albany, State University of New York
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

Rockefeller College of Public Affairs & Policy
Department of Political Science
2012
ABSTRACT

When faced with an international security crisis, the policymakers of great powers are forced into difficult circumstances in a short period of time. The states that embroil the great powers in these crises force upon those policymakers tough decisions in regards to finding an acceptable resolution to the crisis. The decision making process must be quick, as excessive deliberations could have negative effects on the outcome of the crisis. Therefore, policymakers are left with two stark policy options: to either choose a policy of conciliatory engagement or a policy of confrontation. Each strategy comes with its own merits as well as drawbacks. The dilemma involves which strategy is more likely to lead to a successful outcome. To study this phenomenon, this paper will study a series of crisis negotiations over time involving both the great powers and Iran. In conducting these case studies, this paper will analyze the evidence presented throughout the cases and come to some conclusions regarding which type of strategy is most effective in resolving these security crises. Finally, this paper will explore the academic as well as policy relevant findings of this paper as well as future avenues for research.
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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

International security crises pose the most direct to the security of states individually and to the stability of the international system as a whole. The consequences of a crisis, especially in many strategic areas of the world, can be dire. Most significantly, these consequences may not be limited to the immediate security interests of the states involved. Depending on the nature and extent of the crisis, there may also be political, economic, and diplomatic consequences to face as well. Furthermore, the fallout of a major crisis extends beyond the immediate region where it is occurring.

From a policymaking perspective, how to respond to and mitigate the effects of a security crisis becomes of paramount importance, as the threat posed by these crises can significantly disrupt international stability. This is especially true for crises involving great powers, as they are the ones who take the lead and are at the forefront during the subsequent negotiations that are aimed at resolving the crisis. At the beginning of negotiations, the top policymakers from these nations have a very important decision to make. That is, exactly what kind of negotiating strategy will they take going into the talks? Broadly speaking, policymakers are confronted with two stark choices: they can either choose to pursue a policy of broad multilateral engagement which seeks to resolve the crisis through diplomacy, or they can choose a more confrontational tone which relies almost exclusively on coercive threats.

From an academic and policy perspective, this paper will be examining these themes in the context of the Persian Gulf. The focus of this paper will be international security crises involving both Iran and outside powers. The research question that this
paper is most interested in determining what is the most effective negotiating mechanism to resolve the conflict? Specifically, this paper will focus on how has Iran responded to particular overtures, and what type of proposed resolutions have the Iranians been most receptive to when it comes to resolving these national security crises. In addition, what factors might contribute to the Iranian decision making process? Finally, in terms of generic knowledge this paper will examine what implications these findings might have for the present nuclear crisis and other ongoing international security crises.

For the purposes of this paper, an international security crisis will be defined as from the perspective of the state, a situation where three perceptions are present in the minds of the highest-level decision makers: a) a threat to basic values, with a simultaneous or subsequent b) high probability of involvement in military hostilities, and the awareness of c) finite time for response to the external value threat.¹

This paper will answer these research questions by first examining the theoretical literature on the relative merits and costs of the two broad negotiating platforms. From the literature review, this paper will develop a theory that will first explain under what circumstances Iran is most likely to come to an agreement with the outside power. This theory will also propose two hypotheses, which will predict which type of approach is most likely to yield the desired results of ending the crisis. In order to test these two hypotheses, this paper will conduct a structured, focus comparison involving three case studies in order to test the comparative effectiveness of each of these negotiating strategies. These case studies will be the 1979 Embassy Hostage Crisis, the 1987-8 Tanker Wars, and the 2007 British Naval Hostage Crisis. At the conclusion of each case

study the effectiveness of each strategy will be evaluated and a final determination will be made deciding which strategy proved most effective in ending that crisis. Finally, this paper will discuss the policy implications of the findings of this paper in regards to the present Iranian nuclear crisis as well as any policy relevant findings that can be applied to other contemporary international security crises.
CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

The practice of international negotiations comes in many forms and settings, with varying degrees of success and failures depending on the circumstances. The debate revolving around the practice of negotiations is as intense as it is broad. With ongoing international crises across the globe, such as in Iran and North Korea and elsewhere, this debate continues to be as relevant as ever. With stakes as high as they are, it is becoming vitally important to find practical strategies that will contribute to the resolution of these pressing issues.

As a result of these deliberations, the main question revolves around how best to solve these vexing international security problems. Given the high profile nature of most international crises, many of the negotiations have taken place within a broad multilateral context. This does not mean that bilateral negotiations should be excluded as a policy option, as there are many benefits to this strategy as well, especially if they occur in the context of more broad multilateral platforms.\(^2\) A multilateral approach to negotiations comes with its own advantages and disadvantages, with many analysts debating both sides of this issue. Reflecting on the history of multilateral negotiations, Anyaoku reflected on how multilateralism has had a checkered past since the end of World War II.\(^3\) Recounting the relative failures of institutions such as the League of Nations and the United Nations, Anyaoku considered the attacks of September 11, 2001 to be the low point of international multilateral efforts.\(^4\) Noting the increased reliance on American

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4 Ibid., p. 195.
unilateralism in the realm of nonproliferation since September 11, other authors have highlighted how the US has been relatively slow in incorporating multilateral efforts into its strategy, and has at times been highly skeptical of any multilateral regimes. Nonetheless, the US has slowly started to realize the benefits of a multilateral approach and has started to adjust its strategy accordingly.

With the role of multilateralism seemingly at an all time low, the question now turns to what will become of it next? In an increasingly multipolar world, how will multilateral institutions, formal or otherwise, continue to function? In this new multipolar world, where trans-national corporations and NGOs have started to play increasingly prominent roles in multilateral negotiations, the entire dynamics of these negotiations have experienced a fundamental shift. No longer are these negotiations the exclusive privilege of states, as TNCs and NGOs have increasingly played a prevalent role in negotiations, which raises a number of concerns previously not considered. Furthermore, with an increase in both the number of actors involved and the instances of multilateral negotiations, there have been suggestions to reorder the architecture of international cooperation, but the exact format of the new order will be an exceedingly difficult process.

In addition to broad multilateral institutions, there are those who argue that regional and other international institutions are best situated for states dealing with any crises that arise in their own neighborhood. There are a number of advantages that regional institutions can serve for conflict management as opposed to broader institutions.

Regional actors have a deep interest in conflict management in their respective regions; and they can provide legitimacy, local knowledge and experience, and some resources in the form of personnel. However, they also suffer several limitations, including a lack of mandate, the difficulty of maintaining impartiality and forging common positions, limited resources and organizational shortcomings.\(^8\) Acknowledging the fact that many important aspects of international politics tend to be regional rather than fully global or exclusively national, Tavares identified six key pillars of regional clusters that need to be addressed in order to achieve regional peace: agents for peace and security, instruments of peace and security, the security pattern, the conflict pattern, the positive peace pattern, and the level of regional integration.\(^9\) Ultimately, in order for regional institutions to be effective platforms for conflict management, five factors must be present for success: type of institution and commitment to it, shared interests in relationship to a specific armed conflict, institutional capacity, resource availability, and legitimacy and credibility.\(^10\)

An important supplement to any format for negotiations is Track II diplomacy, which includes informal discussions, many times in private, which help build trust between the two negotiating parties. While the advantages of Track II diplomacy include an increase in trust and ease of communications between adversaries, expectations should be tempered when it comes to practical results within the Track I aspect of diplomacy. That said, the gains of Track II should not be ignored, and ultimately this practice is widely regarded as a fruitful endeavor that can occasionally yield practical benefits.\(^11\)

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\(^8\) Alagappa, “Regional institutions, the UN and international security: a framework for analysis.” p. 422.
\(^10\) Alagappa, p. 435.
The key to success is finding the proper linkage between the first track of national
governments and the second track of domestic lobbies. If these two parties are properly
linked for negotiations, two level games can remain relevant and useful.\textsuperscript{12}

Whatever type of negotiation is at hand, there are a number of issues that the
parties involved have to contend with. These issues can include the timing and setting of
the negotiations\textsuperscript{13}, how spoilers present themselves and how they are in turn dealt with\textsuperscript{14},
and the importance of maintaining the willingness to be open for talks.\textsuperscript{15} Regarding the
timing of negotiations, Rothstein argued that leaders have to consider several factors
when determining to enter negotiations. The state of the conflict, bearable resolutions,
and domestic considerations have to be taken into account in order for negotiations to
occur. Once negotiations have commenced, managing non-state actors can make or break
negotiations, and evidence from past cases suggests that spoilers have been successful at
scuttling otherwise productive negotiations. Despite the many pitfalls of negotiations,
maintaining open avenues for dialogue is considered by many as ideal. Without the
possibility for dialogue, the disconnect among adversaries will only widen.

Applied specifically to the Iranian case, the type of negotiation platform and what
should be done has been a highly contentious issue among scholars and pundits alike.\textsuperscript{16}

As will be shown below, there are two consistent approaches discussed in the literature
when it comes to negotiations with Iran. Broadly speaking, these approaches can be

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{12} Crump, “Negotiation Process and Negotiation Context.” p. 222.
\textsuperscript{16} Jeffrey Goldberg, “The Point of No Return,” \textit{The Atlantic}.
\end{flushright}

See also: Fareed Zakaria, “Israel, Don't Strike Iran,” \textit{Global Public Square Blog},
\url{http://globalpublicsquare.blogs.cnn.com/2012/02/19/zakaria-israel-dont-strike-iran/}. 
classified as a conciliatory approach aimed at addressing Iranian concerns and interests versus a much more confrontational approach. Additionally, it is worth taking the Iranian style of diplomacy and Iran's national concerns into account, as many authors have done. All things considered, the current debate over how to respond to the nuclear crisis is driven partly by Iranian behavior and partly by the recommended Western response to these behaviors.

The Iranians have a number of motivations and concerns that have to be considered to understand their quest for a nuclear program, whether civilian or military. Making negotiations much more difficult is the fact that the Iranians have had less than positive relations with nearly all the Western powers for nearly the last 30 years. The high levels of distrust between Iran and all powers involved only makes the task of negotiation with the opaque Iranians all the more perplexing.

Before taking up negotiations it is important to bear in mind what to expect from Iranian negotiators. When talking with Iran, negotiators can expect a number of things that are peculiar to the Iranians. For one, Iranian diplomacy displays a high level of emphasis on religion and playing for time. Also, Iranians believe in martyrdom and are willing to accept large amounts of losses in the course of negotiations. Along with traditional concerns for pride, prestige, and status, what makes the Iranians so difficult to deal with is the fact that they are not afraid to use threats, simulate irrationality, and also use linguistic devices to obscure and confuse communications. To get through the tough Iranian style of diplomacy, it is recommended that Western diplomats follow four strategies during negotiations. First, clarify policy positions and intentions on both sides.

Second, accept Iran as a normal state. Third, respect Iranian history and show a willingness to become part of a long-term friendship. Finally, be flexible. Accept that Iran's command system of government will not always allow it to respond as required by the West.  

Though negotiations have not always gone smoothly, the West does have lengthy experience in negotiating with the Iranians on many issues, especially its nuclear program. Dating back to the period of the Shah, two recurring issues that the Iranians have stressed again and again are respect for sovereignty, and full control of the nuclear fuel cycle. The Iranians have long insisted they should have the same rights accorded to all members of the NPT, and therefore have viewed anything except full control of the nuclear fuel cycle as an infringement of their national sovereignty and in direct violation of their NPT rights. The US in specific has always been concerned about the possible weapons dimensions of an indigenous fuel cycle within Iran.

Despite the difficulties in negotiation with the Iranians and a long history of mistrust between Iran and all parties involved, the Iranians have shown the ability to be pragmatists and reach deals when it is beneficial for them to do so. For instance, from the 2007 NIE on Iran's nuclear program, we have learned that past European and UN efforts to pressure Iran have had some impact in changing their behavior. It has also shown that Iran's leadership is deterrable, and that Iran's cost-benefit calculations would respond to military alternatives to attacking Iran's nuclear facilities – such as theater missile defense or a containment strategy.

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18 Ibid., p. 23.
Even though there is strong domestic support for the nuclear program, with some estimates saying 90% of Iranians support the program\(^1\), assumptions shouldn't be made that Iran is against making a deal. Indeed, some argue that there exists a broad constituency within Iran's establishment in favor of a deal.\(^2\) It shouldn't be taken as gospel that Iran is seeking a nuclear weapons capability, and instead Iran might only be using its program as a bargaining chip for greater concessions in favor of the Iranian national interest. On the point of nuclear weapons, three things have to be kept in mind: Iranian society has enormous respect for international laws and institutions, the experience of the Iran-Iraq War has left many Iranians ambivalent about the legacies of WMD, and ordinary Iranians are concerned about the extremely high costs of their government's pursuit of weapons.\(^3\)

Taking all this evidence into consideration, the Western approaches to Iran can be divided into two broad categories. As mentioned above, Western strategy consists of either a broadly conciliatory approach that seeks to reestablish ties and increase understanding between both sides, with the ultimate hope of reaching a deal that is satisfactory to both sides. The alternate approach is one of confrontation, which fundamentally views Iran as an adversary. In practice the advocates of this approach propose for the West to pursue a strategy based primarily on threats, particularly of the military variety.

Among those in the conciliatory camp are those who propose to resolve the crisis through either major international multilateral institutions or through local regional

\(^{3}\) Barzegar, p. 26.
institutions. Advocating multilateralism as the most promising avenue for success, some argue that all concerned parties in the crisis would have to be involved, including the United States, Europe, Russia and China. This approach accepts Iran's security concerns and understands the dangerous nuclear neighborhood Iran finds itself in. Given these realities, the multilateralists accept the fact that Iran will not under any circumstances give up their right to a civilian nuclear energy program. Therefore, the goal should be acceptance of an Iranian enrichment program, albeit under strict international supervision that works to prevent weaponization. This approach is different than others who demand Iran fully suspend their nuclear enrichment activities before negotiations can commence.

An important question is how to involve Iran's neighbors in any solution to the present nuclear crisis. Specifically, some authors suggest a role for Iran's three main regional peers, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and possibly Egypt. According to Sheena, regional engagement of Iran by these three states may represent one of the last diplomatic avenues for the international community. Relying on Iran's neighbors provides a number of advantages to negotiations that are not present when the broader international community is involved. First, unlike Western engagement, regional powers would not have to worry about addressing human rights and other moral issues when conducting negotiations with Iran. Second, a regional approach would take advantage of realpolitik and let the states of the Middle East balance against themselves absent any outside powers. Finally, as Iran's peers, these states would more likely achieve enhanced verification of Iran's

26 Sheena, “The Case Against the Case Against Iran: Regionalism as the West's Last Frontier,” p. 342.
nuclear activities without the West having to lose face.\textsuperscript{27}

In order to supplement ongoing negotiations, many authors have proposed the use of Track II or multi-track diplomacy to build relationships with the Iranians. Due to the high levels of mistrust between the US and Iran, some have suggested that negotiations can take place on a second level separate from the main negotiations with the facilitation of a mediator, possibly Turkey.\textsuperscript{28} If these talks are to occur, it is important that they be conducted in secret which will allow both parties to more openly discuss four focal points of contention between the two parties: regional security, the threat of crippling sanctions, the threat of a military strike, and the Israeli factor.\textsuperscript{29} The benefits of this type of discussion could be worth the effort. Informal talks by private citizens an experts in a private setting can address these issues that officials cannot openly deal with, and at least clarify the most contentious and controversial issues on both sides.\textsuperscript{30} Emphasizing another example of track-two strategy, other authors have argued that any offer made to the Iranians should be made to the Iranian people as well as the regime itself.\textsuperscript{31} If this strategy of engaging directly with the Iranian people is to succeed, all areas of contentions would have to be on the agenda, from terrorism to democracy and human rights, and even diplomatic relations.\textsuperscript{32} With the Iranian people as well as the ruling elites involved in negotiations, it is hoped the West can gain enough leverage in the negotiations to get concessions from the leadership.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., p. 342-3.  
\textsuperscript{28} Ben-Meir, “Nuclear Iran is Not an Option: a new negotiating strategy to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons,” p. 79.  
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., p. 82-5.  
\textsuperscript{30} Cordesman, p. 19.  
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., p. 122.
Underlying all these previously mentioned approaches was a willingness to accommodate the needs of Iran and make at times unprecedented offers with the goal of solving the present crisis. There is another crowd that argues against trying to make any sort of grand bargains with Iran, and instead advocate taking a much more hardline approach towards the regime. Part of the reason, especially recently, for a renewed emphasis on pressuring Tehran has been the perceived failure of the more conciliatory carrot-and-stick approaches of the past. It is believed that since the previous effort at two-track diplomacy has failed, “it is time to appreciate that the only manner of inducing meaningful change in the Islamic Republic's behavior without the resort to war is to otherwise imperil its very existence.”

It has been argued by others that the main priority for any US administration should be deterrence or containment of all Iranian activity in the Persian Gulf region and beyond. As of now, the main US priorities are restraining Iran's external behavior, moderating its domestic politics, and reversing its nuclear weapons program. To limit Iranian actions in the region, the West can pursue a number of courses. They can play a role in reviving the defenses of the Gulf states, agreeing to arms deals in a number of conventional arms. Additionally, the West could utilize Turkey as a regional counterweight to any Iranian ambitions, especially in the northern areas. It should be noted that this idea of using Turkey as a counterweight is a direct contradiction of the conciliatory crowd which wishes to use Turkey as a mediator in the region.

Another option of coercive diplomacy the West can pursue is initiating economic sanctions against the Iranian regime with the hopes that it will modify the regime's

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34 Ibid., p. 9.
behavior. It has been noted that sanctions have had limited track records of success in the past, especially in the case of South Africa in the 1990s. Under the right conditions, sanctions can prove to be useful tools of a nation's foreign policy, especially if the sanctions regime is structured in accordance with the goals set out for it and if sanctions are accompanied by other tools.\(^\text{37}\)

Applied to the current crisis with Iran, the Iranian economy is seen as an environment that is optimal for further economic measures – both positive and negative.\(^\text{38}\) Since negotiations with Iran have only been mildly successful to date, sanctions are seen as a way of increasing the pressure on Tehran. First, sanctions demonstrate that there are real costs to intransigence. Second, sanctions in the form of export controls can be an effective means of limiting Iran's strategic programs and deterring support from third parties. Third, sanctions serve as a warning to other states that might consider following Iran's path.\(^\text{39}\) Along with the economic sanctions, it is important to establish military tripwires in the event that sanctions prove ineffective in modifying Iranian behavior.\(^\text{40}\)

However, economic sanctions may not prove to be a panacea in terms of constricting Iranian actions in the region. It has been noted how Iran has successfully cultivated commercial and strategic relations with China, Russia, and India to counterbalance the threat of Western nuclear sanctions.\(^\text{41}\) These commercial opportunities call into question how effective any economic sanctions may be in reforming Iranian behavior, given the number of options available to them. Conducting business with the

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East as opposed to the West has allowed Iran to minimize its vulnerability, therefore reducing the likelihood that Western sanctions will be effective in resolving the nuclear quarrel.\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., p. 61.
CHAPTER 3 - THEORY SECTION

For states involved in a major international security crisis, finding the appropriate strategy to deal with potentially intransigent states has always been a vexing problem for policymakers. Finding the balance between a solution where the terms are acceptable to both the West and towards the adversary is an exceedingly difficult task. Any resolution towards the crisis that appears to come off as one side dictating to the other or where one side has to “lose face” could easily stall the negotiations and end the talks in failure. Therefore, a strategy that meets the needs of both sides involved in the crisis is vital if a resolution is to be found.

Many states in the international community have frustrated policymakers with their seemingly consistent ability to draw the outside world into a major security crises. These states, whether because of domestic dynamics, the strategic importance of the regions where they exist, or relations with other states, repeatedly draw the international community into a crisis that demands the near full attention of top policymakers for the states involved.

One state that has proven difficult to engage with is the Islamic Republic of Iran. Throughout its modern history Iran has been involved in several international security crises with outside powers. All of these crises have involved aspects of both diplomatic engagement and coercion with the possibility of military strikes. These crises have provided the need for policymakers across generations to develop the tools to handle security crises in general, and specifically, crises directly involving Iran. Therefore, studying crisis interactions with Iran over an extended historical period can provide
insights to policymakers on how to manage crisis situations in the present as well as the future.

How to approach the Iranians in international crisis situations has been a vexing problem for policymakers since the end of World War II. This has especially been true since the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Given the many times opaque nature of the Iranian decision making process, it is difficult for major powers involved in negotiations to calibrate their negotiating strategies in a way that will prove to be most effective in resolving the crisis. The key is to find a strategy that the Iranians will be susceptible to and will provide a satisfactory resolution to the crisis.

Another important consideration for policymakers is to decide with whom in Iran they will be negotiating with. Of all the various circles of power in Iran, whether the Assembly of Experts, the Expediency Council, the Supreme National Security Council, the Executive, or even the Spiritual Supreme Leader, knowing who is in charge and who holds influence at any given time is extremely important. At the top of the Iranian power structure, and who ultimately is in charge, is the spiritual leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The Ayatollah, as the Supreme Leader, holds the strongest position within the Iranian governing apparatus, but given the other elements – republican and democratic – in the system, the leader is not a dictator.\textsuperscript{43} As Supreme Leader, he only supervises political life. However, he can block or undo decisions of the Parliament and of the government, and he appoints the heads of and controls the security apparatus, the judiciary, the media, and the religious foundations.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{43} Perthes, Takeyh, and Tanaka, “Engaging Iran,” p. 48.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
The other centers of power in the Iranian system can, to one extent or another, also act as veto players and block or put a brake on decisions.\textsuperscript{45} This resulting balance of power within the Iranian system of government results in a situation where it is often not clear who is really in charge. That is, of course, unless the leader himself decides. In terms of foreign policy making, there are a number of institutions within Iran's government that could legitimately claim a say, if not the say, over policies. These include the president, the foreign minister, the Parliament, but also the SNSC and its secretary, as well as a Strategic Council for Foreign Relations which was only set up in 2006.\textsuperscript{46}

Considering all these factors, determining who to negotiate with in a time of crisis can prove to be a very perplexing problem for the policymakers of the states engaged in these negotiations. Even under the best of circumstances, it will be a fine balance trying to manage the internal power structure of the Iranian government. Under more dire crisis circumstances, the power struggles within Iran may become more acute, making it all the more difficult for policymakers to find out who is in charge and who they should be talking to. But, given the generally prevailing influence of the Supreme Leader, it would be beneficial to start by reaching out to him. There are other relevant institutions that will need to contacted as well, but it all begins, and ends, with the Ayatollah. Therefore, the main thrust of contacts should be towards the Ayatollah and the people who serve him. However, there will also be a need to conduct direct negotiations with the other relevant institutions as they have a direct influence on the developments as well.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., p. 50.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., p. 51.
Without a strategy that appeals to all the relevant concerns of the Iranians, as well as the concerns of the international community involved in these negotiations, there is the serious risk that the chosen strategy could end in failure. The consequences of failure in this type of crisis negotiation would be profound in such a vitally strategic region such as the Persian Gulf. There would be fallout that would be political, security, and economic in nature, and these consequences would not limit themselves to the immediate Middle East region. When all is said and done, the effects would be felt globally.

Therefore, there are a number of issues that matter in regards to calibrating a strategy that addresses all areas where the Iranians are most susceptible. Once these issues and concerns are accounted for, the chances for a successful negotiated outcome in a crisis situation are greatly increased. Often repeated concerns that the Iranians have expressed have to do with 1) an inherent mistrust of Western powers; 2) respect for Iranian rights and history and a desire to be treated as an equal in the international community; 3) the role of religion in society; and, 4) respect for territorial integrity. For any strategy to work, these issues will all have to be addressed in a manner that is both believable in the eyes of the Iranians and sufficiently addresses these issues to alleviate Iranian concerns.

Mistrust of the West is one of the primary motivating factors driving the Iranians in all of their interactions with the West. While this mistrust has been most acute since the 1979 Revolution, the Iranians have had repeated bad experiences with Western powers going all the way back to British subjugation in the immediate years following World War II. Mistrust of the West was perhaps irreparably damaged with the 1953 coup
directed by the Eisenhower Administration. This action overthrew the nascent democratic government of Iran and reinstalled the Shah as dictator. This incident, and several since then, have ingrained in the Iranians a deep seated fear of all things Western. That is why, above all else, overcoming this mistrust is perhaps the most difficult obstacle to overcome when conducting negotiations with Iran.

The Iranians also have a strong desire to be respected as an equal among nations. Iranian culture and history stretches back for more than twenty-five centuries of continuous existence, and they are very proud of the many accomplishments their society and culture has contributed to the world in that time. In the Middle East, only Egypt has a longer history as a unified nation. Therefore, approaching any international negotiations, the Iranians usually command the respect they feel they deserve given their nations' past achievements. If they sense they are not receiving their fair level of respect, the Iranians may take offense and be less amicable towards finding a negotiated solution to the crisis.

Any state conducting negotiations with Iran should not underestimate the role of religion in Iranian politics and society in general. The Iranians are well known for being a highly religious people. In fact, religion – and not only Shi'a Islam – shapes even intimate details, such as speech patterns, personal relations, and family life. Iranian religiosity is even more accentuated by the fact that Iranians are Shiite Persians in a neighborhood of predominately Sunni Arabs. Given the demographic odds in the region, the Iranians have always been mindful to assert their perceived leadership role amongst

the Shi'a community. These circumstances contribute to the inflated role of the religious leadership in Iran, specifically Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.\(^\text{50}\) Above all else, the combination of religious and political power leaves Khamenei as the paramount power center among several within Iranian politics. In the context of international negotiations, the Iranians should be expected to conduct themselves in the spirit of the defenders of Shi’a Islam.

The Iranians are also keenly aware of their own security dilemma. As Mokhtari has stated, “Iran's security dilemma is tainted by a historical perception of repeated let downs and betrayals.”\(^\text{51}\) Nearly every one of Iran's neighbors sits on a land that constituted Iranian territory at one time. In an already tense region with several nuclear powers in the neighborhood, the Iranians take any threats to their national security very seriously. Added to this fear is the presence of US forces in the region, which nearly surround Iran. The Iranians have to take into consideration the bellicose posture of American forces, plus the regular saber-rattling by Israel, the primary US ally in the region. All of these factors put together pose a direct threat to Iranian national security and regime survival. That is why the Iranians have responded defensively to any threats to their national security. Many times, the Iranian leadership has responded to threats from abroad with threats of their own. This type of response can and should be expected from the Iranian leadership regardless of who is in charge.

When the time comes to engage Iran or any other state in negotiations during times of international crisis, the opposing powers need to develop a strategy that will both

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cater to the interests of that state as well as provide for an outcome that the West will find suitable as well. As mentioned above, the real challenge will be in calibrating a strategy that addresses the concerns of both the state in question and the opposing powers engaged in the negotiations.

Out of a vast number of strategies and variants thereof that can be pursued, there are two in particular that will be examined. The first strategy is a regional multilateral approach that engages the state in question in a cooperative and constructive manner. This strategy involves not only the states directly involved in the crisis, but also the broader international community and especially the states in the region that have the most to win or lose depending on the outcome of the crisis. The second strategy emphasizes a more confrontational approach, where the state is viewed fundamentally as an adversary. This strategy utilizes threats and coercion in order to make that state conform to international demands.

These two strategies will be studied because they highlight the contrast in options that are typically available to policymakers in a crisis negotiation. In a very short period of time policymakers have to decide whether to engage or whether to confront. From that point, the more nuanced particulars of the strategy evolve, but the broadest approaches available to policymakers will be diplomatic engagement or confrontation.

**Hypothesis 1:** A strategy focusing on engagement that utilizes regional multilateralism will most likely lead to a resolution of the security crisis.
A regional multilateralist strategy provides a number of advantages which increase the likelihood for a successful resolution to a Persian Gulf security crisis involving both Iran and outside powers. When states in the region as well as the broader international community are engaged in the negotiations, the added structure and participation will provide the incentive and motivation to keep the negotiations from stalling. Plus, with more interested parties involved, this style of engagement will better ensure that the needs of both parties involved in the crisis will be met.

In practice, this strategy will significant much activity not only among the direct participants in the standoff. Regional states and international organizations will also have a prevalent role as well. There will be several channels for communication in the context of this format of negotiations. While Iran and the West will carry on many of the negotiations directly, the other parties involved will also share a heavy burden when it comes to facilitating these discussions and moving them along during any times when the talks get bogged down. As far as regional states taking a prominent role in any negotiations, Turkey\(^{52}\) and possibly Egypt depending on political stability are best positioned to work as trusted mediators for the conflicting parties. Saudi Arabia is another possible candidate, but given the Sunni-Shiite tensions in the region, the Saudis might not be well suited as a mediator. It is also worth considering Russia\(^{53}\) and Japan\(^{54}\) as potential candidates.

International organizations can also contribute to the negotiations. Whether regional organizations such as the Gulf Cooperation Council, or major international

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\(^{52}\) International Crisis Group, *In Heavy Waters*. 2012.


organizations such as the United Nations, they will all have a role to play. Functionally, these organizations will serve in a similar fashion to states in the region that are involved in the negotiations. That is, they will largely fulfill the role of mediators and facilitators in the crisis. These organizations also have the advantage of providing a formal international setting to conduct the negotiations.

With regional states and international organizations involved, both the West and Iran will be provided with a forum that will enable them to address each of their respective grievances. During any times of contention over a particular issue, the states and organizations involved will keep the discourse between the two parties at a manageable level as well as prevent the negotiations from becoming stalled. As long as regional states and organizations are involved, it will be in their interest as well to see a favorable outcome to the crisis.

The advantage of this strategy is that it responds to and even anticipates many of the concerns of the Iranians. As discussed above, there are a number of vital concerns for the Iranian regime, and infringing too much on any one of them could upset the balance and negatively affect any ongoing crisis negotiations. These core concerns of mistrust, respect, religion, and security are all addressed in some form by engaging the Iranians in a regional multilateralist framework.

The participation of regional intermediaries will help alleviate the mistrust that Iran has towards the West. These states may be viewed as peers by Iran which will increase the effectiveness of communication as the relevant issues are addressed. Although an element of mistrust will exist between Shiite Iran and its predominately
Sunni neighbors, the Iranians have been known to be consistently pragmatic in terms of their foreign policy.\textsuperscript{55} So if an acceptable deal can be reached, it is by no means impossible. Furthermore, these regional states and organizations will help legitimate Iranian concerns among the wider international community, which will increase Iran's sense of self-worth and respect among nations. Additionally, all the states in the region are also Muslim, which helps when negotiating with Iran. Due to their religious similarities, they will be able to develop a kinship with Iran better than any outside powers. Iran's neighbors will also be more sensitive to Iranian cultural sensitivities, something that the West may have little to no comprehension of. The final issue of Iranian security is another issue that regional states will understand better than the West. Since these states live in the same region as Iran, it is as much their incentive to keep the region at peace as it is for outside powers. If the crisis erupts into full-blown military conflict, the entire Middle East will feel its effects. This reality gives states in the region the added motivation to ensure that the crisis is resolved peacefully, as they will bear the brunt of any military conflict.

**Hypothesis 2:** Relying on a strategy of confrontation including coercion and military threats decreases the likelihood of resolving an international security crisis.

The second strategy for crisis negotiations relies primarily on coercion and military threats. While more confrontational in tone, this strategy assumes that the

regime in Iran is not cooperative in nature, and the only way to convince them to come to
terms with the international community is to threaten the regime with force. Only when
the regime doubts it's own survival will it decide to resolve the crisis in a manner that is
acceptable to the West.

If this strategy is employed specifically towards Iran, diplomacy will still be
intense and active between the West and Iran, but this will largely be overshadowed by
the repeated threats over the use of force. The public's attention, as well as Iran's
reaction, will be focused almost exclusively on the latest public pronouncements coming
from the West. If a confrontational approach ends up being the West's chosen strategy, a
significant amount of attention will be paid to defense issues, as all the forces would have
to be in place in the event they are actually needed. This means the US as well as it's
allies would spend a lot of time deploying various military and naval forces into the
region.

Economic sanctions may be employed as part of this confrontational strategy.
Short of military force, sanctions will serve as a measure meant to inflict pain on the
Iranians, hopefully to the point where they change their minds. Sanctions will be used as
a measure to change Iranian behavior as a last measure before military force is employed.

As Iran sees enemy forces being deployed near its borders, they will start to
respond in kind. The Iranians will most likely engage in war games of varying size and
duration, with the intent of sending the West a pointed message that there are real
consequences for any actions. Quite simply, for every Western action there will be an
Iranian reaction. And since this action/reaction nexus would revolve primarily around
military threats, the two parties would devote lesser attention to alternative means of resolving the dispute. In fact, this cascading rhetoric will only increase tensions and make a peaceful solution to the problem even more unlikely.

Diplomacy will still be utilized in this strategy, though it will only be used as part of a carrot and stick approach to coerce the Iranians to heed to international demands. The major rationale for engaging in diplomacy would be to convince the Iranians that the military threats are not mere bluster and are in fact very serious. Especially in light of the run up to the Iraq War in 2002-3, the Iranians would not see any overtures for a resolution to the crisis as serious while they are being simultaneously threatened with regime change. There will just be too many historical parallels, accurate or not. Besides as a venue to issue threats against the Iranian regime, international diplomacy will only be used to muster world opinion against Iran and assemble a coalition of states that are prepared to act in the even that negotiations completely break down.

This confrontational strategy responds to the four core concerns of the Iranians as does the other strategy. However, this strategy is far less interested in catering to Iranian needs and concerns and more interested in dictating terms of agreement to Iran in a one-way style of communication. As far as the first core concern of mistrust is concerned, this strategy will only reinforce it. Leaving open the possibility of military strikes will inevitably increase the mistrust between Iran and the West. Threatening military strikes will also make it clear to the Iranians that there is virtually no level of respect that the West has for Iranian interests. The religious element will also be in jeopardy with a confrontational approach. Iran will, consciously or not, frame the debate in terms of an
attack on Islam by the West. The final core concern of Iranian security will also be diminished if this strategy is employed. While the Western rationale for this strategy is to get the Iranian to comply with their demands by threatening their national security, the Iranians are most likely to go on the defensive. Directly threatening Iranian security will leave the Iranians with no doubt that the West is not interested in open and constructive negotiations to solve the crisis. With all these factors taken together, it is questionable how effective a confrontational strategy may be in dealing with Iran.
CHAPTER 4 - RESEARCH DESIGN

This paper presents a theory with two hypotheses. The theory and hypotheses are qualitative in nature, so the analysis of their respective effectiveness in regards to the central research question will be conducted empirically. The theory lays out four criteria that are vital for conducting any crisis negotiations, as well as hypotheses that state the likely effectiveness/ineffectiveness of two general strategies that states can pursue in dealing with a state during these negotiations.

In order to test the relative effectiveness of both of these approaches, this paper will conduct a structured, focused comparison evaluating how effective each of these strategies address the four core concerns that were initially laid out in the theory. It will measure effectiveness by developing a ratings scale that will be applied consistently across all criteria and all case studies analyzed. Once the case studies are conducted this paper will be able to evaluate the comparative advantages and disadvantages of the two studied approaches as objectively as possible.

In light of the conclusions determined by this analysis, this paper will provide a number of contemporary policy insights that can be applied to the current nuclear crisis involving Iran, as well as a number of other ongoing crises. With these insights, this paper will prove to be as relevant academically as it will be for policy. As states will always be involved in any number of international crises at any given time, the insights gleaned from this paper will continue to be relevant as well as timely.

Methodology

The structured, focused comparison that will be used in this paper will allow for a
pointed analysis of the two types of strategies in crisis negotiations involving Iran. This method will pay particular attention to evidence in the case studies of both multilateral approaches as well as more confrontational approaches. This method will also study historical experiences from the past in ways that will yield useful generic knowledge of this important type of foreign policy problem.\textsuperscript{56}

When examples of each strategy are found within the individual case studies, the resulting evidence from that approach will be evaluated and rated on a scale to determine it's relative effectiveness. Effectiveness for the purpose of this scale will be defined as a strategy that advances the state of a crisis towards an acceptable resolution. Ineffectiveness will be defined as just the opposite. Each strategy will be evaluated according to this scale:

- **Effective** – Evidence will be considered effective when the strategy improves the progress of the negotiations.
- **Neutral** – Evidence will be considered neutral if and when the strategy employed has no discernible effect on the progress of the negotiations.
- **Ineffective** – Evidence will be considered ineffective when the strategy inhibits the progress of the negotiations.

All the empirical evidence will be rated according to how effectively the strategy addresses the four core concerns of the Iranians that have been identified. That is, for each hypothesis, the strategies employed will be rated according to how they address the

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{56} Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, \textit{Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences}, p. 67.}
core concerns of mistrust, respect, religion, and territorial integrity. The emphasis of these ratings will be on results. That is, effectiveness will be determined based on how Iran responds to the initiatives. Taking these measurements will give the reader a reasonably informed perspective on how the strategies performed across the historical cases.

The four core concerns of mistrust, respect, religion, and security are regarded to have equal importance to the Iranians. In evaluating how the strategies address these four concerns, the criterion will be treated as equal and the evidence will be analyzed in that context. This decision has been made because these themes are consistent concerns for many states in the world, and this is especially so with Iran, given the history and present security dilemma it now faces. While the importance of any one criteria in particular may fluctuate over time depending on the circumstances of the day, broadly speaking each of these concerns are held in nearly equal regard among the Iranians.

The structured, focused comparison and the operationalization of the variables is the appropriate methodology for this study. Given the qualitative and subjective nature of this study, a structured, focused comparison that evaluates all the evidence on an even handed scale brings an element of objectivity to the analysis. Applying the same metric across all the case studies will be the most effective way to control for subjectivity and bias in the analysis.

Being a policy focused paper, conducting a structured, focused comparison will allow for the analysis of case studies with policy relevancy specifically in mind. All the evidence collected and analyzed will be the results of policies themselves. There will
also be a clear relationship between policy initiation from outside powers and policy result as the Iranians respond to it. This will be the basis for the final evaluation in terms of how these strategies fared in practice.

**Case Studies**

To conduct this analysis, this paper will use three case studies involving both Iran and outside powers in crisis negotiations. The case studies that will be examined are the 1979 hostage crisis at the US Embassy in Tehran, the 1987-88 Tanker Wars involving both Iran and the US, and finally the 2007 British Naval hostage crisis.

These cases are optimal for this study because all three of these crises involve both elements of multilateral engagement as well as confrontation with the prospect of military strikes. With elements of both strategies existing within each case study, this paper will be able to weigh the relative effectiveness of each strategy compared to the other within one historical example. Conducting multiple case studies will allow the reader to see any consistency, or lack thereof, in each of the strategies over time.
CHAPTER 5 - CASE STUDIES

1979 EMBASSY HOSTAGE CRISIS

The taking of US diplomats at the American embassy in Tehran by student radicals presented the Carter Administration with an international crisis that demanded a strategy that would release the hostages unharmed. The release of the hostages quickly became the primary concern of President Carter. In order to accomplish this goal, policymakers were forced to decide on a strategy that would appeal to Iranian concerns while obtaining the release of the hostages. A number of options were immediately available to them. They had the choice of multilateral and regional engagement, where they utilized many different avenues simultaneously in order to convince the Iranians that releasing the hostages were in their best interests. They also had the option of a more confrontational approach. The most confrontational options, a military operation, would forcefully release the hostages, but at a considerable risk of doing them harm.

Immediately following the taking of the hostages at the Embassy, members of a crisis team in both the White House and the State Department decided to focus their efforts on a two-track strategy to deal with the Iranians. On one track would be all those efforts designed to maximize communication with Iran about conditions and arrangements for release of hostages and even to open the door to negotiation. On the second track would be efforts to increase the cost to Iran of holding the hostages. This track took into consideration the possibility of economic sanctions and even military action in the events that negotiations completely broke down.

57 Saunders, American Hostages in Iran, p. 73.
58 Ibid.
Broadly speaking, this was the overall strategy pursued by the Carter Administration during the hostage crisis. As events unfolded, and as the relative merits of one particular policy became more apparent, the strategy became more nuanced to fit the realities of the day. When one policy was proving to bear fruit, the administration focused more of their attention towards that end, and when another policy wasn't so effective, those efforts were quickly adjusted.

**Timeline of Significant Events**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November 4, 1979</td>
<td>Iranian students capture the US Embassy in Tehran and take 66 Americans hostage</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 5, 1979</td>
<td>The US rejects Iranian demand to turn over Shah</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 14, 1979</td>
<td>The US freezes all official Iranian assets in American banks.</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 19-20, 1979</td>
<td>First of three hostages released – two black Marines and a white woman hostages, followed by 10 more hostages the following day. Initial hostage release result of Yasir Arafat's mediation with Iran.</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 27, 1979</td>
<td>The UN Security Council meets for the first time to discuss the situation in Iran.</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 21, 1979</td>
<td>President Carter says the US will ask the UN Security Council to impose economic sanctions on Iran.</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 7, 1980</td>
<td>After Khomeini rules the hostages must remain in the hands of the militants, the US formally breaks diplomatic relations with Iran.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 18, 1980</td>
<td>Carter orders new economic sanctions, and threatens military action.</td>
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April 25, 1980 – Operation Eagle Claw launched, the attempt to free the hostages, Operation goes badly, and is aborted after helicopter crashes in the desert.

April 26, 1980 – Iran announces the hostages will be dispersed to prevent any future rescue attempts.

August 10, 1980 – The US announces it is considering new diplomatic initiatives for the release of the hostages.

September 12, 1980 – Khomeini lists four conditions for the hostages' release.

October 20, 1980 – President Carter says he will lift US sanctions against Iran if hostages are freed.

November 10, 1980 – The first American party arrives in Algiers to work on and deliver the American response to Iran's four conditions.


January 6, 1981 – Khomeini gives approval to Algerian assistance in effort to free hostages.

January 16, 1981 – Terms of a final agreement with Iran are drafted by the United States.

January 20, 1981 – Hostages are released twenty minutes after Ronald Reagan is sworn in as President of the United States.

**Multilateral Engagement**

Multilateral engagement in the hostage crisis consisted largely of the United States using third party contacts to communicate with the Iranians. These contacts came from a number of sources from private citizens to third party governments with whom the
US deemed could be trusted. As Gary Sick has observed, “One of the key objectives was to encourage intermediaries with special credentials to approach Khomeini and those closest to him to persuade them to release the hostages.” However, finding initial contacts that are both well placed and trustworthy can be a tedious task, as the US found out in their initial efforts.

The initial plan of sending Ramsey Clark, a former Attorney General during the Johnson Administration, fell through after the Iranians wouldn't let him enter the country. The US additionally sought out the services of Habib Chatty, a veteran Tunisian diplomat who had once been his county's ambassador to Iran. He had also been recently elected secretary-general of the Islamic Conference. This fact gave his a second strong connection to the Iranians, who were members of the Conference. Chatty did soon send a message to the Iranians offering his good offices in negotiating with the United States, but his overtures were soon rebuffed, as the Iranians insisted that the hostages had to be viewed in the context of the long relationship between the United States and Iran. The Iranians just did not find it possible to negotiate on singular issues, especially when it involved the long mistrusted Americans. Indeed, very early on in the crisis US policymakers found it very difficult to initiate any sort of contacts with the Iranians. The Swiss offered their services as good faith intermediaries, and even decided not to apply sanctions on Iran as other countries had done in order to remain in good standing with the Iranians.

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59 Gary Sick, *All Fall Down*, p. 224.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
63 Sick, p. 240.
64 Salinger, p 49.
An even more unlikely intermediary in behalf of the United States turned out to be the head of the Palestine Liberation Organization, Yasir Arafat. While his motives were suspect and attributed to his desire to court American opinion towards his cause, his superior connections with the new revolutionary government in Iran couldn't be discounted. It was not possible for the Americans to contact Arafat directly, so that duty was left to Bruno Kreisky, Austria's Chancellor, and a Lebanese newspaperman thought to have close links to the US Embassy in Beirut.65 Arafat responded positively to the requests, and began working with his PLO representative in Tehran. Initially rebuffed by the Iranians, Arafat persisted and flew to Tehran himself, where reluctantly he was given an audience with the Ayatollah. Somehow, he got his message through to the Ayatollah, most likely through Sadegh Ghotbzadeh. A few days later his efforts were rewarded, and on November 19 the Iranians freed a female embassy employee and two black Marines from the embassy.66

Minor initial successes aside, the negotiations soon reached stalemate by the end of 1979. Initiatives at the United Nations were made, including Resolution 457 which condemned the hostage taking and Resolution 461 which began the process of formalizing economic sanctions in the event that hostages weren't released.67 While galvanizing international opinion, at least formally, these initiatives at the UN had little practical influence in the actual negotiations.

In addition to these overtures with the UN, Washington also made initiatives with

65 Ibid., p. 51.
66 Ibid., p. 52.
allies, especially those in Europe. The Carter administration decided that their objective would be to hurt Khomeini economically, and that could only be effective if America's European allies were prepared to cooperate. At a NATO Foreign Ministers meeting, Secretary Vance took the opportunity to seek European support for UN sanctions. While some allies showed initial reluctance due to business ties with Iran, they plus Japan pledged to support US efforts to get Security Council approval of international sanctions against Iran. The allies also agreed to a set of voluntary interim steps that were technical in nature but helped to restrict Iran's access to credits and blocked an attempted Iranian attack on the dollar by attempting to shift oil payments to other currencies.

During these initiatives at the UN, the United States kept up its efforts at communicating directly with revolutionary figures in Tehran. By the month of December, Washington maintained contact with more than twenty different individuals and organizations, each of which had some degree of proven access and credibility with those in and around the Revolutionary Council. It was also clear that many officials in the Revolutionary Council were anxious to end the crisis and were engaged in efforts to seek a solution.

By the beginning of the new year, it was clear to the Carter Administration that a shift in approach was necessary to engage Iran. While initial efforts thus far had yielded minor tactical victories, overall the crisis had reached a stalemate. In the very first days of January 1980, Secretary Vance, Under Secretary Newsom, Harold Saunders and several of his colleagues spent several hours with a senior Islamic statesman who had

68 Sick, p. 240.
69 Ibid., p. 242
70 Ibid, p. 240.
come secretly to Washington.\textsuperscript{71} This unidentified statesman stated that, “The way out is some kind of deal worked out by a third party.”\textsuperscript{72} Khomeini viewed the United States as a kind of ‘global Shah’ – a personification of evil. Therefore, diplomatic arguments won't persuade him, and neither would sanctions. What was needed was an intermediary, someone who could talk to both the United States and with Khomeini. While the various interlocutors tried so far had only had limited success, the statesman argued that, “The matter at this stage should be taken up by a third party – one who recognizes both Iranian grievances and the mistake of holding the hostages.”\textsuperscript{73}

In the search for a suitable mediator for the crisis, some contenders that were considered for the role were the Syrians, the PLO, or maybe a group including some of them with other Muslims like a Nigerian or a Pakistani.\textsuperscript{74} However, the final choice was Algeria, because if any nation would seem congenial to the Iranians, that would be the Algerians. To begin with, Algeria was an Islamic country. It was also a revolutionary country as well, having won its independence from France in 1961. Plus, Algeria had been among the first countries to acknowledge the new government of Iran by sending an ambassador to Tehran. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the Algerians had been representing the interests of Iran in the United States since the preceding April, when formal relations between the United States and Iran were severed.\textsuperscript{75} At this point in the negotiations, Algeria became front and center in the resolution of the crisis.

Once the Algerians became officially involved in the negotiations, they made it

\textsuperscript{71} Christopher et al, \textit{American Hostages in Iran}, p. 102.  
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., p. 103.  
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{75} Salinger, p. 277.
clear that they viewed their role strictly as that of intermediary. Shortly thereafter, a small group of officials from State and Treasury arrived in Algiers for the first formal discussion of the US response to the Iranian proposal of November 4, 1980 which proposed to terminate the crisis.\textsuperscript{76} The Algerians worked with the American delegation and assumed the role of Devil's Advocate with the US position paper. They would politely but firmly identify every issue they thought might be challenged by the Iranians, and would even offer suggestions in wording changes in order to cater to Iranian concerns.\textsuperscript{77}

This type of communication between the US and Iran developed into a sort of routine. The Algerians would hold discussions in both Algiers and in Washington, typically with a Tehran visit in between. Over the next several weeks, the Algerians had managed to narrow the issues and draw the two antagonists closer to an understanding.\textsuperscript{78} By this time it was a matter of declarations and counter declarations by both sides, with the Algerians in the middle mediating the demands of the two sides. This format was where progress came to be made and the eventual resolution founded.

After a few successive rounds of this process the final hurdle came down to finances. The issue had to do with Iranian assets of $9.6 billion held in an account with the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. To release the funds, they would have to be sent to a neutral banking institution as an escrow agent.\textsuperscript{79} If the hostages were released, the agent would transfer the funds to Iran, but if the Iranian side failed to release the hostages within a given period the funds would be returned to US custody. Working in close

\textsuperscript{76} Sick, p. 319-320.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{78} Christopher et al, p. 308.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., p. 316.
coordination, the Central Bank of Algeria and the Bank of England devised a mechanism where once the hostage release was verified by the Algerians, the Algerian central bank would instruct the escrow agent to release the funds to Iran. Once the details of the transaction were agreed to, the hostages were released, and so were the funds.

Initial Analysis

Taking into consideration all the evidence from the engagement strategies, the final analysis for this strategy in terms of how it responds to core Iranian concerns:

- mistrust – effective
- religion – effective
- respect – effective
- security – neutral

The engagement strategy that the US pursued with Iran yielded a number of success, though progress was slow and seemed to be non-forthcoming through the majority of the negotiations. On the one hand, the use of private intermediaries was useful when there was a lack of any other available options. The difficulty with using intermediaries came with finding someone who actually had access to high level Iranian government officials. With the internal power structure in Iran being so complex and confusing, it was an exceedingly difficult task finding anyone who could legitimately speak on behalf of the Iranian government. This fact led to most of these types outreaches to end without any substantial results. The notable exception, of course, was Yasir Arafat's visit to Tehran which led to the release of the first round of hostages.

80 Ibid., p. 317.
The US also engaged regional organizations such as the UN and its NATO allies. The UN managed to pass successive resolutions in the Security Council, but the tangible results of this international action was negligible. While the public outcry from the international community helped Washington's case in the court of public opinion, the effects of the negotiations themselves were minimal. The White House's NATO partners agreed to lend their official support to Washington during the crisis, but again, tangible results of this action were negligible.

Unquestionably the use of Algeria as mediator proved to be the pivotal step in finding a resolution to the hostage crisis. The Algerians provided the mediation that was able to bridge the high level of mistrust between the US and Iran. A state that was respected and trusted by both sides, Algeria was able to work with both the US and Iran as equal partners and get the two sides to agree to a solution that would end the crisis. Without the Algerians playing such a central role at the very end of the negotiations, the crisis may not have ended in nearly as amicable a fashion as it did.

Confrontational approaches

All the while the Carter Administration was engaged in the diplomatic front with the Iranians, preparations were also being made for more confrontational approaches that could be utilized in the event of a complete breakdown in negotiations. Almost immediately after the hostages were taken in Iran, a military response was actively considered. On November 6, the second day of the crisis, the Joint Chiefs of Staff presented to the Special Coordinating Committee of the National Security Council the general outlines of three potential courses of military action. These were: first, a possible
rescue mission to extract the imprisoned Americans from the besieged embassy; second, a possible retaliatory strike that would cripple Iran's economy; and third, considerations of how the United States might be required to respond if Iran should disintegrate.\(^8\)

Although military options were examined in the first days of the crisis, they were deferred in favor of diplomacy. As the first efforts at negotiations through the United Nations failed to produce much in the way of tangible results, interest in military planning revived.\(^8\)

Nonetheless, even though military options were not the favored option among policymakers in the Carter Administration, they had to make it clear to the Iranians that launching an attack wasn't out of the question if circumstances warranted. Following the release of the hostages after the intervention by the PLO, the White House on November 20 released a statement suggesting the possibility of US military action should Iran put the hostages on trial.\(^8\) This message was a direct response to the recent belligerent rhetoric from the student militants and from the Ayatollah, threatening that the remaining Americans would be tried as spies and executed if the United States failed to return the exiled Shah to Iran. To reinforce the seriousness of the message, the USS Kitty Hawk and its supporting battle group from the Pacific were dispatched to the Arabian Sea.\(^8\)

Getting this message directly to the Ayatollah proved difficult, as only indirect channels of communication were available to the United States to send a private message to Iran's leaders. This was in part due to the chaotic nature of the power structure within Iran. As a result, it was nearly impossible to confirm that the formal US message was

81 Ibid., p. 145.
82 Sick, p. 281-282.
83 Christopher et al, p. 147.
84 Ibid.
ever conveyed to Khomeini personally. However, there is no doubt that the message was received at a very high level in Iran and that it was understood.\textsuperscript{85}

Although no Iranian official ever referred to the message, in subsequent speeches Khomeini continued to denounce the US; however, he ceased his threats to execute the hostages. Instead, he focused on the Iranian nation's willingness to suffer martyrdom in the event of an American attack, now only warning that a US military attack would result in the deaths of the hostages. This turned out to be an important shift and marked a turning point in Iranian rhetoric. Though it is difficult to know with any degree of certainty whether a genuine change of policy had occurred, after the military threat was delivered there was a notable absence of threats against the lives of the hostages that had been all too common before then.\textsuperscript{86}

Of course, when the negotiations reached a point where efforts appeared fruitless, a rescue mission to free the hostages was taken with disastrous results. By April 1980, President Carter had come to the conclusion that, given all that had taken place up to that time, there was no other choice than the military option.\textsuperscript{87} The military had even come around to the idea at this point. They now knew exactly where the hostages were being held, a fact they didn't know at the beginning of the crisis. The military options ranged from a naval blockade to all-out war, but a rescue effort seemed the only option that had a chance of resolving the problem.\textsuperscript{88}

Over the following weeks the exact details of the plan were finalized. Despite the low level of confidence in mission success, the operation was launched on April 24.

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., p. 148.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., p. 148-149.
\textsuperscript{87} Salinger, p. 234.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., p. 235.
Once the operation was underway, a dust storm plus mechanical issues forced the mission to be aborted. A C-130 and a helicopter had crashed in the incident, leading to casualties. The failure of this mission effectively put an end to any future military options.

The Iranians responded to this forceful attempt to rescue the hostages in several ways. Forty-eight hours after the raid, the student militants dispersed the hostages to numerous hiding places in and outside the city, making future rescue attempts nearly impossible.89 Dozens of messages were exchanged through intermediaries, with the Americans wanting the Iranians to know that the decision had been taken because they had felt there was no other possible solution to the crisis. The Iranians replied by stating that they wanted the Americans to understand that they had made a monumental mistake, proving that they understood nothing at all about Iran.90 Stern warning aside, the Iranian response was most notable for the relative softness in which it was delivered. The Iranians indicated that no revenge would be taken against the hostages, and it was time to start again.

**Initial Analysis**

The confrontational approaches had their own results. According to the same scale, this strategy has been rated as thus:

- mistrust – ineffective
- religion – neutral
- respect – ineffective
- security – ineffective

89 Ibid., p. 239.
90 Ibid., p. 240.
In conjunction with the diplomatic engagement, there was always the steady drumbeat of military operations looming in the background. This strategy started out with threats and with the private message sent directly to the Iranians, and it culminated with the botched rescue operation.

First there was the private message sent to the Iranians. This communication sent a clear message to the Iranians that the military option was in fact not out of the realm of possibility, and would seriously be considered if the situation warranted. This strategy actually met with limited success. After the message was sent there was a noticeable change in tone in Iranian rhetoric. Whereas before the message was sent Iranian officials' speeches were filled with belligerent rhetoric, after these very same speeches were much more conciliatory. Kinder words aside, a change in the tone of official speeches wasn't a substantial success and didn't contribute very much overall to the resolution of the crisis.

The actual rescue operation launched in April 1980 had a decidedly negative effect on the negotiations. The most tangible result of this failed operation was that the student radicals who were holding the hostages decided to disperse them to multiple locations in and around Tehran. This act assured that there would be no more military options in the future. Furthermore, it also had a limiting result on US strategy. Since military operations were no longer a feasible option, from there on out the US had no choice but to negotiate and persuade it's way out of the crisis. Judging by the responses to this strategy, it is clear that the threat of military strikes was more effective on the Iranians than any strikes themselves.

**Final Comparative Analysis**
Both of the strategies employed in this crisis yielded varying results in terms of how effective it was in contributing to its resolution. Each strategy yielded responses from the Iranians that overall led to the ending of the crisis. Though more or less both strategies had the intended results, some had more of a desired effect than others in getting the Iranians to come to terms.

On the engagement front, the Carter Administration made numerous and varied types of efforts to help mitigate the crisis with the Iranians. Among the methods attempted were intermediaries, appealing to international organizations, cooperating with allies, and finally utilizing Algeria as a regional third party to bring the crisis to its final conclusion. In terms of direct confrontation, efforts were focused mostly on direct military threats, ultimately culminating in the botched rescue attempt. There was a noticeable Iranian response to these efforts as well, as would be expected when a state's security is at stake.

Based on the outcomes and evidence as rated according to this paper's scale, the first strategy of engagement was more effective in convincing the Iranians to come to terms with a resolution. While progress was slow and at many times frustrating, persistent engagement ultimately paid off. It was the threats of confrontation that played only a peripheral role in resolving the crisis.
US involvement in the Tanker Wars crisis of 1987-1988 came in the midst of the Iran-Iraq War that had been ongoing since hostilities broke out in 1980. In the early years of the conflict, the United States preferred to stay on the sidelines and not become too closely involved with either of the belligerents, though the US had a decided preference towards Iraq. Only when American and international interests became directly at stake, when the free flow of energy exiting the Persian Gulf was threatened, did the White House increase its' involvement in the crisis.

Prior to US involvement, the Iran-Iraq War had been an ongoing struggle with no clear end in sight. The war to that point has been divided into four major phases: the Iraqi invasion from September to November 1980, Stalemate from November 1980 to September 1981, the Iranian initiative from September 1981 to May 1982, and the Iranian offensive in Iraq from May 1982 on. The early phases of the conflict were almost exclusively on land, but by early 1984 the Persian Gulf became a central arena in the conflict, putting the interests of many outside states directly at risk for the first time.

In March of 1984, Iraq made the first attack on international shipping. Using their French-built Super Etanards aircraft, the Iraqis launched an attack on a Greek tanker transiting the Gulf. Iran responded to this action by conducting an air raid on Saudi Arabia's major oil installation at Ras Tanura in early June. Tipped off by the imminent attack by newly acquired AWACs, the Saudi Air Force intercepted the attack and one, possibly two Iranian fighters were shot down.

92 Stephen C. Pelletiere, *The Iran-Iraq War: Chaos in a Vacuum*, p. 84.
93 Ibid.
Over a year later, in September 1985, the Iraqis resumed their attacks on Kharg Island, an island off the coast of Iran with numerous loading facilities and a large port terminal used by many international shipping companies. The attack was a stunning success, causing substantial damage to the facilities, a fact that was celebrated widely on Iraqi television stations that night. The attacks itself also had harsh consequences internationally. Almost immediately Lloyds of London posted a sharp rise in insurance rates for tankers calling at the terminal. Even worse for Iran was the loss of Japanese ship traffic after the Japanese seamen's union complained that it was no longer safe.

The shipping war continued to accelerate in the Gulf over the next couple of years. Through the intervening years, Iraq continued to pound at Iran's shuttle tankers and oil facilities. Though initially on the defensive in the Tanker War, Iran began to demonstrate its ability to conduct an oil war of its own. Iranian ships began firing missiles much more aggressively at the cargo ships and tankers in the Gulf, often at night. In early 1987 alone, there were confirmed missile strikes on the World Dawn on January 8, the Atlantic Dignity on January 12, the Saudiah on January 14, the Isomeri on January 23, and the Ambia Fortuna on February 4, and the Sea Empress and Wu Jiang later that month. Although none of these ships were sunk or seriously damaged, insurance rates continued to rise, and 16 ships had been damaged by early February – raising the total hit since the war began to 284.

This increasing level of attacks on shipping steadily pushed the international community into action in order to preserve their own economies. Though until this point

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94 Ibid., p. 85.
95 Ibid., p. 85-86.
97 Ibid., p. 132-133.
the Reagan Administration had preferred to stay on the sidelines of the conflict, by 1987 the situation in the Gulf had become so dire that more direct American involvement was deemed necessary and actually requested by the Kuwaitis through the UN Security Council. This involvement culminated in Operation Earnest Will, where the United States Navy provided military protection to Kuwaiti tankers and other cargo ships from Iranian attack. As this operation ran its course, there were a number of military engagements between the US and Iran, with both sides targeting each others ships and oil platforms. With the US and Iran engaged in hostilities, these two countries entered into a major international security crisis for the second time in a decade.

**Timeline of Significant Events**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September 1986</td>
<td>Kuwait approaches both US and USSR seeking protection of their ships.</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 20, 1987</td>
<td>Iranian ships start firing Sea Killer missiles at ships bound for Kuwait.</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 1987</td>
<td>Soviets notify Kuwait they will be unable to assist, US declares willingness to reflag vessels.</td>
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<tr>
<td>March-April 1987</td>
<td>Continued attacks in the Gulf, with both Iraq and Iran attacking shipping.</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 7, 1987</td>
<td>US begins escorting Kuwaiti vessels that fly American flag.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 17, 1987</td>
<td>USS Stark struck by two Iraqi Exocet anti-ship missiles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1987</td>
<td>Iranian attacks on neutral shipping continue. GCC issues first</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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99 Cordesman, p. 134.
condemnation of Iranian actions.


April 14, 1988 – USS Samuel B. Roberts badly damaged by Iranian mine.

April 18, 1988 – US responds with Operation Praying Mantis which leads to direct attacks on Iranian targets in the Gulf.

July 3, 1988 – US Vincennes accidentally shoots down Iranian civilian airliner during operations in the Gulf. All 290 passengers and crew killed.

August 20, 1988 – UN Security Council Resolution 598 accepted by both Iran and Iraq, ending the conflict in a ceasefire.

**Multilateral Engagement**

Once the United States became directly involved in the conflict at the request of the Kuwaitis, there were a number of engagements on the diplomatic front in order to resolve the crisis and ensure the uninhibited transit of international commerce through the Persian Gulf. These actions all occurred during the ongoing Operation Earnest Will that was being conducted by the military.

With one of the two superpowers now involved in the conflict, the issue of the reflagging of Kuwaiti ships became an issue of debate for states in the region as well as major international allies. Indeed, the resolution of this crisis might not be possible without broad international support for the policy, as Iran would view it as a direct attack on their sovereignty. The reaction of the states of the GCC were initially ambivalent, especially for UAE, Oman, and Qatar. These states had maintained much closer links to
Iran than the others, so to potentially turn their back on Iran during a major crisis was a dubious proposition at first. Gradually, regional support for this new policy grew, and by June 1987 the GCC issued a communique expressing support for the steps Kuwait had taken to preserve its commercial and economic interests. The initial concerns of these states was that Kuwait had effectively issued an open-ended invitation to the superpowers to increase their influence in the Gulf. However, it was decided that a sudden US withdrawal from the region would be even more destabilizing, so the GCC states decided to support the plan. Even in their decision to confront the Khomeini regime, by seeking the protective shields of superpowers, the GCC countries sustained their quest for a negotiated solution to this war by enticing Iran with offers of economic reconstruction. Moreover, even in inviting the US Navy in the Gulf, the GCC states preferred that this presence remain 'over-the-horizon'.

The reaction of US European Allies as well as Japan was initially mixed similar to the reaction of the GCC states. At first the European allies gave little support to the United States, with even Margaret Thatcher expressing reservations about the reflagging. However, a major change in European policy was caused by the discovery of mines outside the Strait of Hormuz. Widely assumed to be the work of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, these discoveries caused a major reversal in European policy. The UK was quick to reverse policy, followed over the next six weeks by similar reversals from France, Italy, the Netherlands, and Belgium. Altogether, these states sent over 25

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100Rajaee, p. 136-137.
102Ibid., p. 137.
warships to the Gulf for escort and mine suppression duty. Japan was also quick to act. Although they did not send ships to the region as other allies had, it contributed in other ways. For example, Japan offered to finance a $10 million navigational system that would have assisted the US Navy in locating mines. They also donated another $10 million towards UN efforts to end the war.

With the international community now involved in the conflict between Iran and Iraq, the central goal of these efforts was to bring an end to the conflict and make the Persian Gulf safe for international commerce once again. As the mission progressed, international consensus coalesced around the goal of resolving this crisis, and this involved bringing Iraq and especially Iran to terms with an agreement. To see this goal realized, more and more states and international organizations became active participants in the crisis in order to see it resolved.

The cooperation of a number of states and international organizations was very influential in influencing the course of events, and Iranian behavior in particular. This US saw an unprecedented level of cooperation between the Gulf States along with US NATO allies in seeing a resolution to the crisis. The United Nations, and particularly the Security Council, emerged from Cold War gridlock to a more active role in peacemaking. Its resolutions affirming freedom of navigation are especially important in terms of convincing the Iranians as well as the Iraqis to reach a resolution. All told, international cooperation led by the US, the slowly withering Iranian economy, and their increasing regional isolation all contributed to the ending of the Tanker Wars crisis, as

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104Amirahmadi and Entessar., p. 138.
105Walker, p. 77.
106Ibid., p. 76.
well as the overarching Iran-Iraq War.\textsuperscript{107}

Regionally, the role of the GCC was of paramount importance in ending the crisis. The GCC played a fine balancing act during the length of the Tanker War. While the GCC states were willing to make use of US assistance in upgrading their armed forces, they were as concerned as Iran about US policies toward the region and, in general, did not relish dependence on an unpredictable superpower.\textsuperscript{108} Starting in January 1981 an “Islamic Mediation Team” was formed. In September 1987, they launched a major peace plan which offered Iran reparations and promised GCC neutrality. Though initially playing the balancing act between the US and Iran, the GCC issued strong complaints about the behavior following their missile attacks on Kuwait in October 1987. At this point they urged the Arab League to reconsider its relations with Iran at its coming summit meeting. This was a notable act as it was the first time that Oman and the UAE had openly expressed criticisms of their neighbor. After the Arab summit a unanimous declaration was issued which proved to be another indication of Iran's increasing international isolation.\textsuperscript{109}

\textit{Initial Analysis}

Taking into consideration all the evidence from this crisis, the engagement strategies employed by the United States and allies are rated as such:

- mistrust – effective
- religion – effective
- respect – effective

\textsuperscript{107}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{108}Rajaee Ed, p. 145.
\textsuperscript{109}Ibid.
• security – neutral

It is clear that the regional urging by the GCC states was influential in bringing Iran to terms in ending the conflict, but other forces were also at play. At this point in the conflict, both Iran and Iraq were nearing the point of exhaustion, politically, financially, and militarily. So the possibility must be considered that the decision to end the war had more to do with domestic considerations as opposed to a direct response to international demands to end the conflict. Nonetheless, the growing regional condemnation of Iranian actions, especially in the Gulf, contributed to their decision to finally end the crisis. That is why this strategy is rated as slightly effective in terms of responding to Iranian mistrust.

With the GCC being the primary mediators in the conflict, this helped to appeal to Iran's sense of religion. The same terms as dictated by the US, with ongoing military operations in the Gulf, most likely would not have been well received in Tehran. The same goes for the US's European allies or the Soviet Union if they had become involved. The lack of religious understanding may have contributed to ineffective negotiations and not actually resolved the crisis.

The engagement strategy was rated as slightly effective in addressing Iran's sense of respect. The states of the GCC could clearly cater to Iranian concerns for respect, being Iran's neighbors and also having a stake in regional security. With the US Navy actively patrolling the Persian Gulf during Earnest Will, it was difficult to convince the Iranians that they were being respected. But with the US actively urged to stay in the background while the GCC took the lead in engaging Iran, this strategy did have some
success in convincing the Iranians that their needs were being respected.

All of these issues lead to the final one of Iranian security. As mentioned above, the Iranians were never keen on the threat posed by the US Navy patrolling the Persian Gulf. This international military presence was a constant threat to Iranian sovereignty and was always regarded as such. This was all occurring in the background while the GCC was engaging the Iranians, as well as the ongoing conflict with Iraq. At this point in the conflict, the primary security concern to the Iranians was their conflict with Iraq, both on land as well as at sea. The added presence of predominately American forces in the Gulf was a peripheral issue compared to the immediate threat posed by the Iraqis. With all of these factors considered, the engagement strategy was rated as neutral in responding to Iranian security interests. No aspects of this strategy were meant to directly threaten Iran's security. The military mission, at this point, was solely there to preserve the free flow of international commerce through the Gulf.

**Confrontational Approaches**

The American involvement in the Persian Gulf was initially to preserve maritime shipping, first Kuwaiti shipping and then eventually all neutral shipping transiting the Gulf. As the mission progressed, the United States steadily became more involved in the crisis as a central actor, despite best intentions to remain neutral. Operation Earnest Will elicited some unexpectedly belligerent responses from the Iranians, which forced the hand of the Americans to take a decidedly more anti-Iranian stance in the region.

As a result of continued Iranian attacks on Kuwaiti and neutral shipping, the United States launched Operation Nimble Archer on October 19, 1987. The Reagan
Administration explained that Operation Nimble Archer was undertaken in accordance with America's "inherent right of self defense, as recognized by Article 51 of the United Nations Charter." Tehran, on the other hand, took this escalation as a direct threat against their sovereignty. The Iranians followed this announcement by declaring that the United States "had opened an all out war" against Iran. The significance of Operation Nimble Archer was that it was the first time that the United States directly retaliated for an attack against an American flag vessel during Operation Earnest Will.

This change in US policy only ratcheted up tensions with Iran and led them to take a number of heretofore unprecedented actions against American targets in the Gulf. The Iranians began firing Silkworm missiles at more targets in the region, plus they also reinvigorated their anti-ship campaign, conducting 27 attacks resulting in one vessel being sunk and two damaged beyond repair. The US Navy began exercising more aggressive tactics when convoys were approached by Iranian vessels that appeared threatening.

These newer and aggressive tactics committed by both sides escalated to the point where on April 14, 1988, the USS Samuel B. Roberts struck a floating mine laid by Iran. The blast broke the keel of the American frigate, nearly tearing the ship in half and starting numerous fires on board. Though no one was killed in the incident, ten sailors were injured. It was the work of exceptional damage control by the crew which managed to save the vessel.

After the incident, discussion began back in Washington regarding any possible

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111 Ibid.
112 Ibid., p. 62.
retaliation measures that should be taken following the mining of the *Samuel B. Roberts*. The State Department urged that any response should be proportionate. Naval officers argued for the destruction of targets of military destruction. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff proposed the destruction of an Iranian warship as a signal to Tehran that the United States was willing to exact a serious price for continued attacks on American vessels.\(^{113}\)

Following due deliberations, preparations for the American strike, now known as Operation Praying Mantis, were complete. Only hours later, on April 18, a combined sea and airborne assault was launched against the Sassan oil platform. Simultaneously, another assault force struck the Sirri platform. Both platforms were left severely damaged.\(^{114}\) The purpose of this expanded protection mission was to “add a turn to the ever tightening screw on Iran's military.”\(^{115}\)

Following the attacks, the battle spread to other parts of the Persian Gulf, including parts of the Southern Gulf. Iran soon launched follow-up attacks on the Mubarek oil fields, striking several ships, including American-flagged vessels. There were also engagements between an Iranian frigates and American aircraft, which left one vessel sunk and the other severely damaged. All told, Iranian losses totaled three oil platforms heavily damaged, six surface vessels, including a frigate, sunk, and another frigate very heavily damaged.\(^{116}\)

As skirmishes in the Gulf continued, it was almost inevitable that mistakes would happen. The culmination of all these incidents was the accidental shooting down of a

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113Ibid., p. 67-68.  
114Ibid., p. 68-69.  
115Ibid., p. 74.  
116Ibid., p. 70.
civilian Iranian airliner by the USS *Vincennes*. The incident occurred on July 3, 1988, when American warships were responding to reports of small craft menacing neutral shipping. The American ships became embroiled in a small-scale surface action with several Iranian vessels, where it ended with the shooting down of the airliner and the deaths of all 290 passengers on board. Perhaps most ominously as far as policy implications are concerned, this action most likely would never have occurred under the original Earnest Will protection scheme.  

It was only after the American mission was greatly expanded that mistakes happened.

**Initial Analysis**

While the broader international community was engaged in a broad multilateral effort to mitigate the crisis in the Gulf, the United States was simultaneously engaging in military operations that were decidedly directed against Iran. This confrontational strategy has been rated as follows:

- mistrust – ineffective
- religion – neutral
- respect – ineffective
- security – ineffective

The direct military confrontations between the US and Iran during Operation Nimble Archer didn't yield any significant results in terms of crisis resolution. By the time direct hostilities had commenced between US and Iranian forces, maritime shipping through the Gulf had largely been secured already. Granted, Nimble Archer was a direct

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117Ibid., p. 75-76.
result of Iranian escalations and continued attacks on Kuwaiti and neutral shipping. However, the direct American military response to these attacks only escalated the situation out of control, until the tragic incident when the *Vincennes* shot down the civilian airliner.

Considering that Iran already had a high level of mistrust of the US conducting military operations in the Gulf during Earnest Will, launching direct attacks on Iranian assets and forces during Nimble Archer and Praying Mantis only reinforced Iran's sense of mistrust for the US. Therefore, the level of mistrust has been rated as highly ineffective, because these operations did nothing to bring the crisis closer to a settlement.

The military operations had no bearing on Iran's sense of religion, and has been rated as neutral. Nimble Archer angered the Iranians in many ways, but offending their religious sensibilities was an irrelevant concern during this aspect of the crisis. The traditional concerns over religion weren't at the forefront of anyone's mind, neither the Americans nor the Iranians.

Nimble Archer was highly ineffective in respecting Iranian interests and desires. By this point in the conflict, it was clear to American policymakers that the only remaining option in terms of keeping the Persian Gulf secure were direct and unilateral military strikes against Iranian assets in the Gulf. In fact, these actions were a blatant disregard for Iran's sense of respect.

The final core Iranian concern of security was rated as highly ineffective. Again, similar to the Iranian desire for respect, Nimble Archer made every effort to disregard Iran's sense of security. By escalating US involvement, it was hoped by US policymakers
that this pressure would convince the Iranians to come to terms with American demands. Instead, Iran responded to force with force, eventually leading to direct confrontation in the Gulf and the unfortunate incident with the civilian airliner.

**Final Comparative Analysis**

To recap, the United States initially became involved in the Iran-Iraq War when maritime shipping in the Persian Gulf was deemed to be under such a threat that the free flow of commerce needed to be defended. Therefore, the United States first launched Operation Earnest Will in 1987 under broad, yet reluctant support of the international community in order to protect Kuwaiti shipping. As the mission progressed, more or less successfully, Iranian belligerence continued unabated which forced the hand of the Americans. This resulted in Operation Nimble Archer, which expanded the coverage to all neutral shipping in the Gulf, not just Kuwaiti ships. Nimble Archer also allowed for defensive measures to be taken in the event of attack. This wider mission was not taken well by the Iranians, who only responded by ratcheting up their own attacks. This led to direct confrontation between the US and Iranian naval vessels.

The United States' involvement in the Tanker Wars was predominately confrontational, relying on military might to assert authority over Iranian activities in the Gulf during both Operation Earnest Will as well as Operation Nimble Archer. However, there is a distinction to be made. The primary purpose of Earnest Will was to remain as neutral as possible from the conflict itself between Iran and Iraq. The real activity during this phase of American involvement took place amongst America's European Allies who also took part in the naval mission, but especially the US's regional partners in the Gulf.
The states of the GCC played a significant role in providing terms that were acceptable to the belligerents, and Iran in particular. The more direct military operations of Nimble Archer, on the other hand, only led to direct skirmishes between American and Iranian forces.

Taking the evidence from both strategies into consideration, the final analysis for the Tanker War concludes that between the two, multilateral engagement was more effective than confrontation, and that is only slightly. The primary influence for ending the Iran-Iraq war was due to exhaustion on both sides. The GCC, which served as the face of engagement for this crisis, certainly provided a framework for bringing a conflict to an end. Yet the lack of ability or will of both Iran and Iraq to continue the war was also a significant factor in the determination to end the crisis.

**2007 BRITISH NAVAL HOSTAGES**

The British Naval Hostage crisis started when British sailors were captured by
Iranian forces as they were conducting a routine patrol in the Persian Gulf. The incident first occurred on March 23, 2007 as a group of eight sailors and seven marines had been conducting “routine boarding operations of merchant shipping in Iraqi territorial waters,” according to the British Defense Ministry. Just as they had finished inspecting a merchant vessel for evidence of smuggling, “they and their two boats were surrounded and escorted by Iranian vessels into Iranian territorial waters.”\(^\text{118}\) The Britons were based on the frigate Cornwall, part of a multinational force that patrols in the northern Persian Gulf, just below the mouth of the disputed Shatt al Arab. It was believed that the capture was carried out by Iranian sailors belonging to the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy.

Countering the British claims of no wrongdoing and acting within legal bounds, the Iranians considered British activities to be “blatant aggression,” with the Iranian Foreign Ministry saying the Britons had violated “the sovereign boundaries of other states.”\(^\text{119}\) After the personnel were captured, they transferred to Tehran where they had “confessed to illegal entry into Iran's waters.”

These actions were particularly appalling to the British Government. Just days after the incident Prime Minister Tony Blair warned that Britain's campaign to free the hostages would move into a “different phase” if they were not released. Officials in his office and in the Foreign Office were quick to emphasize that he was referring specifically to a tougher diplomatic posture, not to military or other more confrontational


means. To further bolster their case and absolve the naval personnel from any wrongdoing, the Royal Navy decided to release navigational data which it says proves that its servicemen were “well within Iraqi territorial waters” and dismissed accounts given by Iran of the incident to British diplomats.

Two weeks later, the hostages were released, described by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as a gift to the British people in time for the Easter holiday. In announcing his intentions to release the hostages, Ahmadinejad made clear that Iran had every right to try the Britons on charges of trespassing in Iranian territorial waters. Instead, it had been decided to forgive them and allow them to go home.

**Timeline of Significant Events**

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 23, 2007</td>
<td>Eight Royal Navy sailors and seven Royal Marines seized by Iranian forces while conducting inspection at the mouth of the Shatt al-Arab waterway.</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 24, 2007</td>
<td>British Government demands immediate release of personnel. Iran claims Britons had illegally entered Iranian waters.</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 27, 2007</td>
<td>British Prime Minister Tony Blair threatens a “different phase” in diplomacy if detainees aren't released. US begins conducting large military exercise in Persian Gulf.</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 28, 2007</td>
<td>First British “confessions” aired on Iranian state television. Ministry of Defence releases data it says proves the sailors were within Iraqi waters.</td>
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</table>

March 29, 2007 – The UN Security Council issues a statement expressing “grave concern” over the situation.

March 30, 2007 – EU foreign ministers call for immediate and unconditional release of the sailors. EU expresses its commitment to take appropriate measures if sailors not released.

April 4, 2007 – Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad announces he will free the Britons as a “gift” to the UK.

April 5, 2007 – British detainees are flown back to the UK.

**Multilateral Engagement**

As briefly touched upon in the previous section, the central strategy of the British Government during this crisis was to reach a resolution through diplomatic engagement. While the central interactions took place directly between Britain and Iran, there are also examples of other states playing influential roles that helped resolve the crisis.

In the lead of the negotiations, of course, was Britain. Engaged in a primarily bilateral context with the Iranians, the British Government strove from the earliest moments of the crisis to find a peaceful solution to the crisis while working with Iran. Emphasizing the primary role of diplomatic engagement in this crisis, Prime Minister Tony Blair stated during in early April that, “All the way through this, we’ve had two tracks on this.” The first option was to, “make sure Iran understands that the pressure is there available to us if this thing has to be hard and tough and long.” The other preferred option was a peaceful resolution. Blair made clear that, “We’re not looking for confrontation over this,” and that, “the most important thing is to get the people back safe
and sound, and if they want to resolve this in a diplomatic way, the door is open.”\(^\text{123}\)

Between these two tracks that the British chose to pursue, there was a clear preference for adopting a conciliatory tone in dealing with Iran. A number of diplomatic notes were soon sent between Iran and the Foreign Office, staking out their claims. Javier Solana, the European Union's foreign policy chief, was also asked to talk to Iranian authorities on behalf of the 27-member bloc in order to facilitate a peaceful resolution to the crisis.\(^\text{124}\) Britain brought its case before the UN Security Council, where it hoped to get a demand for a release of the hostages. However, the best they could achieve was a watered down statement expressing concern at Iran's capture of the 15 naval personnel, partly due to resistance from Russia and China. In response to the UN Resolution, Iran only stated that Britain's attempt to engage third parties was, “not helpful.”\(^\text{125}\)

The British also engaged in diplomatic pressure against the Iranian regime during the crisis. Early on in the crisis, Britain decided to freeze all bilateral business with Iran. This decision was reached as the government has been under growing political pressure to flex some diplomatic muscle. This strategy was seen as risky, as it could easily backfire with Iran only digging in its heels. There is very little bilateral business between the two nations, beyond sporting and cultural ties, but this step was seen as definitely upping the ante, though it did not go so far as to break off diplomatic relations.\(^\text{126}\)


Following the conclusion of the crisis, the British House of Commons conducted an internal review examining government strategy during the crisis. In regards to the 'dual track' diplomatic approach adopted by the government against Iran, the report concluded that the approach was broadly the correct one to use. Although bringing the case to the UN Security Council in order to increase pressure on Iran didn't work as well as they had hoped, overall the strategy accomplished all its stated objectives.\(^\text{127}\)

Key to this successful diplomatic approach to the crisis was the role regional states played in convincing Iran to come to terms and release the hostages. It was noted by the British Government that Arab countries, led by the Iraqis, were particularly active in the crisis. The impact of the Gulf States, as well as Turkey, were also of real significance.\(^\text{128}\) As Sir Richard Dalton stated, “the key influences on the Iranians were, I think, the regional ones … A major Iranian objective was to show power in the region, yet they had a stream of phone calls from all their regional neighbors saying, 'Please bring this to an end.'”\(^\text{129}\) It was not just regional states that played a role in crisis mediation. The Holy See even became involved in the crisis, with Pope Benedict XVI sending a letter to Ayatollah Khomeini requesting that Iran release the hostages in the spirit of forgiveness.\(^\text{130}\)

Indeed, many independent analysts drew many similar conclusions to those made by the British Government following the end of the hostage crisis. Extolling the benefits

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\(^{128}\)Ibid., p. 23

\(^{129}\)Ibid.

\(^{130}\)“Holy See Confirms, Pope sent letter to Iran asking for release of detained British soldiers,” *Catholic News Agency*,
of engagement, Vali Nasr and Ray Takeyh, two noted Iran watchers, made the observation that just as Iran will meet confrontation with confrontation, it will respond to what it perceives as flexibility with pragmatism. Their ultimate argument was that the release of the hostages was no accident. Britain's carefully calibrated dual track diplomatic strategy was the key to finding a peaceful resolution to the crisis. In their minds, the proponents of a confrontational strategy with Iran should pay careful attention to this incident, as it displays in careful detail the ability of the Iranian regime to make rational decisions.

**Initial Analysis**

The engagement strategies pursued by the British during the crisis will be rated as follows:

- mistrust – effective
- religion – effective
- respect – effective
- security – effective

Overall, the British strategy during the crisis responded to all the four concerns of the Iranians in an effective manner that facilitated the release of the hostages and the resolution of the crisis. Though there was debate post-crisis as to whether Britain's policy was a wise one or they were duped by the sly Iranians, at the end of the day this patient strategy achieved all it's stated goals, namely, the release of the hostages.

First of all, Britain's strategy was very helpful in reducing the mistrust between...
Iran and the West. By publicly emphasizing the desire for conciliatory diplomacy, the Blair Government made clear to the Iranians that military strikes weren't on order. This policy declaration certainly opened the possibility that Iran could use the situation to their own advantage, but it also reduced the perennial fear among the Iranian government of regime change, at least for the time being.

The engagement strategy also appealed to Iran's sense of religion. This was no more true than when the Holy See sent a letter to Iran requesting the release of the hostages. This exchange contributed to ending the crisis by building a bridge between Christianity and Islam, and appealing to the sense of forgiveness found in both religions. Without the involvement of the Pope this crisis very well may have dragged on indefinitely.

Emphasizing the desire to engage the Iranians in a conciliatory way was also a great way to show that Britain was concerned with Iran's sense of respect. Instead of delivering patronizing messages laced with subtle threats, Britain engaged in a manner which made Iran feel as an equal partner in the negotiations, as opposed a junior. This went a long way in convincing Iran to come to terms and finally agree to release the hostages in time for Easter.

Britain's strategy was also instrumental in reassuring Iran of their national security. Taking the military option off the table, though not a favorable decision according to the hawkish crowd, sent a message to Iran that this crisis was going to be resolved through dialogue alone. That allowed Iran to focus the majority of their efforts on the diplomatic front, instead of taking military preparations and engaging in
belligerent rhetoric that would only inflame the situation more.

**Confrontational Approaches**

Throughout the steadfast diplomatic engagement pursued by the British, there was also a more subtle drumbeat for military confrontation in the background. Although a diplomatic solution to the crisis was the stated preference of the Blair Government, Britain's ally the United States was persistent in offering to provide the military muscle should the talks fail. The United States made it very clear to the British that they were willing to make Iran pay dearly if they didn't cooperate in the release of the hostages.

Closely following the taking of the British naval hostages by Iran on March 23, the United States Navy began a major exercise in the Persian Gulf as a calculated show of force in the region. This exercise was part of a broader strategy to contain Iranian power in the region.\(^{132}\) This exercise included two American aircraft carriers, the *John C. Stennis* and the *Eisenhower*, along with about a dozen other warships. American officials said the deployment was planned well before the capture of the 15 British naval personnel, but the exercise was clearly intended to send a signal to the Iranians.\(^{133}\)

The Bush Administration also made offers to the British to conduct aggressive patrols over Iranian Revolutionary Guard positions with warplanes. Soon after the hostages were taken, Pentagon officials asked their British counterparts what they could do for them. A series of military options were also offered to the British that the US would act upon if requested. However, the British turned down all offers, preferring that


\(^{133}\)Ibid.
the Americans stay on the sidelines.\textsuperscript{134}

Along with the overt display of military power, the Bush Administration also kept up the confrontational tone rhetorically. While Blair was careful to issue conciliatory statements throughout the duration of the crisis, the Bush Administration continued the tough talk in order to impress upon Iran the urgency of the situation. Dan Bartlett, the White House counselor, stated that, “This is the type of unacceptable behavior that is just the latest in a long history from the Iranian government of bad actions it’s taken, further isolating themselves from the international community.”\textsuperscript{135} President Bush also condemned the hostage taking as inexcusable behavior, demanding that the Iranians give back the hostages while offering the British any help they may ask for.

The more belligerent tone of the Bush Administration played a part in the overall crisis negotiations, but from the beginning of the crisis the British were wary of any confrontational tones coming out of Washington, and actually asked the Americans not to take any actions.\textsuperscript{136} The British Government's final evaluation was that these aggressive tactics by the Americans, if carried out, would not be helpful in trying to conduct the discussions that were going on.\textsuperscript{137}

This conclusion was not shared by all commentators following the conclusion of the crisis, most notably John Bolton. Taking issue with the British Government's emphasis on diplomacy as opposed to confrontation, Bolton argued that Iran probed and

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item 136 House of Commons, p. 24.
\item 137 Ibid.
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found weakness. Ultimately, British diplomacy was irrelevant, as it was Ahmadinejad who held all the cards and was the true driver of the crisis. Despite the arguments of the engagement advocates, Bolton saw the Iranians as emboldened by this experience in direct engagement with the West.\footnote{John Bolton, “How Iran probed, found weakness and won a triumph,” *The Financial Times*, April 8, 2007, \url{http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/3659540c-e5ed-11db-9fcf-000b5df10621.html} (accessed April 10, 2012).}

Indeed, though unlikely, Iran's brinksmanship in this crisis certainly raised the prospects of a military strike against Iranian facilities. Already concerned about Iran's advances in its nuclear program, the United States was willing to up the ante and conduct aggressive operations against Iranian facilities. Iran lucked out and nothing happened, due mostly to British insistence that the crisis be solved peacefully. Iran's decision to raise tensions in the region was a risky gamble for them to play.\footnote{“Iran's Brinksmanship may prove too costly,” *The Financial Times*, March 27, 2007, \url{http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/9979668c-dbff-11db-9233-000b5df10621.html} (accessed April 10, 2012).}

**Initial Analysis**

The confrontational strategies pursued in this crisis, mainly by the United States, are rated as follows:

- mistrust – ineffective
- religion – neutral
- respect – ineffective
- security – ineffective

The United States' strategy of confronting the Iranians during the hostage crisis played virtually no useful role in bringing the crisis to an end. Despite the repeated offers
by the Bush Administration to bring more pressure against Iran, the British were insistent that this type of strategy had no place in the crisis. While the British used varying levels of diplomatic pressure during the crisis, it was never their intent to threaten, let alone use, military force.

The constant badgering of the British by the United States only increased the mistrust between Iran and the West. These offers for military operations were widely reported throughout the duration of the crisis, a fact that did not go unnoticed by Iran. Since Britain made it publicly aware that their sole interest was in conciliatory diplomacy, these military threats served as nothing more than a distraction from the main efforts at ending the crisis.

In regards to religion, this confrontational strategy didn't have any particular relevance. If anything, threatening military strikes against Iran would only reinforce the perception that the United States and the West is really on a crusade against Islam. Other than that, the military strikes had no bearing on Iranian religious considerations.

Finally, threatening military strikes seriously jeopardizes Iranian security. When a regime that already feels threatened on a near daily basis is faced with the prospects of imminent strikes, this will only force them to double down. Therefore, threatening Tehran with regime change will violate their need for security and will make them far less willing to cooperate while on the defensive.

*Final Comparative Analysis*

The British Naval Hostage crisis involved examples of both engagement and confrontational strategies against Iran. Britain led the way in advocating for and pursuing
an engagement strategy. The United States most prominently advocated and offered to pursue more confrontational operations to convince Iran to release the hostages. Both of these strategies had their effects on the Iranian decision making process, but to different degrees.

Between the two strategies employed in this crisis, the policy of engagement by far was the most effective of the two. Not without merit could it be argued that perhaps Iran played the British in order to gain status in the region. However, on the contrary, there is significant evidence that this plan backfired, and it was the resounding negative action by states in the region and elsewhere that convinced the Iranians that they had made a tactical mistake with potential strategic repercussions in taking the naval hostages.

*Summarizing the Findings Across the Cases*

Taking the final analysis of all three case studies into consideration, this paper's final conclusion is that a strategy of engagement in a multilateral context is the most effective means for ending a security crisis with Iran. Though at times policies of confrontation have yielded positive results in convincing the Iranians to change their decision making, the majority of the time this strategy was employed only served to disrupt and distract from the otherwise fruitful negotiations taking place. Therefore, in light of the disparity in the number of comparative successes between the two strategies, engagement was ultimately the more successful of the two strategies employed during crises with Iran. This does not mean that confrontation does not serve any purpose in crisis negotiations. It certainly can in many circumstances, but due to the risks involved
and likelihood of success, this policy should be used sparingly.
After analyzing the evidence presented in this paper, there are a number of theoretical and policy contributions that have been gained from this research. Theoretically speaking, this paper bolsters the arguments made by many analysts promoting engagement as the prime strategy for crisis negotiations. On the contrary, it diminishes the arguments made by those who argue that adopting a confrontational approach is the best strategy for convincing the opposing state to capitulate to Great Power demands.

This paper has also made contributions that will be useful to the policy world as well. Confronted with international security crises usually at very short notice, policymakers are forced to choose between two broad strategies, not knowing which one is more likely to yield successful results. However, this paper's research contributes to the policymaking process by providing guidance as well as insights on the merits and drawbacks of both strategies. The research conducted in this paper has garnered insights that suggest an engagement strategy is most likely to lead to success.

With the evidence from this paper, it is worth taking a moment and considering how these findings can be applied to the ongoing Iranian nuclear crisis. Since Iranian activities first became exposed in 2002 with the revelation that Iran has been working on a clandestine nuclear program, this issue has developed into a major international security crisis that has the potential to break out into a regional conflict involving Iran, regional states, as well as outside great powers.

The great powers have been engaged in a standoff and a decades worth of negotiations since then trying to resolve the crisis. In the time frame of the ongoing
negotiations there have been two steady drumbeats. The first drumbeat has been a call for dialogue. This strategy has been seen in the repeated rounds of talks between Iran and European Union powers, with the IAEA conducting on the ground inspections of suspect nuclear facilities. The second, and perhaps louder, drumbeat has been the call for military operations against Iran's nuclear facilities, with the ultimate result possibly being regime change. This charge has been led by the Israelis, who encourage the United States to initiate attacks or threaten to do it themselves if no one else will.

Up to the present, no clear resolution to the crisis is in sight. Negotiations with Iran continue, but so do Israeli threats to take matters into their own hands if nuclear progress isn't halted soon. Barring any out of the blue Israeli strikes against Iranian facilities, the negotiations have effectively reached an impasse, with neither side in the negotiations prepared to make the substantial concessions that would be required to break the deadlock. So the question now turns to which way forward?

Applying the conclusions found in the research conducted in this paper, the answer to that question would be to double down on engagement efforts with as much parties involved in the process as possible. Given the prevalent role of mediators in solving past crises with Iran, a renewed focus should emphasize finding a reliable and willing partner who is able to mediate between the two sides. Possible candidates include Turkey or even Japan.

With a renewed emphasis on an engagement strategy, once and for all the


confrontational options of a military strike should be subdued. While it may not be politically feasible to formally take the option off the table as per Iranian requests, it is still possible from a rhetorical standpoint to at least decrease the number of threats issued towards Iran. Privately Iran can be sent reassurances regarding any policy reorientation.

Policymakers should be under no illusion that this strategy would bear immediate results. As with all the other crises involved in this paper, a strategy of engagement is a policy that requires patience as well as persistence. All the previous crises involving Iran took much time and effort before any sort of success bore fruit, and success in the current crisis is anything but assured. However, given the track record of both types of strategies being employed in the present crisis as well as crises in the past, it is clear that a policy of engagement offers the great powers with the best opportunity to resolve the crisis in a manner that will settle the concerns of all states involved.

Based on the findings of this paper, there are a number of areas for further research that would be beneficial. This paper has mainly focused on why engagement is successful more often than confrontation. But utilizing a confrontational strategy isn't entirely devoid of successes, and certainly is a viable policy option for policymakers. It would be a worthwhile endeavor to study under which circumstances a confrontational strategy would be most appropriately utilized by policymakers.

The evidence presented in this paper showed that an engagement strategy is preferable when negotiation with Iran. The next logical step would be to apply the findings in this paper to other states that involve the great powers in security crises. If the findings in this paper hold true for other cases, the arguments presented here would be
further strengthened. If the additional findings don't support these initial arguments, there
would then be a need for further research to explain these differences.

Another variation of possible research would be to study the merits of employing
both engagement and confrontation simultaneously in a crisis. States are not confined to
the choice of either one policy or another. Employing both strategies at once is an option
as well. In terms of academic and policy findings, this examining this research question
would be worth the effort.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


