

Explaining the Origins of the Iran Hostage Crisis: A Cognitive Perspective

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Psychological approaches have long been utilized to try to understand the mindsets of terrorists, but much of this literature has drawn on Freudian-inspired psychoanalytic approaches derived from the field of what is sometimes known as abnormal psychology. Building upon recent work which has largely dismissed the value of this kind of approach, this article suggests that we ought to draw more actively than hitherto upon newer, cognitive-based approaches to the study of terrorism. Stressing the importance of analogical reasoning in normal human reasoning, this article seeks to explain the actions of the Iranian students who stormed the U.S. embassy in Tehran in November 1979. Cognitive images of “another 1953,” it is argued, played an especially decisive role in the hostage takers’ decision-making processes. While analogical reasoning represents only one cognitive approach to decision-making, future research in the field of terrorist studies should utilize more up-to-date “mainstream” approaches to understanding the psychology of terrorist decision-making.

Keywords Iran hostage crisis, analogical reasoning, psychology of terrorism

The recent publication of Massoumeh Ebtekar’s “insider” memoir of the hostage crisis affords us an extraordinary opportunity to try to better understand the motives of the Islamic militants who invaded the U.S. embassy in Tehran in November 1979.¹ Now a Vice-President of Iran, Ebtekar was one of the student radicals who held over fifty American hostages captive in Tehran for 444 days. It is of course always hazardous to rely on a single autobiographical source alone; however, when read in conjunction with the recollections of the U.S. hostages themselves and the memories of other Iranian hostage takers, Ebtekar’s recollections take on an interesting light.² When we examine all these sources together, a clear and consistent pattern emerges: memories of the famous (or infamous) CIA-led coup of 1953 appear to have played a key role in the embassy seizure.³

When analysts have attempted to understand the actions of terrorists using psychological models, they have traditionally resorted to psychoanalytic theories which most cognitive and social psychologists now generally consider even less useful within their own field than scholars of terrorism do within theirs. Frustration-aggression theory, narcissistic rage theory, and other psychoanalytically-rooted explanations have frequently been offered to explain why people become terrorists.⁴ The

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work of terrorism expert Jerrold Post, for instance, has especially contributed to this literature.⁵ But in recent years the value of psychoanalytic approaches in understanding the psychology of terrorism has increasingly come into question.⁶ John Horgan, for instance, argues that such approaches are quite unhelpful in understanding terrorist motivations; while psychoanalytic approaches uniformly stress the role of psychopathy in shaping the personality of terrorists, “there is poor evidence for the principle that psychopathy is an element of the psychology of terrorist organizations.”⁷ Horgan also regards the methodological approaches of those who claim to have uncovered a single terrorist personality as “pitiful.”⁸ Similarly, Andrew Silke suggests that writers who suggest that terrorists are in some way psychologically “abnormal” have usually had the least amount of contact with actual terrorists, while those who argue the opposite tend to have had considerable interaction with terrorists.⁹

Rex Hudson is also skeptical of the value of many of these studies, noting that many of the traits attributed to terrorists as causes of their activities (for instance, narcissism) are also present within the general population (a problem known as the fallacy of composition).¹⁰ There is now a general consensus that terrorists are psychologically normal individuals rather than psychopaths;¹¹ moreover, the prominence of psychoanalytical approaches within terrorist studies renders the former something of an anachronism within contemporary social science, both because these theories stress the idea of terrorist “abnormality” and because they have been widely criticized elsewhere on both conceptual and methodological grounds.¹²

As Silke notes, “after 30 years of research all that psychologists can safely say of terrorists is that their outstanding characteristic is their normality.”¹³ Logically, however, the next step is to apply models previously utilized to understand the behavior of normal individuals in order to understand terrorist behavior. One route which has already been taken from this point is to view the actions of terrorists as driven by strategic logic and choice. Martha Crenshaw, for instance, argues that much terrorist behavior can be interpreted as a rational, instrumental response to the situation faced and is made explicable by cost-benefit analysis.¹⁴ However, this (more economic than psychological) route is not the only direction research on terrorism might take once one has taken terrorist normality seriously. Crenshaw notes elsewhere in the same volume that “cognitive psychology and the use of information-processing frameworks can provide rich insights into political behavior, including terrorism.”¹⁵

What follows represents an initial, tentative attempt to follow this latter direction.¹⁶ One especially insightful body of literature which has thus far been underutilized in the existing terrorism literature, we shall propose, is that on the role of analogical reasoning and schema theory; though widely discussed in the field of political science for many years, schema theory has so far been applied mostly to the decision-making of U.S. foreign policy elites and to U.S. voting behavior, and it has rarely if ever been used to try to explain the behavior of individuals committing acts of terrorism. And yet, as I shall try to show in the analysis which follows, the analytical puzzle to be examined here—“Why did the students invade the embassy?”—makes some sense to Westerners when viewed through the lens of schema theory and its close analytical counterpart analogical reasoning.

A secondary reason for examining the Iran example is that we lack in-depth case studies dealing with the psychology of decision-making. There is certainly a substantial literature on this topic, and this covers a variety of issues from the Stockholm syndrome to the planning of hostage incidents to the effectiveness of negotiation

procedures and different hostage-taking tactics.¹⁷ There are also a number of large *n* studies which have attempted to draw general conclusions about hostage taking. However, there is a general lack of in-depth, theoretically-informed studies of particular hostage incidents of the kind that historians and political scientists often undertake.

While obtaining reliable information about the deliberations of the Iranian decision-makers is admittedly difficult, more and more information about the Ayatollah Khomeini's reasoning and that of the students who seized the American embassy has become available over the past few years. As well as utilizing information provided in Ebtekar's book, this article draws in particular on interviews conducted during the course of 1998 in Iran and the United States by the British film company Antelope Productions. These interviews—which formed the basis of the documentary *444 Days*, broadcast by the BBC in November 1998—were kindly made available to the author and provide a wealth of information about the motives and intentions of the hostage takers (some of whom were interviewed directly) as well as detailing the thinking of American decision-makers and many of the hostages themselves. The argument offered here also draws upon the large number of interviews with the hostages reproduced in Tim Wells's *444 Days: The Hostages Remember*, on the memoirs of former members of the Carter administration, oral history interviews contained in the Jimmy Carter Library in Atlanta, Georgia, and other secondary accounts of the hostage crisis. In order to locate the argument within its theoretical context, we will briefly turn to what has already been written on this topic by both political scientists and psychologists.

The Political Psychology of Analogical Reasoning

Analogical reasoning has been little discussed in the study of terrorism, but it has an established pedigree both within cognitive psychology and the study of foreign policy decision-making. While a full account of the many findings cognitive psychologists have arrived at lies beyond the scope of this article, several of the most significant discoveries in the growing literature on human problem-solving are worth restating here.¹⁸ Foremost among these is the fact that analogical reasoning is a cognitive mechanism which tends to be used under conditions of high uncertainty or ambiguity, such as when an individual is confronted by novel circumstances or a highly stressful situation. Michael Eysenck and Mark Keane note that much of the existing psychological research on human problem-solving examines how people deal with familiar, routine, and recurring situations, but “people can also solve unfamiliar or novel problems. Sometimes we can produce creative solutions when we have no directly applicable knowledge about the problem situation.”¹⁹ An especially significant mechanism for doing this is analogical reasoning.

A second central finding—which relates primarily to the processes through which analogical reasoning occurs—is that analogizing involves what several authors have referred to as a “mapping” process. As Eysenck and Keane put it, “various theorists have characterized this analogical thinking as being the result of processes that map the conceptual structure of one set of ideas (called the base domain) into another set of ideas (called a target domain).”²⁰ The innovators in developing this mapping theory have been Dedre Gentner, Mary Gick, and Keith Holyoak. According to Gick and Holyoak, for instance, “the essence of analogical thinking is the transfer of knowledge from one situation to another by a process of *mapping*—finding a

set of one-on-one correspondences (often incomplete) between aspects of one body of information and aspects of another."²¹ In analogizing, "isomorphic" relationships are discovered between one event, situation, or object and another.

A third, closely related point to note is that analogical reasoning is a *structural* process. An analogy, Dedre Gentner finds, is not simply a statement that something is like something else; rather, it is a comparison in which the subject assumes that the perceived similarities are "structural," (or causally significant) as opposed to merely "superficial."²² She distinguishes analogies from "mere appearance matches" and things which are literally similar.²³ This distinction may best be appreciated by noting that policymakers—and human beings generally—rarely draw analogies between things which are very similar if the similarities do not seem causally important. The fact that both Saddam Hussein and Adolf Hitler have moustaches does not strengthen the appeal of an analogy between the two, for example, while factors such as expansionist tendencies or the use of secret police do. One can also appreciate the structural nature of analogies by recognizing that just as not all similarities count in favor of an analogy, not all differences necessarily *weaken* a comparison. For instance, to stick with the Persian Gulf War example just alluded to, for most analysts the appeal of the Munich analogy in 1991 was not weakened by the fact that Kuwait is in the Middle East and Poland in Eastern Europe.

In practice, of course, individuals *do* often draw analogies between things or events which exhibit only a superficial surface similarity (even though, as already noted, analogical reasoning involves a structural process). As Catherine Clement and Dedre Gentner succinctly put it, "suppose we know three facts: *It rains in San Francisco there is a mime troop in San Francisco*, and *It rains in Urbana*. Clearly we do not want our theory of analogy to tell us that *There is a mime troop in Urbana*."²⁴ Unfortunately, in the complex world of foreign policy decision-making things are rarely so cut-and-dried. The appeal of the Korean analogy to Lyndon Johnson and Dean Rusk during the 1965 debate about escalation in Vietnam, for example, was probably enhanced by the fact that Vietnam and Korea are both in Asia. In policymaking, surface similarities are usually easy to confuse with underlying structural ones. Plausible causal or higher order relations must be mapped between base and target in order for the analogy to be useful for predictive purposes, but this is easy to do in political decision-making. Reliance on superficial similarity naturally leads to errors and biases, however, not least because analogical reasoning usually involves reasoning from an *n* of one—a practice which any good student of political methodology knows to be fraught with potential error.

A fourth prominent finding is that analogical reasoning appears to play a key role in schema formation; analogizing aids, in other words, the construction of general rules for solving a particular category of problem. Analogical reasoning is seen by most cognitive psychologists as intimately connected to the larger body of theorizing in psychology known as schema theory. A schema may be thought of as a mental representation of how to act in response to a cue, a definition which comes close to that of a script. More generally, a schema "refers to a general cognitive structure into which data or events can be entered, typically with more attention to broad brush strokes than to specific details."²⁵ According to Gick and Holyoak, when the individual has solved a problem successfully in the same way on two or more occasions, he or she will eventually form a general "problem schema," a set of abstract principles for dealing with that problem type which derives from particular analogical cases but which acquires an independent identity of its own.

In this way general rules may be formed which derive from—and yet go beyond—any particular case, abstract beliefs for which analogies supply examples and provide concrete support.²⁶

The use of analogical reasoning in foreign and domestic policymaking has long been commented upon in political science, although it has only been viewed as an explicitly psychological process since the late 1970s.²⁷ In the main, this literature has sought to provide answers to two sets of questions. First of all, many authors have pondered the time-honored question of whether the past is generally a useful or misleading guide to the present and future. Richard Neustadt and Ernest May's *Thinking in Time*, for instance, is intended as a kind of "how-to-do-it" manual for policymaking, being primarily concerned with the question of how decision-makers can make better use of historical lessons. The second set of questions, on the other hand, has to do with the status of analogizing as a cause (rather than an effect) of decision-making. Given that analogizing undoubtedly takes place, what role do analogies generally play? Are they cognitive tools used for making sense of a complex world, or simply ex-post mechanisms which decision-makers employ with the sole intention of convincing their colleagues of the appropriateness of a pre-set course of action? The first political science author to reflect upon analogizing as an explicitly psychological process was Robert Jervis, who devotes a chapter of his *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* to the use of history by decision-makers, and almost all recent work in the field of analogizing has taken its inspiration from him. Jervis's analysis stresses the origin of analogical reasoning in the past personal experiences of decision-makers, showing how analogies can lead the policymaker to misdefine the character of situations and/or to arrive at policy choices poorly suited to the task at hand.

Later work by supporters of the cognitive approach to decision-making has sought to apply Jervis's observations to various case studies, drawn almost exclusively from the United States. Alex Hybel, for instance, found that analogical reasoning played a significant role in seven major post-war episodes of U.S. intervention in the Caribbean and South America, Dwain Mefford finds that analogies played a prominent role in President Eisenhower's decision to overthrow the Arbenz regime in Guatemala in 1954 and this author argues that the Johnson and Carter administrations' choices were heavily conditioned by a range of analogies during the Detroit riots of 1967 and the Iran hostage crisis respectively.²⁸ Yuen Foong Khong's book *Analogies at War*, however, is by far the most sustained and in-depth analysis of analogizing in foreign policy to appear to date. Khong examines the decisions by the Johnson administration to escalate U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War in 1965, and finds that analogies played a prominent part in the reasoning processes of both those who opposed the escalation and those who supported it. Under Secretary of State George Ball, for instance, argued that increased American involvement there would soon lead to "another Dien Bien Phu," to a repeat of the disastrous French experience in Indochina; however, for President Johnson and many of his other advisers (such as Dean Rusk), Korea was the analogy of choice. "To be sure, Johnson was informed by many lessons of many pasts," Khong argues, "but Korea preoccupied him . . . Whatever it was that attracted Johnson to the Korean precedent, a major lesson he drew from it was that the United States made a mistake in leaving Korea in June 1949; the withdrawal emboldened the communists, forcing the United States to return to Korea one year later to save the South. Johnson was not predisposed toward repeating the same mistake in Vietnam."²⁹

Khong argues that we can think of analogies as “diagnostic devices” which assist policymakers in performing six crucial functions: they “(1) help define the nature of the situation confronting the policymaker, (2) help assess the stakes, and (3) provide prescriptions. They help evaluate alternative options by (4) predicting the chances of success, (5) evaluating their moral rightness, and (6) warning about dangers associated with the options.”³⁰ He develops what he calls the “AE Framework,” essentially a short-hand term for the belief that analogies are genuine cognitive devices which perform the tasks specified above. The primary research purpose of Khong’s book is to argue against the view proposed by Arthur Schlesinger and others that analogies are used solely to “prop up one’s prejudices” or to justify decisions which have already been decided upon using some other rationale, and he finds that the Johnson people tended to use historical analogies which drew upon recent events such as the missile crisis, the Berlin crises, Korea, Pearl Harbor, and Munich.³¹ Khong shows that in choosing a historical analogy which seemed to make sense of Vietnam, Johnson’s advisers picked a historical example partly on the basis of its superficial similarities to the case in hand.³²

What determines the relative appeal of different analogies or historical experiences? Why is one analogy used and not another? Here the literature consistently points to the use of what Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky call the *availability* and *representativeness* heuristics.³³ The availability heuristic is associated with the idea that recent or otherwise vivid events tend to be recalled most readily because they are most cognitively available. Availability, however, can be completely unrelated to statistical frequency, and available information may take on a role disproportionate to its real significance. In one especially revealing study, Barbara Combs and Paul Slovic found that people tend to greatly overestimate the likelihood of dying in “spectacular” ways (such as in a terrorist attack or plane crash) and greatly underestimate the likelihood of more mundane forms of death (such as cancer or heart disease). The reason, they argue, is that spectacular forms of death are more cognitively available, due to the fact that the media report these but do not usually report deaths from cancer (unless the victim is a celebrity of some sort).³⁴

The representativeness heuristic refers to the tendency of people to estimate the likelihood of something according to the degree to which it fits some archetypical category, rather than how statistically likely it is. In analogical reasoning, for instance, the likelihood that a given situation represents “another Vietnam” or “another Munich” is assessed according to the degree to which that situation closely resembles (or departs from) the typical characteristics associated with Munich or Vietnam. What people do not do, on the other hand, is estimate the statistical likelihood that “X represents Y.” We shall return to these heuristics in a later section in order to assess their relevance to the Iran case.

Seizing the Embassy

The Iran hostage crisis began on Sunday, November 4, 1979, a normal working day for many in America’s Tehran embassy.³⁵ At around nine o’clock in the morning a body of Iranian students broke away from the larger group of demonstrators and began to congregate outside the walls of the embassy. They shouted slogans like “Death to America!” and “Death to the Shah!,” but in revolutionary Iran these were common enough refrains and so they provoked no special caution on the part of the embassy authorities. As former hostage Tom Schaefer, recalls, “it looked like a

bunch of students this time were coming by. I was not even concerned that students were going by, until someone said “they’re getting through the gate.” I honestly felt that’s all it was, it was a bunch of students. They probably just want to talk to us. And eventually we found that there was more than this because they were taking other American workers out of the outbuildings, blindfolding them, with guns to their heads, and that was my first indication really that this is more than just a student visit to our embassy, that this is serious.”³⁶ At around 10:30 a.m. Tehran time (2 a.m. in Washington D.C.), a large group of the students (estimates vary between several hundred and three thousand) stormed through the main gate of the compound and clambered over the walls of the embassy.³⁷ Within a couple of hours the students had full control of the embassy building, and most importantly, they now held sixty-five American citizens as hostages. This action, unbeknownst to the U.S. government, had been carefully planned in advance for some days or weeks by the students who undertook it.³⁸ Two days after this, the Ayatollah Khomeini gave his blessing to the hostage taking, thus sparking a full-scale crisis in U.S.-Iranian relations which remains an open wound today. For the next 444 days the hostage takers blindfolded, interrogated, and psychologically tortured the hostages, subjecting some of them to mock executions.

The motives of the hostage takers remain something of a mystery to Westerners even today, but the most common response within the Carter administration initially was to dismiss the radical students as “irrational” and even insane; what could they possibly hope to achieve by such an action? In his memoirs former President Jimmy Carter claimed that the Iranian leader “was acting insanely,” and notes that “we always behaved *as if* we were dealing with a rational person” (my italics).³⁹ According to this account, the students were simply fanatical extremists hell-bent on a course of action which had no rational, human basis. More sober judges of the Middle Eastern scene within the Carter administration argued that the embassy had been taken for domestic political reasons; the Ayatollah was by no means fully in control of Iranian politics in the immediate aftermath of the Shah’s fall, and so he perhaps engineered the takeover of the embassy himself in order to mobilize Iranians against the common foe, the “Great Satan.” Former National Security Council staff aide Gary Sick, for example, argues that “the Ayatollah was at least generally aware of the plans for an attack on the embassy and consciously exploited it for his own domestic political purposes . . . the real issue was Khomeini’s constitution and the realization of his vision of an Iranian republic.”⁴⁰

It seems beyond question that those around Khomeini manipulated the hostage episode for political gain in the weeks and months *after* it had actually occurred. However, there is little or no evidence to support Sick’s claim that the Ayatollah himself was even generally aware of what the students were planning to do before they actually did it. Massoumeh Ebtekar insists that although the students attempted to inform Khomeini of their plans beforehand, their attempts to reach him simply failed. In the days before the embassy seizure, the students planning the attack met with the Ayatollah Mousavi Khoeihi, a colleague of Khomeini, and asked him to tell Khomeini what they had in mind. But the cleric was reluctant. “He had told them that although he believed the Imam would approve the action in principle, he was reluctant to inform him directly. It might be difficult for the Imam, as leader and supreme revolutionary authority, to announce his consent publicly, he explained. The delegation insisted, and Mr. Khoeihi promised them he would bring up the matter as soon as the proper circumstances arose It wasn’t until

after the embassy takeover that we learned that Mr. Khoieniha had never succeeded in informing the Imam."⁴¹

Is this deliberate deception on Ebtekar's part? It seems difficult to understand why she might make a false claim so long after Khomeini's death, but such speculation is not decisive. More convincing is the fact that her statement is supported by close associates of Khomeini, who also insist that he had no knowledge of the students' plans until the takeover had actually taken place. According to Khoieniha himself, "the students wanted to tell their plans to Iman Khomeini and to get his backing for their action. I prevented this and convinced them to proceed with their plans without the knowledge of the Iman."⁴² Similarly Baqer Moin, author of the best English-speaking biography of Khomeini, argues that his subject was "taken by surprise by the affair of the embassy." For some days, he said nothing about the hostage incident publicly since he "needed time to gather his thoughts and assess the potential advantages and disadvantages of any pronouncement by him for or against the move." He made his move to back the students only when it seemed clear to him that the advantages of doing so outweighed the disadvantages.⁴³

This interpretation is further supported by others in Khomeini's immediate circle. Former Iranian Foreign Minister Ibrahim Yazdi insists that Khomeini had no knowledge of the embassy takeover before it happened, though he notes that the students naturally "informed him afterward."⁴⁴ According to one observer, the Ayatollah was actually "very angry" at the students during the first three days of the crisis; he may well have felt at first that the embassy seizure would actually provoke American intervention rather than prevent it.⁴⁵ Yazdi backs this up to some extent, claiming that Khomeini initially asked him to get the students out. "Who are these gangs?" Yazdi remembers Khomeini asking him. "Go and see if you can keep them out," the Iman ordered.⁴⁶

So far, we are no nearer to understanding why the embassy seizure itself took place, for we still know nothing about the original motivations of the students who planned and executed the takeover; but here Massoumeh Ebtekar's explanation becomes especially useful to historians. Ebtekar, who acted as the spokeswoman for the students through most of the hostage crisis, throws considerable light on the "why" question in her book, emphasizing the overriding importance of the 1953 analogy as a determining force behind the embassy takeover:

When the man whose long rule had brought riches beyond all description to his immediate family and associates, and impoverishment and cultural subjugation to the Iranian people, was welcomed in the United States, we believed that the West was once more determined to subvert our newly won independence. Were the fate and future of our country once again going to be decided in Washington D.C., which had first brought him to power in its 1953 coup? How could we voice our concern, our indignation? To whom could we protest? From the media establishment and from international bodies, the response was a deafening silence. Iranians, whose immense sacrifices had finally brought down a corrupt dynasty, were once again being ignored.⁴⁷

Later on in her book, Ebtekar recalls that "this was not the first time Iran had lived through harrowing times. In August 1953, a coup d'état engineered by the CIA that overthrew the democratically elected government of Dr. Mossadegh and

restored the Shah to power had dashed all hopes of establishing an independent democratic system. The price of genuine independence was heavy.” She insists that “our reading of our own history told us that we had to act quickly. . . action was our only choice.”⁴⁸ She is suggesting, in other words, that the students genuinely believed that the United States was about to mount another coup—this time against the Aytollah Khomeini.

Mohammed Mossadegh became Prime Minister of Iran in 1951. While he was by instinct a forceful nationalist rather than a Communist, Mossadegh was increasingly forced to rely upon more radical leftists as his political coalition weakened. His policies increasingly came into conflict with the priorities of the Eisenhower administration and with the economic interests of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, which had been doing business in Iran for most of the twentieth century. Mossadegh was overthrown, as Ebtekar notes, in a coup engineered in part by the Central Intelligence Agency (somewhat ineptly, by most accounts) and encouraged by the British. The Iranian monarchy and Muhammed Reza Shah were reinstated, and would rule Iran until the Islamic revolution of 1979.

In the years after 1953, the CIA’s role in Mossadegh’s overthrow would be much analyzed and debated, becoming the stuff of legend; as Gary Sick puts it, “the belief that the United States had single-handedly imposed a harsh tyrant on a reluctant populace became one of the central myths” in the relationship between the United States and Iran.⁴⁹ The CIA’s manoeuvres, it has often been noted, could not have succeeded had Mossadegh’s popularity not been declining and that of the Shah ascending. As former CIA Director Stansfield Turner recalls, “covert actions to overthrow governments work best when the situation is unstable and only a small push is needed to change it, as was true with Mossadegh.”⁵⁰ Nevertheless, whatever the weight one attributes to American actions in the downfall of Mossadegh, it was perceived in Iran as an unforgivable interference in its domestic political and economic affairs by an outside party, and a clear violation of its political sovereignty. Whether it truly made a difference or not, the United States had interfered, or attempted to interfere, in Iran’s internal affairs in a very visible way.

Generations of Iranians were brought up in the shadow of 1953, and it became a defining experience and national rallying point—a mixture of historical fact and exaggeration—in their lives. Consequently, when another Iranian leader whose political priorities clashed markedly with Western interests appeared on the scene after the fall of the Shah, it is easy to see why that historical experience should have become activated in such a striking way. There was little concrete evidence at the time (and none has emerged since) to suggest that the Carter administration had any plans to mount a second coup; according to available records, National Security Adviser Brzezinski was alone among Carter’s advisers in seriously considering such an action.⁵¹ Moreover, even if Carter had wished to take this action, the CIA lacked the human assets on the ground to make this viable,⁵² and the records show that the president strongly resisted pressure for the Shah’s admission initially (something which is hard to explain if his admission on medical grounds was in fact the pretext for a second coup). Nevertheless, perceptions mattered as much as, if not more than, reality. To expect that history would repeat itself was, moreover, an understandable position for the students to take at the time given the fact that none of this information was available to them.

What do other members of the hostage-taking group say about the role played by 1953 in their actions? Again, we do not need to take Ebtekar’s word for it that the

mental image of a second coup was what motivated the students to act. Recently, two other former hostage takers intimately involved in the takeover—Abbas Abdi and Ibrahim Asgharzadeh—have provided further evidence in support of the analogical interpretation. In an interview conducted with *Time* magazine in Tehran in 1998, Abdi—one of about a dozen student leaders behind the embassy takeover—defended the decision by the militants as justified “against a potential U.S.-backed coup d’état.” As related by Scott Macleod, “they genuinely feared, Abdi insists, that the Shah’s arrival in New York City in 1979 for medical treatment was part of a U.S. plot to restore him to power, as was done by a CIA-engineered coup d’état in 1953.”⁵³ Abdi also lends support to the claim that the Ayatollah Khomeini had no prior knowledge of the planned takeover. “The way we saw it, the Imam would either approve of the action afterward or disapprove of it, in which case we would have left the embassy,” he said.⁵⁴

Further light on why the 1953 comparison became so convincing to the students has been provided by Ibrahim Asgharzadeh, one of the small core of student leaders who actually planned the takeover. When the Americans decided to allow the Shah of Iran into the United States for medical treatment in 1979, this strengthened Iranian suspicions, causing radical Iranians to view this as “a prelude to some imminent coup attempt.”⁵⁵ After fleeing Iran in January, the Shah passed through a succession of countries looking for a safe haven. Having spent time in Egypt and Morocco, and after it was learnt that he was suffering from cancer, the Carter administration reluctantly agreed to allow the Shah to enter the United States. But as Asgharzadeh says, this provoked enormous suspicion amongst the Iranians: “The decision to occupy the embassy began with our reaction to what America had done. We felt that by allowing the Shah into America they were conspiring against the revolution.”⁵⁶ As Baqer Moin notes, Khomeini himself believed that the United States would not accept the new regime he intended to fashion, and that it was only a matter of time before America intervened. “When the cancer-ridden Shah was allowed into the United States for medical treatment on 22 October 1979... Khomeini fumed at what he considered to be a provocative act. To him, this was evidence of American plotting. His statements became increasingly belligerent, and he railed against the machinations of the ‘Great Satan.’”⁵⁷ In endorsing the takeover, Khomeini suggested that the embassy was critical since it would be the base for this supposed counter-revolution. “America expects to take the Shah there, engage in plots, create a base in Iran for these plots, and our young people are expected simply to remain idle and witness these things,”⁵⁸ he stated.

No doubt in years to come the evidence in favor of or against the claims of Ebtekar, Khoienha, Yazdi, and Asgharzadeh will accumulate, but it is worth noting that their remarks about 1953 are consistent also with the evidence provided by American commentators, including journalists who observed Iranians at the time and a number of the hostages themselves. According to Barry Rubin, the students based their actions “on a desire to block an alleged American-sponsored counter-revolution and to destroy the moderate regime.”⁵⁹ Rubin argues that the hostages were essentially an insurance policy against a U.S. intervention, since they were “not fully convinced of their ability to prevent a dramatic reversal of the revolution and the restoration of the Shah to power—as, after all, had occurred in August, 1953.”⁶⁰ Expecting that the United States would try to repeat its actions of that year, the radicals sought to forestall this expected blow. Similarly, John Kifner, observing events in Tehran for the *New York Times* as the Shah was admitted to hospital in the

United States, observed that the “sense of plot” was so widespread in the city that it was “almost impossible to find anyone who believes the Shah is actually sick.”⁶¹ As former State Department official Henry Precht remembers, “the one constant theme that obsessed the movement against the Shah, both the leader of the revolution and the followers, was a fear that the United States would repeat 1953 (when the Shah was restored to his throne with U.S. help) in destroying Iran’s revolution.”⁶²

If the students misinterpreted the admission of the Shah to the United States as a portent of another 1953, there were also other events which seemed to confirm this suspicion. From the beginning of 1979—having lost a key Middle Eastern ally in the Shah—the Carter administration began trying to salvage what remained of the tattered U.S.-Iranian relationship; it sought, for instance, to re-establish the American embassy in Tehran, whose membership had been much depleted by the onset of the revolution, and it attempted to normalize relations with the new political authorities in general. Yet as Michael Metrisko (U.S. Embassy Political Officer in Tehran at the time and a hostage throughout the crisis) puts it, “what we saw as normalization with the new provisional government, with the new revolutionary government, the students and a lot of clergy—a lot of the ultra-militant—would see as the destruction of revolution.”⁶³ Like Kifner, Metrisko recalls that many Iranians did not believe that the Shah was sick “until he actually died, and even then [they did not believe it].”⁶⁴

As William Daugherty—a hostage and CIA member who had only recently arrived in Iran just prior to the embassy seizure—points out, “to the ever-suspicious Iranian radicals, the admission of the Shah for medical treatment was a sham designed to hide a conspiracy aimed at overthrowing their revolutionary government.” In a move which was only to heap fuel upon the fire, Iranian moderates Mehdi Bazargan and Ibrahim Yazdi⁶⁵ met briefly with National Security Adviser Brzezinski in Algiers on November 1, 1979, ostensibly to celebrate the anniversary of Algerian independence. “In this meeting, which was not publicized in Algiers, the Shah and the future of U.S.-Iranian relations were discussed,” Daugherty notes.⁶⁶ The meeting between the National Security Adviser and the moderates within the provisional Iranian government undoubtedly enflamed the passions of the students and helped reinforce the historical analogy already in their heads.

Upon entering the embassy, many of the students were under the impression that everyone in the embassy was engaged in intelligence activity, that it was in effect what the Ayatollah Khomeini’s son Ahmad called a “nest of spies.”⁶⁷ An extensive search was immediately carried out. Interviews with the hostages themselves repeatedly confirm this, but the experiences of two of the hostages—press officer Barry Rosen and communications officer Charles Jones—may serve as typical examples. When Rosen was asked by an Iranian interrogator what his function was inside the embassy, he replied that he was a press officer. The interrogator simply did not believe him, however. “No, this is a lie. You are CIA!,” she said, and then “went into a tirade about how the CIA had destroyed Iran.”⁶⁸ Similarly, Charles Jones relates that he “tried to explain a little bit to them about international diplomacy and what the functions of an embassy were. But it was hopeless. They were absolutely convinced that everyone in the embassy was a spy.”⁶⁹ While there were in fact several CIA operatives inside the embassy, the assumption that everyone was a spy was of course incorrect; but as William Daugherty recalls, “CIA involvement in the overthrow of Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadeq in 1953 loomed extraordinarily large in the minds of Iranians” and this had a clear effect on the way the students

reasoned. “Always suspicious of U.S. motives and sincerity,” he notes, “Iranians during this period were constantly looking for signs of U.S. intentions to repeat the coup of 1953.”⁷⁰

The Potency of 1953: Availability and Representativeness

One danger which researchers working in the area of analogical reasoning have long been aware of is the possibility of *ex post facto* reasoning.⁷¹ There is a risk, which cannot be entirely ruled out, that the students used images of 1953 as a pretext of some sort, an excuse to mask their true intentions. Several factors make this unlikely, however. First of all, if one places oneself in their position—with limited knowledge of the American political system, of Carter’s presidency and of what was going on behind the scenes in Washington—it is entirely understandable, from the vantage of revolutionary Iran, that the students would imagine that history was about to repeat itself. This view, moreover, was not confined to the hostage takers themselves, but was widespread in the Iranian media at the time. As David Farber notes, “the dissident Iranian media . . . spoke in the darkest possible tones about the threat of an American-sponsored coup to save the Shah, just like the CIA-led coup of 1953.”⁷² Use of analogical reasoning in this instance is also consistent with what we know about how human beings reason when confronted with a high degree of uncertainty. Secondly, the former students have continued to spontaneously recall the impact of 1953 in the years since the hostage crisis—despite in most cases not being asked explicitly about the role of historical analogies—and these recollections are remarkably uniform. Thirdly, there is no clear rationale for the students to continue to insist that 1953 was uppermost in their minds in interviews conducted today. If anything, given that we now know that Carter had no serious plans to mount a second coup, the former students have an incentive not to mention this factor. The fact that they continue to do so, however, surely adds to the explanatory power of the analogical approach in this case.

Why, though, did 1953 exert such a powerful mental hold upon the hostage takers in 1979? Here the work of Kahneman and Tversky on mental shortcuts or heuristics, described briefly earlier, has much to add to the discussion. First of all, 1953 was especially *available* to the hostage takers because it represented an exceptionally vivid event. The majority of the students were in their early twenties when the embassy was seized; most had therefore not even been born in 1953. To many in the United States government, moreover, 1953 was ancient history. Just as until the early 1990s many outside observers assumed that the terms “Serb” or “Bosnian” had no meaning for modern Yugoslav citizens, most members of the Carter administration in 1979 were unaware that anyone in Iran still thought about 1953 as anything other than a distant memory.

Nevertheless, the event did form a major part of Iranian experience and was cognitively available to the students for this reason. The events of 1953 had become the stuff of Iranian folklore during the years in which the students were growing up, but this was something which U.S. decision-makers never understood. As Metrisko notes, “in Washington there was a failure to understand the vast degree of suppressed hatred that had been caused by our bringing about the collapse of the Mossadegh government. That was Iran’s chance to become democratic. We screwed it up, and we bragged about it.”⁷³ Similarly, though he disputes the idea that the embassy seizure was motivated primarily by fear of another 1953, Gary Sick readily

concedes that Washington decision-makers failed to realize the continued potency of this memory in Iran. In the United States, he notes, 1953 “had all the relevance of a pressed flower . . . in Iran, however, the memory (or mythology) of 1953 was as fresh as if it had happened only the week before.”⁷⁴

Further enhancing the availability of 1953 as an event, perhaps, was the publication (with execrable timing, from a U.S. perspective) of Kermit Roosevelt’s memoir of his role in the 1953 coup, *Countercoup*. The book first appeared in 1979. While it would be unrealistic to assume that all the students had read this, at least one of the hostages believes that the publicity surrounding it in Iran did have an effect upon his captors.⁷⁵ Probably more important was the fact that accusations of conspiratorial plots were all over the Iranian media, so much so that the belief that another plot was afoot was shared by many moderate Iranians such as Yazdi. “You must keep in your mind,” he recalls, “what happened in August 1953 in Iran. That the Americans and the British . . . made a military coup against the national government of Dr. Mossadegh and the Shah . . . fled the country. They brought him back. The moment that they wanted to take the Shah to the United States, all these memories came to the mind of our people. They say ‘oh no,’ that’s again the same story.” Yazdi notes that at the time he and his colleagues requested that a team of Iranian doctors be allowed to come to the United States and examine the Shah, so that ordinary Iranians would accept that the Shah was indeed sick and not about to be restored to power. This request was refused.⁷⁶

Even the Shah himself believed that planning for a second coup was underway. According to Hamilton Jordan, the Shah “had the dream, totally unrealistic, that Khomeini might quickly fall on his face and that there might be a chance for him to return to Iran just as he had done in 1953 with the help of the CIA.”⁷⁷ Henry Precht adds further evidence. When the Shah left Iran, the original intention was that he would stay in California. “When he left though, someone, I’m not sure who, got to him and persuaded him to stop off in Morocco. I think the thought was just as in 1953 . . . he went as far as Rome and then he was summoned back after a coup had taken place. I think he thought ‘I’ll stop on Morocco, the coup will take place, I’ll be called home in triumph.’”⁷⁸ If even the Shah was deluded into thinking that Carter would order the CIA to intervene, it is little wonder that many ordinary Iranians made a similar miscalculation.

Why did the hostage takers think the events of 1979 *representative* of those of 1953? Here our answer must be more speculative, but several possibilities seem to carry some weight. First of all, like Mossadegh before him, Khomeini was quite simply seen as a threat to U.S. interests, making it easy in the language of Dedre Gentner to “map” one onto the other. Furthermore, as long-time Iranian expert James Bill notes, the movements each man symbolized—while quite different in inspiration—were fiercely nationalistic in character.⁷⁹ Thirdly, Iranians knew or suspected that both Khomeini and Mossadegh were similarly portrayed in the United States as “irrational” figures. Lastly, the Shah’s flight from Iran superficially resembled that of 1953. While he did not in fact visit the United States on the earlier occasion, the almost birdlike manner with which he flitted from one state to another in 1953 was repeated in 1979. It is possible that this too was remembered by older Iranians and contributed to the strength of the analogy. And then, of course, the precipitating events—the admission of the Shah to the United States and the November 1 meeting—seemed to provide Iranians with the proof they had been looking for all along that another coup was about to take place.

Yesterday's Terrorist is Tomorrow's Policeman

The finding suggested by this article is potentially of broad interest because it confirms the sense of Martha Crenshaw and others that cognitive models—developed originally in the United States to explain the behavior of psychologically normal individuals—do in fact have some worth in the study of terrorism. It is worth emphasizing that, so far as we can tell, the embassy seizure was carried out by psychologically normal individuals as opposed to deranged or insane ones, a finding which of course reinforces the growing consensus in the literature; all of the hostage takers interviewed subsequently by members of the Western media have enjoyed relatively normal lives and careers in the years since the hostage crisis ended.⁸⁰

When asked to recall the Iran hostage crisis, most Westerners understandably call to mind TV images of bearded fanatics and extremists; but what few notice is that many of the original hostage takers are now key leaders of the democratic reformist movement in Iran. Asgharzadeh, for instance, is now a member of the Tehran Islamic City Council, supports democratic elections, and has high political ambitions. As Scott Macleod notes, "These days, Asgharzadeh is a changed man. At 44, he is a yuppie-ish politician with a seat on Tehran's municipal council, and he is frequently denounced by hard-liners. He has shaved his beard and clearly prefers cracking jokes to raising a clenched fist."⁸¹ Another of the leading hostage takers, Mohsen Mirdamadi, has prospered in later years and become a leader of the reformist movement in Iran. As Bill Berkeley and Nahid Siamdoust put it, nowadays "it is hard to square the image of the fire-breathing, world-defying, avowedly Islamist "terrorist," as Americans knew him then, with the course of his more recent career. Mirdamadi in middle age is a leading figure in Iran's embattled reformist movement, including its independent press—in vehement opposition to the ruling mullahs in whose name he acted in his youth. As both a journalist and a politician, he has played a prominent role in the power struggle that has raised—and, more recently, dashed—the hopes of millions for a more open and democratic Iran. As an elected member of Iran's Majlis, or parliament, Mirdamadi for a time was the head of its national security and foreign affairs committee, advocating a normalization of relations with America."⁸² If most terrorists are in fact normal in a psychological sense, then we can expect them to utilize the same kind of cognitive shortcuts that both attribution theory and schema theory suggest are central to how human beings understand the world around them.

The Iran hostage crisis was ultimately a tragedy for both the United States and Iran, and it exerted a heavy toll on relationships between the two nations which is still very much in evidence today. But if the students who seized the embassy in November 1979 are to be believed, the whole train of events which led to American hostages spending 444 days in captivity was initiated in part by simple cognitive misperception. The students invaded the Tehran embassy essentially because they misinterpreted the signals they were receiving from Washington; signs and messages designed to reassure the fragile new regime had precisely the opposite effect, and they did so in large part because they evoked memories of events which most members of the Carter administration assumed had long since lost any meaning or relevance. The students also misperceived the intentions of Khomeini, and most importantly, the fact that he did not share their aspirations for a new democratic order in Iran.

Some of the implications of this for the study of terrorism in general, and hostage taking in particular, produce more scientific explanations for commonplace

observations; for instance, decision-makers commonly refuse to “do deals with terrorists” because this will only encourage further terrorism. If hostage crisis *a* produces the desired result for the hostage takers, the hostage takers may conclude that this tactic works and seek to repeat it in situation *b*. There are also deeper policy implications, however, for the Iran case suggests that we need to pay close attention to the risk of evoking dangerous analogies in the minds of adversaries; we may sometimes provoke terrorist acts simply by acting in ways which reinforce conspiratorial images in the heads of those who already distrust us. Governmental decision-makers, however, often fail to notice how their actions may evoke false perceptions in the heads of others.

How might policymakers *avoid* feeding the popularity of conspiracy theories in states whose populations already harbour an intense dislike of us? Admittedly this is difficult where a long-established tradition of conspiratorial thinking exists,⁸³ and it is also possible that the Iran case was *sui generis* and should not be mined for general lessons. The psychological literature on conspiracy theorizing and delusions further suggests a cautionary note about the limits of what can be done to “assuage” those who firmly believe that they are the victims of such plots. In addition to searching for confirmatory evidence, conspiracy theorists tend to ignore or downplay disconfirmatory evidence, items of information which appear to show that there is in fact no conspiracy.⁸⁴ They also have a tendency to engage in Von Domarus-type thinking or paleologic—drawing conclusions from inadequate evidence—and their views are often highly resistant to change.⁸⁵ One need not resort to psychopathological explanations to account for this however. It may also be related to cognitive consistency; individuals prefer not to hold incompatible beliefs, and so try to maintain order or balance between them.⁸⁶ In his famous study of John Foster Dulles, for instance, Ole Holsti shows that Dulles rationalized away evidence that the Soviets desired some form of accommodation or *détente* as evidence of weakness rather than good intentions.⁸⁷ In a similar fashion, while the Iranian hostage takers were not “paranoid”—there was after all an objective basis to their fears—even moderate Iranians rationalized away evidence that the Carter administration was seeking an accommodation with the new Islamic regime, viewing this as further evidence of conspiracy. There may thus be limits to the power of “good intentions” in attempting to minimize the risks posed by conspiracy-minded terrorists.

Nevertheless, there is no more important issue confronting counterterrorist decision-makers today than that of what we can do to minimize further attacks and incidents. One seemingly obvious but little heeded measure we can take is to refrain from engaging in crusading foreign interventions where these bear no essential relationship to our interests, or where short-term gains are outweighed by the risks of long-term adverse effects. Policymakers very rarely seem to consider the long-term impacts their actions may have on generations to come. In retrospect, the 1953 coup probably represented an overreaction to the situation in the Middle East. By most measures, Mossadegh was already unpopular by the time of America’s intervention, and it is highly unlikely that he would have clung to power much longer in any case; indeed, had Mossadegh not been so close to the precipice, it seems unlikely that a coup would have succeeded there. In this sense, the U.S. intervention was both unnecessary and avoidable. The Iran hostage crisis also represents a classic example of what Chalmers Johnson calls “blowback,”⁸⁸ since 1953 colored the way in which most Iranians interpreted Carter’s desperate but genuine efforts to reach out to the fragile new Islamic state.

Also avoidable was the publicization of a meeting which was, in retrospect at least, bound to be misperceived and to enflame the passions of those already inclined to suspect our intentions; while some effort was made by the Carter administration and moderate members of the provisional government to disguise the fact that they were in contact—the November 1 meeting between Brzezinski, Bazargan, and Yazdi took place in Algiers, not Iran—clearly not enough consideration was given to the impact this would have on the already hypervigilant Iranian population if and when the meeting became public knowledge. As David Harris notes, “neither side . . . gave enough heed to the potential explosiveness with which their contact would be perceived in Iran,”⁸⁹ though as already noted, Yazdi recalls that he did urge Brzezinski to allow Iranian doctors to examine the Shah. News of the meeting appeared in the Tehran press only the day after the meeting, and this had a devastating impact on the students. As Ibrahim Asgarzadeh recalls, “the Americans were obviously looking to make history repeat itself, and we had to deliver a blow to make them come to their senses.”⁹⁰

The admission of the Shah to the United States was in retrospect both unnecessary and highly counterproductive; there were a number of hospitals in Western Europe which could have quietly treated the former ruler of Iran, but Jimmy Carter eventually bowed to pressure from prominent Americans such as Henry Kissinger and David Rockefeller to admit the Shah to the United States. Ironically, however, Carter strongly suspected that the Iranians would seize America’s Tehran embassy if the Shah was admitted. “What are you guys going to advise me to do if they overrun our embassy and take our people hostage?”, he asked his advisers angrily at the time. “On that day we will all sit here with long drawn white faces and realize we’ve been had.”⁹¹ Carter’s first instinct had been to deny the Shah admission, and in retrospect he should probably have held to this initial conviction. Going beyond the Tehran case, it is clear that policymakers should avoid wherever possible appearing to provide confirmatory support for the conspiracy theories of those who are already watching us for signs of malevolent intentions towards them.

Robert McNamara and James Blight have recently urged us to practice “empathy” when dealing with others, placing ourselves in the shoes of our adversaries in order to better understand their motivations and reasoning.⁹² Once we accept that terrorists are in some sense rational and normal, it becomes possible to apply this rule to our understanding of those who engage in extreme behaviours. We should place ourselves, so far as we can, in the shoes of the terrorist and appreciate the life experiences which fashion his or her beliefs, considering the analogies and cultural histories which are likely to drive terroristic behavior within different contexts.⁹³ The analogical reasoning perspective can also be used to illuminate our own (counterterrorist) decision-making processes, especially responses to hostage crises. Decision-making during the 1975 Mayaguez incident was significantly informed by the analogy several members of the Ford administration drew with the Pueblo incident of 1968; similarly, the Carter administration’s own thinking was significantly affected by lessons drawn from several previous hostage crises, including the Pueblo and Entebbe hostage crises.⁹⁴

Homo Economicus and Homo Psychologicus

Approaches to the study of terrorism which emphasize strategic or rational choice (a model which has been aptly termed *Homo Economicus*) represent a much-needed

corrective to traditional psychodynamic or psychoanalytic approaches.⁹⁵ However, the approach taken here is more in keeping with Herb Simon's "bounded rationality" tradition, and it is worth explaining briefly why the latter has been preferred in this instance to the former. Simon was one of the first social scientists to observe that, rather than engaging in a full information search as models of comprehensive rationality suggest, individuals make frequent use of shortcuts or heuristics; his own special contribution was to suggest that individuals frequently "satisfice" rather than maximize expected utility (a key assumption of neo-classical economics).⁹⁶ The Iranian case obviously fits this boundedly rational, *Homo Psychologicus* image of reality rather better than it does that of mainstream economics, with its assumptions of perfect information, maximized utility, and the like. This is not to say that *Homo Economicus*-derived models are not useful in other contexts, however; as researchers, we need to carefully delineate those circumstances in which simplifying assumptions can be made about terrorist behavior (for instance, where there is little or no room for variation in individual responses) and those which necessitate more complex analyses, reflecting the ways in which cognitive and social psychologists have found us to behave when confronted by a high degree of uncertainty and a low degree of information.

The objective of this paper has been to explain the origins of the Iran hostage crisis as a case study. However, we are entitled to ask how far such explanations can be pushed in other hostage taking cases, and whether terrorism in general can be explained this way. Clearly, it would be absurd to suggest that analogical reasoning somehow informs all terrorist incidents, and it seems likely that this approach can illuminate terrorist decision-making in some cases but not others. In general this has been the finding of the foreign policy decision-making literature, which holds that cognitive shortcuts like historical analogies are likely to be utilized when individuals face a high degree of uncertainty, stress, or time pressure.⁹⁷ Aside from the perils attendant in analogical reasoning, more research is needed into the various psychological traps which attend terrorist and counterterrorist decision-making (and decision-making in general).⁹⁸ Prospect theory is another particularly interesting candidate for the explanation of terrorist behavior. This approach suggests that actors are apt to be most risk-acceptant when they face a domain of losses (in other words, where they perceive that they are "losing" in some sense).⁹⁹ This is well worth exploring in the context of terrorist studies, since it may be that terrorists are most likely to strike out when confronted by losses of some sort and become most risk-averse after a perceived victory. Many terrorist incidents may also involve rule-based reasoning, as opposed to case-based reasoning (of which analogical reasoning is a variant).¹⁰⁰ Future research needs to utilize all of these approaches, drawing upon the full tool kit of the cognitive psychologist as the turn away from psychoanalytic approaches increases apace.

Notes

1. Massoumeh Ebtekar with Fred Reed, *Takeover in Tehran: The Inside Story of the 1979 U.S. Embassy Capture* (Vancouver, B.C.: Talonbooks, 2000).

2. Fortunately a good few interviews were done with the former hostage takers on or around the 20th anniversary of the hostage crisis by Western journalists and TV crews, and these will be used to bolster our account.

3. The author wishes to thank four anonymous reviewers whose comments greatly improved the final version of this article. Any errors which remain are of course to be attributed to the author alone.

4. For overviews of these approaches, see for instance Andrew Silke, "Cheshire-Cat Logic: The Recurring Theme of Terrorist Abnormality in Psychological Research," *Psychology, Crime and Law* 4 (1998): 51–69, and Rex Hudson, *The Sociology and Psychology of Terrorism: Who Becomes a Terrorist And Why?*, a report prepared under an interagency agreement by the Federal Research Division, Library of Congress (Washington, D.C.: The Division, 1999).

5. See for instance Jerrold M. Post, "Terrorist Psycho-Logic: Terrorist Behavior as a Product of Psychological Forces," in Walter Reich, ed., *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States Of Mind* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990) and Jerrold M. Post, *Leaders and Their Followers in a Dangerous World: The Psychology of Political Behavior* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004). Post maintains that terrorists are psychologically normal, while also insisting that most terrorists share narcissistic characteristics.

6. Of recent notable work in this area, see in particular Andrew Silke, ed., *Terrorists, Victims and Society: Psychological Perspectives on Terrorism and Its Consequences* (Chichester, England: John Wiley, 2003); Fathali Moghaddam and Anthony Marsella, eds., *Understanding Terrorism: Psychosocial Roots, Consequences, and Interventions* (Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2004) and John Horgan, *The Psychology of Terrorism* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2005).

7. John Horgan, "The Search For The Terrorist Personality," in Silke, ed., *Terrorists, Victims and Society*, (see note 6 above), 7.

8. *Ibid.* 10.

9. Andrew Silke, "Becoming a Terrorist," in Silke, ed., *Terrorists, Victims and Society* (see note 6 above), 32.

10. Hudson, *The Sociology and Psychology of Terrorism* (see note 4 above), 27.

11. Martha Crenshaw, "The Causes of Terrorism," *Comparative Politics*, 13 (1981): 379–99; see also Silke, "Becoming a Terrorist," in Silke ed., *Terrorists, Victims and Society*. (see note 6 above).

12. On this point, see Maxwell Taylor, *The Terrorist* (New York: Brassey's, 1988).

13. Andrew Silke, "An Introduction To Terrorism Research," in Silke, ed., *Research on Terrorism: Trends, Achievements and Failures* (London: Frank Cass, 2004), 1.

14. Martha Crenshaw, "The Logic of Terrorism: Terrorist Behavior as a Product of Strategic Choice" in Reich, ed., *Origins of Terrorism*. (see note 5 above).

15. Martha Crenshaw, "Questions to be Answered, Research to be Done, Knowledge to be Applied," in Reich, ed., *Origins of Terrorism* (see note 5 above), 259.

16. Of the existing literature on hostage taking, only Margaret Wilson has utilized cognitive concepts in order to understand terrorist incidents. See Margaret Wilson, "Toward a Model of Terrorist Behavior in Hostage Taking Incidents," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 44 (2000): 403–424.

17. See for instance Todd Sandler and John Scott, "Terrorist Success in Hostage Taking Incidents: An Empirical Study," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. 31 (1987): 35–53; Brigitte Nacos, David Fan, and John Young, "Terrorism and the Print Media: The 1985 TWA Hostage Crisis," *Terrorism* 12 (1989): 107–15; Margaret Hermann and Charles Hermann, "Hostage Taking, the Presidency and Stress," in Reich, ed., *Origins of Terrorism* (see note 5 above); Gary Sick, "Taking Vows: The Domestication of Policy-Making in Hostage Incidents," in Reich, ed., *Origins of Terrorism*; Margaret Wilson, "Toward a Model of Terrorist Behavior in Hostage Taking Incidents" (see note 16 above); Margaret Wilson, "The Psychology of Hostage Taking," in Silke, ed., *Terrorists, Victims and Society* (see note 6 above).

18. Much of this literature was conducted in the 1980s and early 1990s. More recently, behavioral psychologists utilizing relational frame theory have turned their attention to this topic, but these accounts have so far been used exclusively to understand learning processes in language. See for instance Ian Stewart et al., "Generating Derived Relational Networks via the Abstraction of Common Physical Properties: A Possible Model of Analogical Reasoning," *The Psychological Record* 51 (2001): 381–408.

19. Michael Eysenck and Mark Keane, *Cognitive Psychology: A Student's Handbook* (Hove, U.K.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1990), 399.

20. *Ibid.* 401.

21. Mary Gick and Keith Holyoak, "Schema Induction and Analogical Transfer," *Cognitive Psychology* 15 (1983): 1–38.

22. Dedre Gentner, "Structure Mapping: A Theoretical Framework For Analogy," *Cognitive Science* 7 (1983): 155–170.
23. Gentner, "The Mechanism of Analogical Learning," in Stella Vosniadou and Andrew Ortony, eds., *Similarity and Analogical Reasoning* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
24. Catherine Clement and Dedre Gentner, "Systematicity as a Selection Constraint in Analogical Mapping," *Cognitive Science* 15 (1991): 89–132.
25. Henry Gleitman, *Psychology*, fourth edition (London: W.W. Norton, 1995), 268.
26. Gick and Holyoak, "Schema Induction and Analogical Transfer," (see note 21 above), 32.
27. Ernest May, *Lessons of the Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 217–287; Richard Neustadt and Ernest May, *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision Makers* (New York: Freedom Press, 1986); Dwain Mefford, "Analogical Reasoning and the Definition of the Situation: Back to Snyder for Concepts and Forward to Artificial Intelligence for Method," in Charles Hermann et al., *New Directions in the Study of Foreign Policy* (Boston, MA: Allen and Unwin, 1987); Alex Hybel, *How Leaders Reason: U.S. Intervention in the Caribbean Basin and Latin America* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1990); Hybel, "Learning and Reasoning by Analogy," in Michael Fry, ed., *History, the White House and the Kremlin: Statesmen as Historians* (New York: Pinter, 1991); Mefford, "The Power of Historical Analogies: Soviet Interventions in Eastern Europe and U.S. Interventions in Central America," in Fry, ed., *History, the White House and the Kremlin*; Yuen Foong Khong, "The Lessons of Korea and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965," in George Breslauer and Philip Tetlock, eds., *Learning in US and Soviet Foreign Policy* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991); Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu and the Vietnam Decisions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992); David Patrick Houghton, "The Role of Analogical Reasoning in Novel Foreign Policy Situations," *British Journal of Political Science* 26 (1996): 523–52; M. J. Peterson, "The Use of Analogies in Outer Space Law," *International Organization* 51 (1997): 245–274; Houghton, "Historical Analogies and the Cognitive Dimension of Domestic Policymaking," *Political Psychology* 19 (1998): 279–303; Houghton, "Analogical Reasoning and Policymaking: Where and When Is It Used?," *Policy Sciences* 31 (1998): 151–176; Christopher Hemmer, "Historical Analogies and the Definition of Interests: The Iranian Hostage Crisis and Ronald Reagan's Policy Toward the Hostages in Lebanon," *Political Psychology* 20 (1999): 267–289; Houghton, *U.S. Foreign Policy and the Iran Hostage Crisis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Marijke Breuning, "The Role of Analogies and Abstract Reasoning in Decision-Making: Evidence from the Debate over Truman's Proposal for Development Assistance," *International Studies Quarterly* 47 (2003): 229–245; Annika Brandstrom, Fredrik Bynander, Paul t'Hart, "Governing by Looking Back: Historical Analogies and Crisis Management," *Public Administration* 82 (2004): 191–210; Alex Griorescu, "Mapping the UN-League of Nations Analogy: Are There Still Lessons to be Learned from the League?," *Global Governance* 11 (2005): 25–42.
28. Hybel, *How Leaders Reason* (see note 27 above); Mefford, "The Power of Historical Analogies" (see note 27 above); Houghton, "The Role of Analogical Reasoning in Novel Foreign Policy Situations" and "Historical Analogies and the Cognitive Dimension of Domestic Policymaking" (see note 27 above).
29. Khong, *Analogies At War* (see note 27 above), 110–11.
30. *Ibid.*, 10.
31. *Ibid.*, 214.
32. *Ibid.*, 217–218.
33. See especially Daniel Kahneman, Paul Slovic, and Amos Tversky, eds., *Judgment Under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
34. Barbara Combs and Paul Slovic, "Causes of Death: Biased Newspaper Coverage and Biased Judgments," *Journalism Quarterly* 56 (1979): 837–843.
35. Friday is the holy day in Iran, so the U.S. embassy used Sunday as the beginning of the working week.
36. Quoted in CIA, "Moving Targets," BBC, Broadcast in Britain, July 1992. Schaefer was the Defense Intelligence Agency's chief in Tehran between 1978 and 1979.

37. Tehran is eight-and-a-half hours ahead of Washington, D.C.
38. For a detailed account of the planning in preparation for the embassy seizure, see Ebtekar, *Takeover in Tehran*, (see note 1 above), 47–63.
39. Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York: Bantam, 1982), 468.
40. Gary Sick, *All Fall Down: America's Encounter With Iran* (New York: Random House, 1985), 251.
41. Ebtekar, *Takeover in Tehran* (see note 1 above), 58.
42. Interview with Mousavi Khoieniha, Iran Project, Antelope Productions. Quoted in *Storyline: 444 Days*, broadcast on British television, BBC2, 14 November 1998.
43. Baqer Moin, *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1999), 226–227.
44. Interview with Ibrahim Yazdi, Iranian Project, Antelope Productions. Yazdi was an associate of Khomeini and served as his Foreign Minister for a time.
45. Interview with Dr. Rouhani, Iranian Project, Antelope Productions.
46. Yazdi interview, Antelope Productions.
47. Ebtekar, *Takeover in Tehran*, (see note 1 above), 37.
48. Ebtekar, *Takeover in Tehran* (see note 1 above), 52.
49. Sick, *All Fall Down* (see note 40 above), 7.
50. Stansfield Turner, *Terrorism and Democracy* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1991), 77.
51. Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle. Memoirs of the National Security Adviser, 1977–1981* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1983), 382–398.
52. See Kenneth Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict Between Iran and America* (New York: Random House, 2004), 163.
53. Scott Macleod, “Can Iran Be Forgiven?,” *Time* 152: 26–28, 3 August 1998, 27.
54. *Ibid.*
55. Rubin, *Paved With Good Intentions* (see note 59 below), 303.
56. Interview with Ibrahim Asgharzadeh, Iran Project, Antelope Productions.
57. Moin, *Khomeini* (see note 43 above), 220.
58. *Ibid.*
59. Barry Rubin, *Paved With Good Intentions: The American Experience and Iran* (New York: Penguin, 1981), 298.
60. *Ibid.*, 303.
61. John Kifner, “Bitter Hatred—of the Shah and the U.S.—Reunites Iran,” *New York Times*, 18 November 1979. The Shah had been diagnosed with cancer, and had been allowed into the United States by Jimmy Carter on humanitarian grounds.
62. Quoted in Harold Saunders, “The Crisis Begins,” in Warren Christopher, ed., *American Hostages in Iran: The Conduct of a Crisis* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1985), 43.
63. Interview with Michael Metrisko, Iran Project, Antelope Productions.
64. *Ibid.*
65. Yazdi had graduated from a U.S. medical school and had practiced his profession in the United States. He also held a Permanent Resident Alien green card.
66. William Daugherty, “A First Tour Like No Other,” *Studies In Intelligence*, (Spring 1998):1–45.
67. Quoted in John Stempel, *Inside the Iranian Revolution* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1981), 225.
68. Quoted in Tim Wells, *444 Days: The Hostages Remember* (New York: Harcourt, 1985), 87.
69. *Ibid.*, 90.
70. Daugherty, “A First Tour Like No Other,” (see note 66 above), 13.
71. See in particular Khong, *Analogies At War* (see note 27 above); Houghton, *U.S. Foreign Policy and the Iran Hostage Crisis* (see note 27 above).
72. David Farber, *Taken Hostage: The Iran Hostage Crisis and America's First Encounter With Radical Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 99.
73. Michael Metrisko, Iranian Project interview, Antelope Productions.
74. Sick, *All Fall Down*, (see note 40 above), 8.
75. Kermit Roosevelt, *Countercoup: The Struggle for the Control of Iran* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979). See Metrisko interview Antelope Productions.
76. Interview with Ibrahim Yazdi, Iran Project, Antelope Productions.

77. Hamilton Jordan, Oral History Interview, Miller Center Interviews, Jimmy Carter Library, 6 November 1981, p. 80.
78. Interview with Henry Precht, Iran Project, Antelope Productions.
79. James Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 96.
80. This is admittedly a well-worn point in the literature by now; however, since so many commentators insist on clinging to a “common sense” version of the abnormality thesis even today, arguably this is a point we should keep on making. See Silke, “Becoming a Terrorist,” (see note 9 above).
81. Macleod, “Can Iran Be Forgiven?” (see note 53 above).
82. See Bill Berkeley and Nahid Siamdoust, “The Hostage-Takers’ Second Act,” *Columbia Journalism Review* September/October 2004, available online at <http://www.cjr.org/issues/2004/6/letter-berkeley-siamdoust.asp>.
83. Robert Robins and Jerrold Post, *Political Paranoia: The Psychopolitics of Hatred* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), Chapter 2.
84. See in particular Daniel Freeman and Philippa Garety, eds., *Paranoia: The Psychology of Persecutory Delusions* (New York: Psychology Press, 2004), Chapter 4.
85. Robins and Post, *Political Paranoia* (see note 83 above), 9.
86. See for instance Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1957).
87. Ole Holsti, “The Belief System and National Images: A Case Study,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 6 (1962): 244–255.
88. Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000).
89. David Harris, *The Crisis: The President, the Prophet and the Shah: 1979 and the Coming of Militant Islam* (New York: Little, Brown, 2004), 200–201.
90. Quoted in Harris, *The Crisis* (see note 89 above), 201.
91. Hamilton Jordan, *Crisis: The Last Year of the Carter Presidency* (New York: Putnam, 1982), 5.
92. Robert McNamara and James Blight, *Wilson’s Ghost: Reducing the Risk of Conflict, Killing and Catastrophe in the 21st Century* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001).
93. See Karl Seger, “Deterring Terrorists,” in Silke, ed., *Terrorists, Victims and Society* (see note 6 above), 264.
94. This is essentially the argument of one of my own previous studies. See Houghton, *U.S. Foreign Policy and the Iran Hostage Crisis* (see note 27 above).
95. The terms Homo Psychologicus and Homo Economicus are borrowed from Shanto Iyengar and William McGuire, eds., *Explorations in Political Psychology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993).
96. See for instance Herbert Simon, *Models of Man: Social and Rational* (New York: Wiley, 1957).
97. Ole Holsti, “Foreign Policy Formation Viewed Cognitively,” in Robert Axelrod, ed., *Structure of Decision: The Cognitive Maps of Political Elites* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976).
98. See John Hammond, Ralph Kierney, Howard Raiffa et al., “The Hidden Traps in Decision-Making,” *Harvard Business Review*. (September-October 1998).
99. Rose McDermott, *Risk Taking In International Politics: Prospect Theory in American Foreign Policy* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1998).
100. See Breuning, “The Role of Analogies and Abstract Reasoning in Decision-Making” (see note 27 above).