

Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy Flaws: A Case Study of the Development of the 1980 Iran Hostage Rescue Mission

Mark A. SELZER

Abstract

In the post-9/11 world, there has been a great degree of attention focused upon how nations should respond to demands placed by the perpetrators of terror. The process of creating an effective response policy is essential for any government in today's international security environment. This article looks at the process of policy formation and the potentially negative effects of bureaucratic politics on that process, by reviewing a case study of one U.S. Administration's experience. This case study consists of the development of "Operation Eagle's Claw," The Carter Administration's disastrous response to events following the 1980 takeover of the U.S. Embassy in Iran by militant extremists and the subsequent abduction and confinement of 52 American hostages. Using the published memoirs of the main personalities in President Carter's inner circle and by reviewing their recollections, this article will examine what influences existed in the policy-making process that produced this flawed operation. It will be argued that bureaucratic maneuvering between different parties, along with a deepening sense of crisis resulted in the adoption of a policy response that had very little chance of success.

International Institute Lecturer, College of International Relations, Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto, Japan. © 2003 Mark A. Selzer. All rights reserved.

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