

## MOMENT in HISTORY

### HOSTAGE TO TERROR

Bound and blindfolded, American diplomat Jerry Miele is led out of the U.S. embassy in Tehran, Iran, after militants stormed the building on November 4, 1979. Ten months earlier, an Islamic fundamentalist revolution had overthrown the Shah of Iran, a staunch American ally. President Carter's decision to allow the ailing Shah to seek medical treatment in the United States led to the embassy takeover. Of the Americans taken captive, 52 were held for more than a year. The crisis contributed to Carter's defeat in the presidential election in 1980.



**Morality in Foreign Policy** Carter had set the tone for his foreign policy in his inaugural speech, when he announced, “Our commitment to human rights must be absolute. . . . The powerful must not persecute the weak, and human dignity must be enhanced.” With the help of his foreign policy team—including **Andrew Young**, the first African American ambassador to the United Nations—Carter strove to achieve these goals.

The president put his principles into practice in Latin America. To remove a major symbol of U.S. interventionism in the region, he moved to give the Panamanians control of the Panama Canal. The United States had built and run the canal since 1903. In 1978 the president won Senate ratification of two Panama Canal treaties, which transferred control of the canal to Panama on December 31, 1999.

Most dramatically, Carter singled out the Soviet Union as a violator of human rights. He strongly condemned, for example, the Soviet practice of imprisoning people who protested against the government. Relations between the two superpowers suffered a further setback when Soviet troops invaded the Central

Asian nation of Afghanistan in December 1979. Carter responded by imposing an embargo on the sale of grain to the Soviet Union and boycotting the 1980 Summer Olympic Games in Moscow. Under the Carter administration, *détente* virtually collapsed.

**Triumph and Failure in the Middle East** It was in the volatile Middle East that President Carter met his greatest foreign policy triumph and his greatest failure. In 1978 Carter helped broker a historic peace treaty, known as the **Camp David Accords**, between Israel and Egypt, two nations that had been bitter enemies for decades. The treaty was formally signed in 1979. Most other Arab nations in the region opposed the treaty, but it marked a first step to achieving peace in the Middle East.

Just months after the Camp David Accords, Carter encountered a crisis in Iran. The United States had long supported Iran’s monarch, the Shah, because Iran was a major oil supplier and a buffer against Soviet expansion in the Middle East. The Shah, however, had grown increasingly unpopular in Iran. He was a repressive ruler and had

introduced Westernizing reforms to Iranian society. The Islamic clergy fiercely opposed the Shah's reforms. Opposition to the Shah grew, and in January 1979 protesters forced him to flee. An Islamic republic was then declared.

The new regime, headed by religious leader Ayatollah Khomeini, distrusted the United States because of its ties to the Shah. In November 1979, revolutionaries stormed the American embassy in Tehran and held 52 Americans hostage. The militants threatened to kill the hostages or try them as spies.

The Carter administration tried unsuccessfully to negotiate for the hostages' release. In April 1980, as pressure mounted, Carter approved a daring rescue attempt. To the nation's dismay, the rescue mission failed when several helicopters malfunctioned and one crashed in the desert. Eight servicemen died in the accident. Hamilton Jordan, President Carter's chief of staff, described the gloomy atmosphere in the White House the day after the crash:

“I arrived at the White House a few minutes before the President went on television to tell the nation about the catastrophe. He looked exhausted and careworn. . . . The mood at the senior staff meeting was somber and awkward. I sensed that we were all uncomfortable, like when a loved one dies and friends don't quite know what to say. . . . After the meeting, I wandered around the White House. . . . My thoughts kept returning to the bodies [of the servicemen] in the desert.”

—quoted in *Crisis: The Last Year of the Carter Presidency*

## World Geography Connection



### The Islamic State

In establishing an Islamic republic, the Ayatollah Khomeini created a state in which the codes and beliefs of Islam guide politics and thus direct nearly every aspect of life. Mullahs, or Islamic religious leaders, became political leaders as well, which allowed them to impose Islamic codes on Iranian citizens. In a religious state, religious practices are not a matter of choice but the law of the land. Politics and religion have joined forces in other parts of the Islamic world as well. In 1996 a group known as the Taliban transformed Afghanistan into an Islamic state. From insisting that men grow beards to forbidding women to work outside the home, Afghanistan's leaders enforced a social order based on an interpretation of Islam. **What long-held American principle does the creation of a religious state violate?**

The crisis continued into the fall of 1980. Every night, news programs reminded viewers how many days the hostages had been held. The president's inability to free the hostages cost him support in the 1980 presidential election. Negotiations with Iran continued right up to Carter's last day in office. Ironically, on January 20, 1981, the day Carter left office, Iran released the Americans, ending their 444 days in captivity.

**Reading Check** Summarizing What was President Carter's main foreign policy theme?

## SECTION 3 ASSESSMENT

### Checking for Understanding

- Define:** *inflation, embargo, stagflation.*
- Identify:** Helsinki Accords, Department of Energy.
- Identify** the achievement and failure President Carter experienced in the Middle East during his administration.

### Reviewing Themes

- Economic Factors** How did President Carter attempt to deal with the nation's energy crisis?

### Critical Thinking

- Evaluating** Do you think President Ford should have pardoned Richard Nixon? Why or why not?
- Organizing** Complete a graphic organizer similar to the one below by listing the ways that President Carter applied his human rights ideas to his foreign policy.



### Analyzing Visuals

- Analyzing Photographs** Study the photograph on page 848. What effect do you think images such as this one had on Americans who were living or traveling in other countries?

### Writing About History

- Expository Writing** Write an essay identifying what you believe to be President Carter's most important foreign policy achievement. Explain your choice.