



# **Taken Hostage: The Iran Hostage Crisis and America's First Encounter with Radical Islam (Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century America)**

*David Farber*

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On November 4, 1979, Iranian militants stormed the United States Embassy in Tehran and took sixty-six Americans captive. Thus began the Iran Hostage Crisis, an affair that captivated the American public for 444 days and marked America's first confrontation with the forces of radical Islam. Using hundreds of recently declassified government documents, historian David Farber takes the first in-depth look at the hostage crisis, examining its lessons for America's contemporary War on Terrorism.

Unlike other histories of the subject, Farber's vivid and fast-paced narrative looks beyond the day-to-day circumstances of the crisis, using the events leading up to the ordeal as a means for understanding it. The book paints a portrait of the 1970s in the United States as an era of failed expectations in a nation plagued by uncertainty and anxiety. It reveals an American government ill prepared for the fall of the Shah of Iran and unable to reckon with the Ayatollah Khomeini and his militant Islamic followers.

Farber's account is filled with fresh insights regarding the central players in the crisis: Khomeini emerges as an astute strategist, single-mindedly dedicated to creating an Islamic state. The Americans' student-captors appear as less-than-organized youths, having prepared for only a symbolic sit-in with just a three-day supply of food. ABC news chief Roone Arledge, newly installed and eager for ratings, is cited as a critical catalyst in elevating the hostages to cause célèbre status.

Throughout the book there emerge eerie parallels to the current terrorism crisis. Then as now, Farber demonstrates, politicians failed to grasp the depth of anger that Islamic fundamentalists harbored toward the United States, and Americans dismissed threats from terrorist groups as the crusades of ineffectual madmen.

*Taken Hostage* is a timely and revealing history of America's first engagement with terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism, one that provides a chilling reminder that the past is only prologue.

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