

DOCUMENT 28.1

Robert Ode | Iran Hostage Diary, 1979–1980

In November 1979, Iranian students stormed the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and held fifty-two Americans hostage for 444 days. Their demands included the surrender of the recently deposed shah, who was in the United States for medical care. At the time of his capture, American hostage Robert Ode was a retired diplomat who was on special assignment in Tehran. He was released in January 1981 along with the other hostages. While he was in captivity, Ode kept a diary, which included the following entries.

Explore

November 4, 1979

We were taken back to the Compound, being pushed and hurried along the way and forced to put our hands above our heads and then marched to the Embassy residence. After arriving at the residence I had my hands tied behind my back so tightly with nylon cord that circulation was cut off. I was taken upstairs and put alone in a rear bedroom and after a short time was blindfolded. After protesting strongly that the cord was too tight the cord was removed and the blindfold taken off when they tried to feed me some dates and I refused to eat anything I couldn't see. I strongly protested the violation of my diplomatic immunity, but these protests were ignored. I then was required to sit in a chair facing the bedroom wall. Then another older student came in and when I again protested the violation of my diplomatic immunity he confiscated my U.S. Mission Tehran I.D. card. My hands were again tied and I was taken to the Embassy living room on the ground floor where a number of other hostages were gathered. Some students attempted to talk with us, stating how they didn't hate Americans—only our U.S. Government, President Carter, etc. We were given sandwiches and that night I slept on the living room floor. We were not permitted to talk to our fellow hostages and from then on our hands were tied day and night and

only removed while we were eating or had to go to the bathroom. . . .

April 28, 1980

Nothing special has happened since my being moved to the new (less desirable room) except that I forgot to mention that about a week or 10 days ago we had hasps [metal fasteners] applied to the doors of our room and are now padlocked in the room as an extra security precaution! So with the bars on our windows and our doors being padlocked, it is more like a prison than ever!

*[A year later, the hostages were still in captivity.]
October 21, 1980 (353rd Day!!!!)*

Still no more mail today. Thirty-three days with only one letter from my wife and only 10 others from other family members, friends, and strangers. Every day is exactly the same as the one before and the one after. Mohsen came in Monday, October 20 and said we could take showers. However, I have decided not to go through the hassle anymore of being blindfolded, put into a car, stumbling around, and then have to shower in a filthy bathroom used by countless student-terrorists. I am just going to make my daily sponge baths do even though it is cold water.

Source: Robert Ode, "Iran Hostage's Diary," 1979–1980, Jimmy Carter Library, http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/documents/r_ode/index.shtml.

Interpret the Evidence

- How does Ode react when he is initially taken hostage? How does he describe the Iranian students?
- Based on this entry, do you think that Ode grew resigned to his captivity over time? Why or why not?

Put It in Context

How did the hostage crisis expose the weakness in the United States' ability to defend its interests throughout the world?