5 Iran, Islam, and the Terrorist Threat, 1979–1989

The second feature [of terrorism], and vastly the more dangerous,
is the principle that no one is innocent of politics. Terrorism denies
the distinction between state and society, public and private,
government and individual, the distinction that lies at the heart of
liberal belief. For the terrorist, as for the totalitarian state, there are
no innocent bystanders, no private citizens. Terrorism denies that
there is any private sphere, that individuals have any rights or any
autonomy separate from or beyond politics.
                        —Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan,
                "Terrorists, Totalitarians, and the Rule of Law"

"What do you want for Christmas?" [reporter to young girl]
"I want to get Daddy out of Iran."
                        —*ABC News*, December 25, 1979

In the United States, the 1980s began with the nightly spectacle of Ameri-
cans held hostage by Iranian militants in Tehran. During the 444 days of their
captivity, which began on November 4, 1979, and ended on January 21, 1981,
the day Ronald Reagan was inaugurated as president, the hostages in Iran be-
came a national symbol. Many Americans marked their solidarity with the
captives with yellow ribbons or white armbands. People in coffee shops and
on radio talk shows debated what should be done to free them. And for more
than a year, Walter Cronkite, who in 1979 was rated in polls as the most
trusted person in the United States, closed his nightly news broadcast with a
reminder of the hostages and their fate: "And that is how it was on January
__, the __ day of the hostages' captivity."[1] Similarly, ABC's late-night news-
cast *Nightline* began with a marker of the hostage crisis: Day 148 and Day
233 became signifiers in a tally whose referent needed no explanation. The
United States existed on two calendars, with the number of days in captivity
superimposed over the Gregorian dates. In fact, the Iran crisis became one of
the most widely covered stories in television history, gaining as much sus-
tained attention as civil rights, Vietnam, or Watergate. One Kennedy School
of Government study summarized the overall coverage this way: "Instead of
receding with time, eclipsed by fresh-breaking news, the story of the 'hostage

crisis' mushroomed, becoming a virtual fixation for the nation and its news organizations throughout much of the fourteen-month embassy siege."[2]

On the day of the hostages' release in January 1981, President Reagan used his inaugural address to announce that "terrorism" would replace "human rights" as the nation's primary foreign policy concern. Over the next decade, the "war against terrorism" played a significant role as the theoretical structure that supported the Reagan-Bush military buildup and the determined reassertion of U.S. political and military hegemony in the Middle East, a reassertion that included, among other things, U.S. military intervention in Lebanon (1981–1983), military and logistical support for Iraq in the Iran-Iraq war (1980–1983), the sale of arms to Iran in the Iran-Iraq war (the Iran-Contra deal, 1983–1985), the U.S. bombing of Libya (1986), and the expansion of arms sales to Saudi Arabia (1985–1988).[3]

As we have seen, terrorism was already a visible concern in foreign policy and an available plot device for films and novels in the 1970s. In the 1980s, however, the discourse of terrorist threat developed in new and important ways as public reactions to the Iran hostage crisis were staged in the speeches of policymakers, in television news reports, and in the activities of communities around the country. These accounts brought Americans, rather than Israelis, into the primary position as victims of—and eventually fighters against—terrorism. For the fourteen months that it dominated the U.S. nightly news, and for nearly a decade after in various cultural texts, the Iran story became the paradigmatic signifier of America as a nation imperiled by terrorism. Debates over U.S. national interest continued in the 1980s, but debates about the relevance of antiterrorism and the Israeli model did not: Iran ended that discussion and structured a national narrative of victimization and longed-for revenge.

The discourse of terrorist threat formed in the context of the Iran hostage crisis depended on the underlying structure of a captivity narrative—those stories of whites taken by Indians that had dominated the literature of early America.[4] The hostages in Iran, like those early captives, came to represent an entire nation in its conflict with another culture; the public concern over their captivity was part of a larger story about national identity, foreign policy, and racial constructs. Gender was central to the Iranian captivity story, as it was significant at earlier points in American history, and family, domesticity, and marriage figured visibly in public understandings of the crisis. The United States was distinguished from Iran (and captives distinguished from captors) in large part by the ways that the hostages were positioned within their families, as part of the private sphere. The private sphere, identified with the activity of women and the affective

life of the family, and imagined as separate from public life and politics, became politicized precisely through the staging of an imminent threat to its autonomy.[5] With the family under siege as a highly visible trope, the preservation of a privileged site for the nonpolitical life of individuals became the signifier of American national identity.

As the discourse of terrorist threat developed, during the Iran crisis and after, it helped to construct a subtle but crucial change in the imagined geography of the Middle East, a change that was marked by a reclassification: "Islam" became highlighted as the dominant signifier of the region, rather than oil wealth, Arabs, or Christian Holy Lands. None of these other constructs disappeared, of course, but they were augmented and transformed by a reframing of the entire region in terms of proximity to or distance from "Islam," which itself became conflated with "terrorism." On one level, these constructs referred to genuine changes in political identities in the Middle East in the 1970s and 1980s. Revivalist Islam *did* become a more prominent political force in places like Egypt and Lebanon, and eventually Iran, in the wake of the failure of secular nationalism to produce the promised political and moral victories against the vestiges of Western imperialism (including military victories against Israel, which was seen as an outpost of European power). The representation of this reality in U.S. public culture, however, often transformed an emergent political-religious phenomenon into the essential character of an entire region. Ironically, perhaps, this cognitive mapping of the Middle East in terms of Islam made non-Arab Iran the new synecdoche for the whole area: what had been understood, albeit incorrectly, as "the Arab world" in the 1960s and 1970s became, again, incorrectly, "the Islamic world" in the 1980s. (Islam was the majority religion in forty states and territories in 1983, including many non–Middle East states such as Indonesia, parts of Africa, and Turkey, as well as parts of Yugoslavia [Bosnia] and significant areas of what was then the Soviet Union.)[6]

The story of terrorism, captivity, Iran, and Islam was also a story about television. It highlighted the centrality of the mass media, particularly television, in the public consumption of the hostage crisis. It was television that brought the Iran hostage crisis into the homes of millions of Americans night after night, thus providing Iranians with a stage on which to air their grievances against the United States. Television came to be perceived as an actor, as implicated in some of the activities it proposed to report. The issue of the complicity of news coverage became central to policy debates about terrorism and also to television news programs' own self-representation.

After Iran, the problem of terrorism and the problem of television became intimately intertwined.

This chapter traces the cultural and political work that the representation of terrorism did in mapping certain moral geographies, and the role of that mapping in supporting U.S. expansionist nationalism. In focusing on terrorism as a construct in this way, I have no intention of minimizing the significance or the moral gravity of hostage taking, bombings, or killing. Of course, holding hostages in the embassy was both politically and morally wrong, and, as much as one might understand the anger directed against the United States by Iranians, that anger does not justify systematically enacting revenge on noncombatants. At the same time, it is not my purpose to theorize terrorism per se or to analyze what distinctions can or should be made among types of political violence. Nor is it to suggest what kinds of military activity might be more acceptable, more politically or morally justifiable, and in what circumstances. That project has been undertaken, in great detail and with varying degrees of success, by others.[7]

If my analysis does have an underlying theorization of terrorism, it is this: that of the many kinds of activity that might fit various definitions of terrorism, the discourse of terrorist threat in the 1980s focused on only one set—those highly visible and dramatic actions, such as hijackings and bombings, that came to dominate news coverage in the United States. I suggest that this narrowed definition of terrorism did important political work. As a cultural symbol, terrorism came to carry an "excess of meaning" that had powerful nationalist implications in the United States.[8] Antiterrorism then came to be central to the construction of U.S. national interests in the 1980s, finding its way into a wide range of cultural and political sites. In the discussion that follows, I first examine the television news coverage of the Iran crisis, then link the extraordinary visibility of the hostage story to the production of the icon of "media terrorism" in academic and policymaking circles in the mid-1980s. The chapter ends by tracing the trope of hostage rescue in the proliferation of popular narratives in the 1980s, focusing particularly on rescue dramas in film. In each of these very different institutional locations, I argue, terrorism, hostage taking, and captivity worked to construct the United States as a nation of innocents, a family under siege by outside threats and in need of a militarized rescue that operated under the sign of the domestic. Terrorism in the 1980s was a gendered trope that figured centrally in the imagined geography of a nationalist and expansionist narrative that staged "Americans" and the "Middle East" in a drama of conflict, threat, and rescue.

CAPTIVITY AND ISLAM

Seven years after the Munich Olympics, ABC television was once again cat-apulted to prominence by a terrorist event. On November 4, 1979, the U.S. embassy in Tehran was taken over by Iranian militants. Sixty-five Ameri-cans were taken hostage on the first day of what was to become the 444-day Iranian hostage crisis. Acting quickly, ABC managed to get a reporter and camera crew on the scene in Tehran. Shortly after the ABC correspon-dents' arrival, Iran began refusing entrance to other news teams. For more than four days, ABC was the only network able to produce its television coverage from Tehran, and it fully exploited the advantage. On November 8, ABC ran a special broadcast at 11:30 P.M., after the local news, called *The Crisis in Iran: America Held Hostage*. The show opened with exclusive footage of American hostage Barry Rosen being paraded before the cam-eras by his captors. "Look at this," the anchor began, "one American, blind-folded, handcuffed, today in the courtyard of the American embassy in Tehran." The hour-long news special went on to showcase the images and themes that would soon become nightly rituals: Iranians marching in the streets, U.S. flags burning, tearful interviews with families of the hostages, a concerned president considering various diplomatic and/or military op-tions, and interviews with angry U.S. citizens. "When I see what they do to that flag," said one longshoreman, "it just gets me in the heart."[9]

Initially, both the U.S. and the Iranian governments expected the hostage crisis to be resolved relatively quickly. The takeover of the U.S. embassy by a group of students loyal to the Ayatollah Khomeini had taken most Ira-nian officials by surprise, and Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan promised that his government would assure the hostages' safety and quick release. But the actual politics on the ground in Iran were more complicated. Bazargan was one of the more moderate leaders in a country still in the midst of consolidating a revolution, and he soon lost the internal power struggle to hard-liners close to Khomeini. Khomeini threw his support be-hind the students at the embassy, and the hostages quickly became national symbols in Iran, caught up in the new government's determination to prove Iran was capable of defying the United States.

The United States had long played a highly visible role in Iran, as the primary ally of the recently deposed Shah. The Shah had ruled Iran since 1941; in the early 1950s, he had maintained his throne in the face of an emerging democracy movement only with the help of the CIA. A West-ernizing, secular leader, the Shah had established a certain base of support among the urban middle classes but had maintained his rule through the

Figure 19. Hostage Barry Rosen is brought into the courtyard and shown to the television cameras in the early days of the hostage crisis.

ruthless suppression of dissent. The internal security police in Iran, SAVAK, were known for torture and murder; they were also known to be trained and funded by the CIA. By the late 1970s, the Shah had inspired opposition that included both liberal, secular elements opposed to his antidemocratic rule and religious leaders opposed to the rapid secularization and Westernization he had introduced into the country.

Despite this opposition, the Shah was widely considered to have a stable hold on power, in large part because of the very strong alliance between Iran and the United States. That alliance had provided him with a wide range of military and political resources, the most important of which was access to advanced weapons technology. In the 1960s and 1970s, successive U.S. governments cultivated the relationship because, perhaps more than any other ruler in the Middle East, the Shah could and did shore up the stated goals of U.S. foreign policy in the region: the supply of oil, support of Israel, and containment of the Soviet Union. A major oil-producing nation, Iran consistently supported the continuing flow of oil to the United States and its allies; it was one of the few Middle Eastern nations that had not participated in the 1973 oil embargo.[10] The Shah also had positive relations with Israel, which included security and intelligence sharing. Most important, Iran under the Shah was strongly anti-Soviet and served as a valued cold war partner for the United States. The Nixon Doctrine of 1969 had declared that, in the wake of Vietnam, the United States would shore up its international military and political position by supporting regional allies. In the Middle

East in the 1970s, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Iran became the primary pillars of that policy, each of which then provided the United States with some combination of military support, intelligence data, and political backing. (After the Camp David Accords in 1978, Egypt also became a major U.S. ally.) President Nixon had apparently explained U.S. expectations to the Shah with remarkable candor at a 1972 meeting. At the end of talks aimed at expanding U.S.-Iranian relations, Nixon looked across the table and said to the Shah, simply: "Protect me."[11]

The Shah played the role of regional client to the hilt, and as the oil wealth flowed in, the United States allowed Iran to buy virtually any and all weapons (except for nuclear weapons) in the U.S. arsenal. One analyst has described the Shah's buying frenzy as "a stampede": in the period between 1972 and 1976, the Shah ordered more than $9 billion worth of U.S. weaponry, including more advanced planes, tanks, and artillery than the Iranian army could easily absorb.[12]

With this kind of backing, neither U.S. officials nor the Shah himself expected his government to be overthrown, and certainly not with the extraordinary rapidity that it was. But opposition to the Shah's rule had mounted significantly in the later 1970s, as "modernization" proceeded with little regard for most people's religious sensibilities, and oil wealth remained in the hands of a few, while calls for democracy were ruthlessly suppressed. Despite his well-deserved reputation for ruthlessness, however, the Shah, secretly ill with cancer, was increasingly unwilling or unable to repress the mounting demonstrations that developed at the end of the decade. The protests, which were staged by a coalition of religious organizations (with different views about the role of Islam in the state), secular moderates, and leftists, soon became a call for the Shah's removal. In January 1979, the Shah left the country, effectively abdicating his throne. Shortly thereafter, the Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Iran from exile to lead what political scientist Richard Cottam has described as "quite possibly the most popular revolution in human history."[13]

The Iranian government under Khomeini's leadership was, like most postrevolutionary governments, composed of a complex set of disparate elements that had little in common but their desire to get rid of the Shah and a broadly shared hatred of the United States as the Shah's backer. With the Shah gone, the struggle over power and policy ensued in earnest. The Shah and his rule were still the source of enormous anger and frustration; the wealth he had apparently taken out of the country when he fled was a potent reminder of the misrule and corruption of the monarchy. When, just eight months after the revolution, the Carter administration decided to

allow the ailing Shah to come to the United States for medical treatment, angry students stormed the U.S. embassy in protest. The hostages who were taken on November 4, 1979, became both symbol and stake in the internal struggle to define the nature of postrevolutionary Iran. Over the next fourteen months, as the Carter administration negotiated with various members of the Iranian leadership, U.S. officials often found themselves talking to Iranian officials who were soon replaced, as the Iranian government became more and more dominated by radical Islamic clergy.[14] As long as the hostages remained in Iran, they were a living symbol of the new government's refusal to be dominated by the United States; the students later called the takeover "the second revolution."[15] The hostages, Khomeini sometimes said, would not be released until the United States learned a lesson about the new realities of power in Iran.[16]

The captivity of the hostages riveted U.S. audiences, who watched the evening news in unprecedented numbers in the first weeks after the embassy takeover. The role of television at such moments was already firmly established. In 1972, ABC had televised the events surrounding the hostage taking and murder of Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics. Four years later, the rescue of Israeli hostages at Entebbe had dominated U.S. news for weeks. This time, six days after the takeover of the embassy, ABC began running a news special on Iran every night. The head of ABC News, Roone Arledge (who had been promoted from the sports division after overseeing the Munich coverage), made the decision, he said, because everyone he saw was obsessed with the crisis. From his elevator man to his taxi driver to the pilot on his plane—"all these people care about now are the hostages in Iran."[17] Most people at ABC expected the news special to be a two- to three-week commitment; instead, "America Held Hostage" went on the air every night for four months, until March 1980, when ABC replaced it with the more generic late-night news program *Nightline*, anchored by Ted Koppel. In the early months of the broadcast, ABC estimated that the hostage specials reached an average of twelve million viewers each night.[18] The show regularly beat *The Tonight Show* in audience share, prompting one columnist to comment that "ABC has finally found someone who can beat Johnny Carson. Khomeini."[19]

The task of putting together thirty minutes of daily coverage on the same story was made considerably easier by the Carter administration's decision to keep the crisis in the public eye. According to Hodding Carter, then assistant secretary of state for foreign affairs, "the decision was made for there to be a very visibly concerned president who said in effect that the hostages' fate is a primary concern of the president of the United States."[20]

Figure 20.   Iranian protesters burn an American flag outside the U.S. embassy in Tehran in late 1979. The scene would become a familiar one to Americans over the 444 days of the hostages' captivity. Photo courtesy of Wide World Photos.

On reflection, one ABC staff member made clear the interdependence of news makers and policymakers: "We needed a daily news peg. If they had said, 'No, we're not going to talk about the hostage crisis anymore,' that show would have ultimately perished."[21] Regular evening news broadcasts were also dominated by the hostages: one analyst has estimated that, over the entire year of 1980, coverage of the hostages in Iran took up more than 20 percent of all television news; on ABC, coverage averaged 4.1 minutes out of every 22-minute broadcast.[22]

ABC's initial presentation of the crisis stressed the innocence of the hostages, their captivity, and their national identity. The first shots had fo-

cused on the humiliating vision of "one American" held captive. As *America Held Hostage* continued, the initial shot of hostage Barry Rosen in a blindfold became a staple image, a constantly invoked symbol, used *at least* once in most broadcasts as the illustrative on-screen icon. Updates on the hostages or reports on Iranian demonstrations and flag burnings were often introduced with this photo, which became perhaps the single most visible symbol of the crisis overall. This image soon came to represent the nation itself: if the hostages were important in Iran because of their symbolic meaning, they were important to Americans for the same reason. Both sides saw the people held inside the embassy as representing the United States, and the question of how the "United States" should be treated became the underlying political stakes of the drama being played out in Tehran.

Within the television news accounts, the hostages represented the United States not because they worked for the U.S. embassy but because of their status as private individuals, as "typical Americans." The fact that most of the hostages were American diplomatic personnel ("official Americans," in State Department lingo) was all but ignored. Instead, the hostages were consistently identified by their positions within their families, by their relationship to "home." Throughout the months of the crisis, the human drama of parents, wives, and children waiting for the hostages' return structured the news stories of Iranian demands, diplomatic negotiations, and foreign policy complexities. Gary Sick, an official in the Carter administration, described the coverage as "the longest running human interest drama in the history of television": "Never had a news story *so thoroughly* captured the imagination of the U.S. public. Never had the nation sat so totally transfixed before its television sets awaiting the latest predictable chants of 'Death to America' alternating with the day's interview with a brave relative of one of the hostages."[23] Although the reporters narrating the interviews and family stories usually indicated whether the hostage was in the military or part of the diplomatic staff, and listed briefly his or her title, those were not significant distinctions; very little was ever said of the specifics of a particular hostage's job within the embassy, or of his or her political convictions. Instead, television audiences learned the names of the hostages and saw frequent interviews with their families. The hostages were individualized—they had weeping mothers and stoic fathers—but not distinguished from each other.

The suffering of the families of the hostages was painfully clear, as, in interview after interview, they struggled to maintain hope for the safe return of their family members. At Christmas the first year, and again the second year, television crews went to homes and church services, inter-

Figure 21.   Barry Rosen's blindfolded visage became the icon
for ABC's coverage of the hostage story.

viewed children and neighbors, filmed presents being opened around Christ-
mas trees in families with missing fathers or sons or daughters. As the
months wore on, the "hostage families" became a new kind of figure in
American public life: they gave interviews, held their own press conferences,
and attended commemorative events in local communities. They also had a
powerful status as moral agents in the realm of politics. Families traveled to
meetings with government officials in Europe, and on one occasion, Ted
Koppel arranged for the wife of one of the hostages to confront an Iranian
diplomat on *Nightline*.[24] These families represented their husbands or chil-
dren in the Tehran embassy, but they also became more broadly represen-
tative; they were not the nation-state as public institution but the national
community constituted through its families, and now under siege. The
hostages were identified with the private sphere, allied with family, emo-
tions, and domesticity, rather than diplomacy, officialdom, or politics.

The yellow ribbons that soon became the predominant public symbol of
concern for the hostages were another important instance of this frame-
work: the ribbons appeared on streetlights, pinned to blouses, and on
bumper stickers. In January 1980, a gigantic yellow ribbon was wrapped
around the outside of the Super Bowl stadium. The yellow ribbons had a
complicated history as a symbol of female fidelity to husbands or boyfriends
in times of war; they symbolized the promise of love and reentry into pri-
vate life for soldiers, and now for hostages. The practice of placing yellow
ribbons was a material part of the construction of meanings about Iran; it

also provided private citizens with a simple way to identify as part of the "family" that would welcome the hostages home.[25] The location of the hostages in the world of "private life" became a way of marking them as nonpolitical, and their "freedom from politics" became one of the primary aspects of the political narrative that developed around them.

In a similar way, ABC's icon of Barry Rosen invited the audience to see the crisis as a simple story of human suffering. The moral distinction between Iranian "fanaticism" and the haunting image of a single, blindfolded man's face was the not-very-subtle subtext of many of the ABC reports. This depoliticization of the individual, his or her insertion into a position of virtuous selfhood, is the classic move of the captivity narrative; it identifies the hostage with the feminized space of family and sexuality. Identification with the private sphere is the guarantee of "innocence"; it is what constitutes the captive as the virtuous victim resisting illegitimate domination. In the case of Iran, these private individuals were counterposed to the mass of Iranians chanting outside the embassy, fists raised, their fury turned either on the people inside or on the effigies of Carter they burned outside the gates. The contrast invited those in the American audience to feel their own furious bewilderment. And despite the fact that some news accounts explained something of the history of U.S.-Iranian relations under the Shah, a determined incomprehension remained the dominant stance.[26] The news media made something of a virtue of this incomprehension. In February, after more than three months of near-saturation reporting, CBS anchor Walter Cronkite could still open his report on diplomatic developments in the hostage situation with the comment that the breakthrough might help solve "the gigantic puzzle that for the last 103 days has been Iran."[27]

The Iranian students at the embassy and their supporters, on the other hand, did everything in their power to emphasize the "guilt" of the hostages and their status as U.S. government representatives. Statements by Khomeini or other Iranian officials often referred to the embassy as a "den of spies," a designation that emphasized the official, and potentially hostile, status of the embassy employees. In fact, as is the case with almost all embassies, some of the U.S. personnel stationed in Tehran did have espionage responsibilities. (David Martin and John Walcott have argued that the eventual rescue attempt in April 1980 was made considerably more difficult by the fact that most of the CIA agents in Tehran were now hostages at the embassy.)[28] The Iranian threat to put some of the hostages on trial for spying was taken quite seriously by the Carter administration. Carter also made it clear to his staff that any such trials would have elicited immediate U.S. military action against Iran.[29] Later, many of the official papers and

documents seized in the embassy takeover were published in Iran. Though they showed relatively little evidence of spying, they did indicate what the Iranians wanted to emphasize: the public and official nature of the work done at the embassy. For the captors, this was the significance of the flags and the Carter effigies, which were accompanied by repeated statements from the Iranian militants that they had no quarrel with the American people, only with the U.S. government.

The Iranian attempt to stage an ideological rather than personal confrontation was perhaps most evident in the decision, two weeks after the initial takeover, to release some of the hostages. Right after the embassy attack, boxer Muhammad Ali had volunteered to replace the hostages, saying that the militants' actions were against the spirit of Islam.[30] His offer was ignored, but soon thereafter, with the PLO serving as negotiator, the students agreed to release any women and black men who were not being held as suspected spies, on the argument that neither of these groups was as central as white men to the dominant power structure in the United States. The goal was also apparently to split U.S. public opinion; on the day the release was announced, a demonstrator in Tehran was filmed carrying a sign obviously meant for the U.S. television cameras on the scene: "American Blacks! Rais[sic] Up against Carter!"[31]

Although this rather crude attempt at revolutionary incitement got little hearing, the Iranian students had more success in getting their views across to one of the first group of released hostages. One young marine, Sergeant William Quarles, told reporters in Tehran that he had made some friends among his captors. Quarles's statement also indicated that he had been receptive to some of the political frameworks the Iranians had presented. "In a way, I kinda hate to leave them. Some of them are pretty nice people," Quarles told reporters. "I've learned a lot from what I've read and what I've seen, and I'm very saddened by some of the things that went on under the Shah's regime." The history of the U.S. relationship with the Shah, he seemed to suggest, might deserve some inquiry. Before televising this apparently shocking statement, the ABC reporter explained to viewers that Quarles's apparent sympathy for his captors was a syndrome well known to psychologists. American officials later admitted that they were "concerned about some of the statements the freed hostages have made since their release."[32]

But the explanatory power of such explicitly political approaches was overridden by the personalist and ahistorical approaches of the hostage captivity narrative. When that narrative did attempt to explain Iranian actions (rather than simply assume a posture of appalled bafflement), it did so through Islam, rather than the specific history of U.S.-Iranian relations.
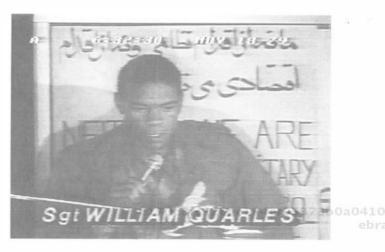
Figure 22.   Sergeant William Quarles speaks to reporters after being released by his captors at the U.S. embassy in Iran, November 1979.

"Militant Islam" quickly became the primary narrative device for the U.S. news media; long essays and editorials in many major publications explained "Islam" as a single, unchanging cultural proclivity to mix faith with politics, and to express both through violence. The vast variety of Muslim beliefs and practices, spread across four continents, were summarized in simplistic, often overtly hostile summaries of the "essence" of Islam, which was now allegedly on display in Tehran.[33] This explanation of events as both produced by, and exemplary of, Islam also enabled a certain categorization of persons: Muslims were those who made politics out of simple human suffering.

Islam was contrasted explicitly with Christianity, and perhaps in no other political situation in the 1970s did the mainstream media and politicians so insistently present the United States as a "Christian" nation. In 1979, after almost two decades of slow secularization of U.S. political life (and just before the political victories of the emerging Christian Right), it was relatively uncommon for the mainstream media to evoke Christianity as a public symbol of nationalism. In the discourses surrounding the Tut exhibit, for example, tropes like modernity, rationality, and humanism were more commonly linked to American identity. But as "Islam" emerged as the category for understanding Iran, Christianity became remarkably prominent in the media accounts.

This mobilization of religion-as-nation was particularly evident in one dramatic segment of ABC's *America Held Hostage* on December 21, 1979,

six weeks after the takeover of the embassy. The anchor introduced a report on a demonstration in support of the hostages by commenting that Americans and Iranians were "worlds apart in their view of the world, their values, their principles, and surely in their demonstrations." This American demonstration, the anchor opined, "was totally unlike *anything* we have seen in Iran." In fact, the "demonstration" was a gathering of foreign service officers and marines, the colleagues of the hostages, who marched silently in Washington, D.C., then gathered for a short service, where they sang "God Bless America" and several other songs. With only a minimum of voice-over (which explained that the songs were being sung at the request of one of the hostages), the camera panned the crowd, first in straight-on close-ups, then in medium close-ups shot from below, so that the camera and the television audience looked up into the faces of those singing. The camera then pulled back to a wide-angle shot of the crowd with one large American flag waving in the middle. That shot seemed to end the broadcast; anchor Frank Reynolds signed off with the American flag and the crowd in a still image beside him. But before the credits rolled, the film of the demonstration recommenced, serving as a kind of coda: a young marine, in full-dress uniform, went to the front of the stage to sing "Go Down Moses." The (white) marine's performance of the old African American spiritual was formal, almost operatic, but its resonance with the exodus story and its African American revisions were clear—this time, "the people" were not African American slaves or their descendants, nor new nations struggling against colonialism, nor even just the hostages in Iran, but the entire American nation those hostages were seen to represent. This re-invocation and reinterpretation of the black Christian use of the exodus narrative mobilized its nationalist connotations. As the singer intoned the repeated phrase "let my people go," the camera lingered on his face; when the young man stepped away from the podium, the camera pulled back to medium shot. The final frozen image was of a serious but proud marine, smiling slightly at the applause that greeted his evocative rendition of the ancient story of captivity and redemption.[34]

The reporting on the hostage crisis took on a different tone when, in April 1980, five months after the initial embassy takeover, the U.S. government attempted a military rescue of the hostages, code-named Operation Eagle's Claw. The rescue plan called for helicopters to be flown to the Iranian desert, from where they would carry members of the Delta Force special operations team (formed in 1977 in part in response to the successes of the Israelis at Entebbe) into the heart of Tehran. The team would then drive pre-positioned vehicles to the embassy, extract the hostages, and bring them

back to the desert for pickup.[35] On April 24, a visibly shaken President Carter announced that the mission had been aborted at stage one, after three of the helicopters had been taken out of service for malfunction or navigational problems. Then, as the rescue team had prepared to leave the Desert One staging area outside of Tehran, one of the helicopters accidentally collided with one of the transport planes, killing eight military personnel and seriously wounding five others.

Television news coverage of the rescue failure was extraordinary in both its intensity and its tone. Several long news specials described the mission, naming the members of the rescue team who had died, interviewing their families, and detailing the furious reactions of people from across the political spectrum. The Carter administration defended its decision to launch the rescue, and the decision to abort it, amid a storm of protest from those European allies and congressional representatives who said that military measures should not have been used, as well as the outcry from those who strongly supported the idea of a rescue but who angrily discussed the mission's failures of planning and execution. Meanwhile, both television and print media produced in-depth accounts of the attempted rescue, to the extent that information was available, showing detailed maps and step-by-step illustrated explanations of the rescue plan, with arrows and charts explaining what had gone wrong, and where, and why.[36] No one who had seen the gleeful enthusiasm that greeted similar illustrations three and a half years earlier, after Entebbe, could have missed the contrast.

Then, too, there was the issue of the bodies. *Left in the* burned wreckage of the plane, the bodies of the eight servicemen quickly became tangible signifiers of national failure. After the Israeli rescue, U.S. television cameras had recorded the arrival home of the victorious rescue team and the flag-draped coffins that had accompanied them. Now the U.S. operation would be symbolized by the humiliation of those bodies left behind. The day after the mission, ABC anchor Frank Reynolds opened his broadcast with a melodramatic summary: "We tried, we failed, and we have paid a price: the bodies of eight young Americans still lie in the Iranian desert, victims of a daring and tragic end to the rescue mission in Iran." Unremarkable in its casual claim to "we"—by this time, television news had become all but the official mouthpiece for an outraged nationalist response to the crisis—the report also signaled what would be television's near-universal narration of the event: it was good to have tried a rescue but inexcusable to have failed. The tenor of helpless anger only increased when the bodies were taken to Tehran, where some religious authorities joined the Iranian students in unwrapping charred corpses before a gathering of demonstrators—

and, of course, the television cameras. No network showed the exposed bodies, but ABC allowed close-ups of the cloth-covered bodies and footage of the beginning of the unwrapping process, thus getting close enough to the display to be shocking.[37]

In the months following the April rescue attempt, the hostage story stayed in the news, with hopes for a negotiated end rising and waning. Conventional wisdom had it that another rescue had been made impossible, though in fact the Carter administration began planning a second try two days after the failure of the first.[38] But during the next months, little else happened to promise hope, despite ongoing negotiations.

In August 1980, news accounts focused attention on an issue that had arisen periodically since the embassy attack: the rights and opinions of Iranians living in the United States. At the end of July, almost two hundred Iranian students were arrested when a pro-Khomeini demonstration in Washington, D.C., escalated into a violent conflict with a few American counterdemonstrators. Although criminal charges against the Iranians were quickly dropped, the students were held in a New York detention center until their immigration status could be checked. The August events were certainly not the first time that public attention had been focused on Iranian students in the United States; the vocal anti-Shah or pro-Khomeini opinions of some of the students had been the source of considerable media outrage from the first weeks of the crisis. But by August, tensions were at a high point. After the demonstration, there were many calls in the press and Congress for all of those arrested to be deported, but, as one CBS reporter wearily announced, quoting a Justice Department official, "The Constitution protects even visitors to this country, and some Iranians have learned to take advantage of that."[39] Almost all the demonstrators were soon found to be in compliance with their visas and were released, going immediately from New York back to Washington for another demonstration, which was met by a group of Americans (white and African American) who staged another counterdemonstration. The Americans, carrying U.S. flags and effigies of Khomeini, chanted for the Iranians to "go home." Although the two groups were separated by a long corridor of District of Columbia police, some fights broke out, and some Iranians were hit by bottles and eggs. The Iranian demonstrators were protected by police from serious violence, but at this point, American demonstrations did not look so different from Iranian demonstrations after all.[40]

Anti-Iranian sentiment in the United States drew heavily on the stereotyped representations of the Arab Middle East that had become so prevalent in the 1970s, particularly the image of "Arab terrorism." The Israeli battle

against terrorism had, as we have seen, very high visibility in the U.S. press, and the reporting of those events often had not explained Arab nationalism or Palestinian grievances with any more nuance than the current media explained Islam or Iran. The post-1973 iconography of the oil crisis was also redeployed, as the angry fascination with Arab oil wealth and "oil sheiks" reappeared, this time organized around Khomeini and Iran. For example, "Nuke Iran" or "Don't Waste Gas, Waste Khomeini" bumper stickers had been available from the early days of the crisis. More than twenty anti-Iran novelty songs were produced within the first month or so of the embassy takeover; two of them became national hits. Dart boards and toilet paper with Khomeini's image popped up for sale, in an odd kind of commodification that in some ways paralleled the irreverent purchase of King Tut T-shirts and coffee mugs. To purchase was to contain.[41]

Perhaps the weirdest example of how anti-Arab sentiment morphed into anti-Iran sentiment (and back again) is that of an Iranian wrestler who, in the early 1980s, called himself the "Iron Sheik." Here again, the "Arab Sheik" image was used to carry over oil crisis anger and resentment onto representations of Iran. As media scholar Hamid Naficy has discussed, this Iranian wrestler was often paired with a bad Soviet wrestler, and the two of them were pitted against blond "American" wrestlers, particularly Hulk Hogan. The Iranian would wave the Iranian flag and shout anti-American slogans, which then became a cue for the audience to shout and wave placards reading "Iran Sucks." (Later, with the onset of the 1991 Gulf War, this wrestler rather cleverly remade himself into an *Iraqi general*.)[42]

The last six months of the hostages' captivity were dominated by reports of the possibility of their release. From late July to September, a negotiated solution looked very likely. But on September 22, 1980, Iraq invaded Iranian territory, crossing four strategic junctures, including the disputed Shatt al-Arab waterway, and launching what would become the eight-year Iran-Iraq war. Many Iranians were convinced that the Iraqi attack was instituted, or at least backed, by the United States, so the onset of hostilities with Iraq made negotiations with the United States much more difficult.[43] With the hostages still in Tehran, Jimmy Carter proved to be unelectable and on November 4, 1980 (the first anniversary of the embassy attack), Ronald Reagan won the presidential election decisively. Another Christmas passed, commemorated in television specials and, once again, long interviews with the hostage families. The Iranian government was by then engaged in furious negotiations with the Carter administration. The conservative clerics in power had now become convinced that the continued holding of hostages was doing their government more harm than good. Finally, in the last weeks

of the Carter administration, terms for the release of the hostages were set-
tled upon and enacted. These terms included the release of more than $8
billion in Iranian assets held in the United States. On January 21, 1981—the
day of Reagan's inauguration, and thus the last day that Iran could be sure
that the arrangements it had made with Carter would be honored—the
hostages were released. As a result of their 444-day captivity, the United
States had, indeed, been taught a lesson about the limits of its power. But
over the course of the 1980s, the impact of that lesson was surely not what
any of the revolutionary elements in Iran would have hoped.

"TERRORIST THEATER"

In October 1984, *Harper's* magazine published a forum on terrorism and the
media that brought together some of the nation's most prominent journal-
ists to consider the responsibility of the news media in reporting terrorist
events. The problem, as *Harper's* presented it, was the development in re-
cent years of the "terrorist theater": a staged performance of violence in
which the terrorist had become "the master of ceremonies at a media spec-
tacle."[44] By the mid-1980s, the issues of media, representation, and visibil-
ity had become intimately tied up with the public discourse on terrorism.
Inevitably, descriptions of the problem of "media terrorism," as it was in-
creasingly known, took the television coverage of the Iranian crisis as their
backdrop. By 1984, the developing mainstream consensus looked back at the
embassy takeover as an exemplary moment in this new kind of terrorism.
It had become something of a truism to argue that the hostage crisis had
been prolonged by the daily presence of television cameras in Tehran. Tele-
vision, in the words of one of the commentators, had "managed to turn the
American embassy into a television stage. The Iranians had merely to ap-
pear on it in order to impose any message they wanted on the world."[45] Both
liberals and conservatives tended to agree that the ongoing problem of ter-
rorism was inexorably linked to the public visibility that the news media
gave to terrorist events. In the years after the hostage crisis, a new public
figure, the terrorism expert, joined with policymakers and politicians in ar-
ticulating the phenomenon of media terrorism. The knowledge about ter-
rorism produced in this circuit included its own very distinct definitions of
what terrorism was, and a new articulation of why it was so dangerous.

   The development of an expert consensus on terrorism had begun to take
shape before the embassy crisis in Iran. In July 1979, the First International
Conference on Terrorism met in Jerusalem, where it had succeeded in bring-
ing together an impressive roster of primarily conservative international

political leaders, including Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin, presidential candidate and former CIA director George Bush, columnist George Will, *Commentary* editor Norman Podhoretz, Senator Henry Jackson, and author Claire Sterling, who would soon go on to write a popular book on terrorism.[46] The conference was organized by the Jonathan Institute, which had been founded in 1976 by Benjamin Netanyahu in memory of his brother Jonathan, the Israeli army officer who was killed while leading the rescue at Entebbe. Before his brother's death, Benjamin Netanyahu had served for several years in the special forces of the Israeli army. After founding the Jonathan Institute, he became a frequently quoted expert on terrorism. He would later serve as a diplomat in Washington and as Israel's representative to the United Nations before returning to Israel in 1988. There he quickly became the leader of Israel's right-wing Likud party and, in 1996, prime minister.

At the end of the 1979 meeting in Jerusalem, the conferees adopted a joint definition of terrorism that looked back at the hijackings and airport massacres of the 1970s: "Terrorism is the deliberate and systematic murder, maiming, and menacing of the innocent to inspire fear for political ends." But the conference also looked forward: by bringing together Americans and Europeans with Israelis, the makeup implicitly suggested that terrorism was an international problem; by focusing on conservative political leaders, the roster also reflected the alliances that were developing between the United States and the Israeli right.

Although the first conference achieved a good deal of positive press coverage, it was eclipsed by the high public visibility of the Second International Conference on Terrorism, which was held in Washington in 1984 and served as the primary source for the *Harper's* special forum. Between 1979 and 1984, a great many changes had taken place on the international political scene, including not only the Iran hostage crisis and the arrival of the Reagan administration in Washington but also a complex series of events in the Middle East: the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the subsequent U.S. military intervention in Lebanon that was effectively ended by the bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut in 1983 by Shiite militants (in which 243 marines were killed), and the ongoing Iran-Iraq war. The 1984 conference brought together many of the same public figures as the 1979 event, but it carried a very different kind of political weight in the United States. The symbolism of moving the conference from Jerusalem to Washington was not lost on anyone; now the United States, rather than Israel, would be acknowledged as the leader in the struggle against terrorism. The conference was covered extensively in the media and was treated as an im-

portant policymaking event. When Secretary of State George Shultz addressed the gathering, his speech was reported as the top story of the day in the *Washington Post*, despite the fact that Shultz had already given dozens of similar speeches on the topic of terrorism.[47]

Perhaps nothing so indicates the surprising success of the 1984 meeting as the publication history of the conference proceedings, which were first excerpted in *Harper's* in 1984 and then published in 1986 under the title *Terrorism: How the West Can Win*, with Benjamin Netanyahu as editor. *How the West Can Win* was widely reviewed, including glowing assessments on the front pages of both the *Los Angeles Times Book Review* and the *Washington Post Book World*. In both cases the reviewers were other leading political figures: Dennis DeConcini, the Democratic senator from Arizona who had authored antiterrorism legislation, and Robert McFarlane, Ronald Reagan's national security adviser, who called it "the best assessment we have of . . . international terrorism."[48] Other reviewers were far less enthusiastic, and several liberals criticized the book as simplistic and militaristic. Writing in the *Nation*, Edward Said argued that the book included several essays by academic specialists on Islam that "would be considered the rankest racism or incompetence in any other field."[49] In general, however, *How the West Can Win* presented itself, and was received by the press, as *not* simply another analytic text but rather as a strategic manual for the war on terrorism, offering "a clear and comprehensive plan," formulated by experts, "with which world democracies can act to free themselves from the threat that holds every person hostage."[50] Less than a year after its original publication, *How the West Can Win* was reissued in a mass-market paperback format complete with lurid cover art featuring two crossed assault rifles over a globe (and an endorsement by the well-known liberal governor of New York, Mario Cuomo, among others).

The need for coordinated international action against the "threat that holds *every person* hostage" was one of the central messages of both the conference and the book. "Terrorism is the cancer of the modern world," declared one essay. "No state is immune to it. It is a dynamic organism which attacks the healthy flesh of the surrounding society."[51] This trope of an international terrorist cancer attacking the body of the West managed to expand the definition of potential victims, while retaining the Middle East as site and source of the infection. Cancer infects one organ but soon threatens the whole body; Israel may have been on the front line, but now it was the entire West, and in particular the United States, that was under attack. This was very much Secretary of State George Shultz's argument: "Wherever it takes place, [terrorism] is directed in an important sense

against *us,* the democracies, against our most basic values and often our fundamental strategic interests."[52] Just three months before the opening of the conference, in April 1984, Shultz had articulated the Shultz Doctrine, which called for the increased use of force in combating terrorism.

Several participants at the conference highlighted the supposedly special relationship between "Islam" and terrorism. No other cultural or religious group was singled out in this way, despite the fact that many of the participants discussed terrorist activities in Europe, Latin America, and Asia. With some caveats and a small amount of complexity, three basic reasons were given for considering Islamic terrorism to be a particular concern. First, as Bernard Lewis, perhaps the country's best-known expert on Islam, explained, Islam is a "political religion," since Muhammad founded and led a state as well as a faith. Or, as one of the other experts put it, "Politics itself has been viewed as a variant of religion, if not religion incarnate."[53] This particular fusion of state and religion was presented as in the "nature" of Islam, but not of course of Judaism or Christianity.

Second, the "world of Islam" invented terrorism. Two of the three experts devoted a significant part of their presentation to the rise of the tenth-century sect, the Assassins, as an early and emblematic example of the Islamic use of terror—and of the ultimate failure of the tactic. In addition to the dubious intellectual worth of explaining modern politics through medieval examples, it is important to note the ways in which those examples worked by inference. Khomeini's government had often been described as "harsh medieval rule," as if the Iranian revolution were simply an anachronism rather than a specific response to modernity. By explaining modern Islam in terms of tenth-century antecedents, these experts extended that association, making the implicit argument that Islam itself (not just in Iran) had a medieval character—that Muslims, unlike Western people, lived outside of time.

Finally, the expert panel posited an essential opposition between "Islam" and the "West." P. J. Vatikiotis, author of several well-known books on Middle Eastern politics, argued that "Islam" was essentially hostile not only to ideas of democracy or pluralism but also to the Western concept of the nation-state itself. In the Middle East, he insisted, the nation was considered in religious terms, so that the "community of believers" was necessarily in a constant clash with the idea of a nation-state. Muslims were thus particularly inclined to *international* types of terrorism, since they were disinclined to comprehend state boundaries. (Vatikiotis mentioned the PLO as one major source of terrorism, but he failed to mention both its secular orientation and the fact that, far from being hostile to the concept, it was fight-

ing to *establish* a state.) Islam was hostile to democracy, and thus, "as European influence receded ... [t]he return of the traditional politics of violence was inevitable."[54] The overall effect of these presentations was to make clear that, whatever caveats they might offer, these experts were convinced of the existence of a particular Islamic tendency toward terror. This "tendency" seemed to be rooted in the idea that Islam was at once ahistorical, still operating from its medieval structures, yet also *hyper*political in its refusal to recognize a boundary between church and state.

The hyperpoliticization of Islam linked it to terror; it also connected Islam to totalitarianism. Conference participants labeled all three as anti-democratic and anti-Western, but also as instruments for the expansion of "politics" to the whole society. As Jeane Kirkpatrick, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, argued, "The affinities between terrorism and totalitarianism are multiple. Both politicize society."[55] This was also the underlying force of Senator Moynihan's argument that the threat of terrorism lay in its challenge to the liberal belief in the separation of public and private spheres. Just as the coverage of the hostage crisis had resolutely inserted the hostages into the private space by focusing on the hostage families at home, expert discourse insisted that terrorism in general was defined by its refusal to acknowledge the "innocence" of the "private" citizen. By focusing on this alleged refusal of terrorists, Muslims, and totalitarians to acknowledge the privileged status of the private sphere, the conference participants forged one enemy from diverse political and ideological trends.

Within this formulation, "media terrorism" became the code for a certain, particularly heinous, kind of violence that seemed to be primarily interested in the television coverage the action would generate. The heart of the "global battle" against the "cancer" of terrorism lay with Western public opinion and the media that (presumably) influenced it. One centerpiece of the conference was the journalists' symposium mediated by ABC's *Nightline* anchor, Ted Koppel.[56] The symposium included several of the most prominent journalists and columnists of the 1980s, including Norman Podhoretz, editor of *Commentary;* Charles Krauthammer of the *New Republic;* syndicated columnist George Will; Bob Woodward of the *Washington Post;* Daniel Schorr, then of Cable News Network; and two European columnists, Alain Besancon and John O'Sullivan.[57] Koppel began the discussion with a provocative introduction, suggesting that the media and terrorists had developed "a symbiotic relationship." "Without television," he said, "terrorism becomes rather like the philosopher's hypothetical tree falling in the forest: no one hears it fall and therefore it has no reason for being. And television without terrorism, while not deprived of all the interesting things

in the world, is nonetheless deprived of one of the most interesting."[58] In the lively exchange that followed, the discussants disagreed strongly and sometimes vociferously on questions of censorship, media culpability, and the issue of self-restraint in reporting. At one point, Daniel Schorr rather pointedly commented that it was entirely appropriate that Koppel mediate the discussion, since (referring to Koppel's rapid rise to journalistic prominence as a result of his role as anchor of *Nightline* during the Iran hostage crisis) "you are one of few Americans, along with Ronald Reagan, whose career has benefitted from terrorist activities."[59] But despite the disagreements among the participants, whose political opinions ranged from strongly conservative (Will and Podhoretz) to liberal (Woodward and Schorr), there was one remarkable convergence: media reporting of terrorist activities, it was agreed, helped to give those activities legitimacy.[60]

The journalists of the forum agreed that Western, and particularly American, media were trapped in a dilemma. The national ideals of openness and freedom of speech (and, of course, the competition among the businesses that are the media) meant that any highly spectacular event would be covered, and covered even to excess. But the representation of terrorist events, it was argued, served the terrorists in their cause. Media coverage of hijackings and bombings offered a "magnifying effect," functioning, in the words of Charles Krauthammer, as a "form of political advertising....Like the sponsors of early television who produced shows as vehicles for their commercials, media terrorists now provide drama—murder and kidnaping, live—in return for advertising time."[61] More or less successfully, terrorists used the media as a stage; and more or less consistently, the media gave the hijackers and bombers the kind of political status they were seeking.

Within this logic, the news media was represented as terrorism's coconspirator through its insistence on reporting the activities that allowed terrorists an audience for their grievances. Television's presentation of the story was also said to inhibit the military or law enforcement activity that would actually stop and punish terrorists—that is, having the cameras there limited the kind of violent responses national governments might choose. At the same time, the media, and in particular television, was said to be *like* terrorism: its pursuit of a story violated the sanctity of the private individual; it recognized no national boundaries; it refused to "avert its eyes" in the face of what should not be shown.[62]

Although it was never said quite so explicitly, a significant underlying problem with "media" terrorism, as opposed to other types, had to do with its targets. While terrorists who focused on a "local" population were rarely a threat to Americans and Europeans, when those same terrorists wanted to

get international media attention, they chose nonlocal targets to get their actions beamed into the living rooms of those Americans and Europeans. Krauthammer, for example, defined "media terrorism" by way of an oddly nostalgic comparison between the "classical terrorism" of the FLN in Algeria, in which violence was aimed directly at the French colonizers, versus a more insidious violence that was not directed at the oppressors per se. In this new terrorism, the hostages or the airline passengers were only the means, not the real object. The goal of the violence was not revenge, it was air time.[63] In this logic, "old terrorism," though admittedly violent, at least had the virtue of being uncommodified by a dependence on mass media. In this new age, relatively rare actions could nonetheless terrorize a "nonlocal" (and thus presumably "innocent") population; international news media gave the violence of third world actors salience in first world homes.

Krauthammer's delineation of the historical progression of types of terrorism—from direct and local to international and mass-mediated—was remarkably partial, even partisan. It ignored, for example, the continuing reality of terrorist activities that were *not* dependent on the media. As Bob Woodward attempted to point out, a great deal of the military activity aimed at instilling terror in a civilian population did not need television to get its point across. Woodward used the assassination of the president-elect of Lebanon in 1982 as his example, but he was largely ignored by other participants, who seemed uninterested in this merely "local" violence.[64] In essence, the distinction between "classic" and "media" terrorism was a distinction between victims; when attacked within their own borders, civilians and noncombatants simply did not hold the interest of most of the conference participants. (In fact, when the panel became part of the book, none of the liberal panelists were asked to contribute.) The panel's focus on "media terrorism" was entirely congruous within the conception formulated by the conference as a whole, which defined terrorism as a cancer and television as the agent of an infection that moved violence from the third world to the first world by attacking the innocent across state lines.

In a deft series of moves, then, the Second International Conference on Terrorism translated a rather broad understanding of terrorist activity as the deliberate and systematic targeting of civilians (to paraphrase the definition adopted at the 1979 conference), which theoretically could include a range of activities from an IRA bombing to the murder of nuns in El Salvador to the Israeli bombing of Palestinian camps in Lebanon, into a very specific focus on *international* events, particularly hostage taking, that made extensive use of the media as part of their strategy. The link between media and terrorism was constructed as both instrumental (what the media did to

further actual terrorist events) and metaphoric, in the shared tendency of both the media and terrorism to refuse to respect the "right to privacy" of American and European citizens. The flexibility of this definition—and something of its essentially nationalist nature—becomes clear when one considers the near-universal habit among conference participants of referring to the bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks in Lebanon in 1983 as a terrorist event. The horrors of that attack notwithstanding, it was obviously an attack on a military installation—the U.S. Marine base. In that case, the language indicated a convenient insensitivity to the distinction between civilian and military targets on the part of those who declared themselves most committed to it.

How the West Can Win was a respectfully reviewed best-seller, but it was hardly alone in the kinds of arguments it made about the terrorist threat. While the high positions held by many of its contributors surely contributed to the book's unusual visibility, it was part of an avalanche of academic and semipopular books about terrorism published in the 1980s. These books, and the associated reviews, plus major articles in popular journals, meant that the discussion of the proper American and/or Western response to terrorism had become a noticeable popular and policy preoccupation. Walter Laquer, himself the author of one of the best-known of these studies, pointed out in 1986 that "the literature on terrorism has grown by leaps and bounds."[65] Another observer complained, "Every think tank, police force, subway system, and fast food restaurant has its own mandatory 'terrorism expert.' "[66] These productions of knowledge, simply by their extraordinary volume, helped to construct what Edward Said has called "the sheer knitted-together strength" of a dominant discourse.[67] Although the specific policy suggestions varied, as did the particular political affiliations of those producing this discourse, the presumptions about what defined "terrorism" were remarkably similar. The real crime of terrorists was not their killing of civilians (which, after all, happened in wars all the time) but their targeting of private life. The Iran crisis was the paradigmatic and originating event for a discourse that combined concerns about the victimization of "innocents," the active role of the media, and a direct attack on the "West."

RETURN OF THE HOSTAGE STORY

In the mid-1980s, as antiterrorism was dominating the concerns of policymakers, the rescue of hostages taken by Middle Eastern terrorists became a near obsession in U.S. cultural texts, inspiring films, novels, and true-story

narratives. These stories inevitably took the Iranian hostage crisis as their reference point, either directly or indirectly, but they enacted a crucial transformation: in these accounts, the hostages in question were rescued, not negotiated for. They returned home as symbols of victory, not as reminders of decline.

In 1983, for example, the renowned spy novelist Ken Follett published *On the Wings of Eagles*, which recounted how billionaire businessman H. Ross Perot had organized a rescue operation to free two executives of his company, who had been wrongfully imprisoned in Iran. Publicity for the book went directly to the point: "There were two major American rescue efforts in Iran. One failed—and made grim headlines. The other succeeded...." Follett's account received ecstatic reviews and quickly became a best-seller; it was soon made into a television movie, starring Burt Lancaster.[68] Also in 1983, John le Carré published *The Little Drummer Girl*, one of the best-selling novels of the decade, which focused on the efforts of a covert Israeli team to capture a Palestinian terrorist with the aid of a naive young woman. The climax of the novel was the dramatic, last-minute rescue of the heroine by her Israeli lover. When the movie became a film a year later, the British heroine became an American, played by Diane Keaton. Although le Carré's tale was a complicated meditation on the moral complexities of violence, it was also something much simpler: a detailed exegesis of the elements of a successful rescue attempt.

In addition, hostage rescue quickly became a staple of American action movies. The film landscape had already been transformed by the success of action/sci-fi films like *Star Wars* (1977), *Alien* (1979), and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), which broke both budget and box office records. By the middle 1980s, action films dominated the box office, spawning new stars like Harrison Ford, Sylvester Stallone, and Arnold Schwarzenegger.[69] The low-budget imitators that came in the wake of these successful films made hostages and rescue a recurrent plot device, often organized around a wishful revision of the Iran crisis in militarized terms. In *Iron Eagle* (1986), for example, a teenager dreams of being an air force pilot. He finally gets his chance when he must launch his own operation to rescue his father, who is being held hostage by Khomeini-like Middle Eastern despots. Although not a big-budget film, it was successful enough to spawn two sequels.[70] In fact, Hollywood produced so many, mostly minor, films about terrorism and rescue in this period that when the Bruce Willis blockbuster *Die Hard* was released in 1988, the audience's presumed familiarity with the genre was part of the point. Just as the terrorists (who were really only robbers pretending to be terrorists) counted on FBI antiterrorism protocol to carry out their

heist, the film counted on the audience to know, and to enjoy the film's commentary on, the various routines of a hostage event: the issuing of statements and demands, the arrival of the media, the bumbling of high-level officials, and the vulnerability of frightened captives. By the time Sylvester Stallone was preparing to star in *Rambo III, New York Times* film critic Vincent Canby felt obliged to warn the filmmakers that they had better get their film out soon, since "if they wait much longer, there won't be any hostages left."[71]

The proliferation of militaristic action films in the 1980s often has been misunderstood as primarily a right-wing reaction to Vietnam. But the political currency of the action genre is far more complicated. On their surface, action films often exhibit rather different ideological positions: the range extends from the firmly militarist *Delta Force* series to the anticapitalist populism of several Steven Seagal movies (*Under Siege, On Deadly Ground*), from the right-wing populism of the *Rambo* films to the mildly liberal *Die Hard* movies, which construct snobbish Europeans, right-wing Central American dictators, and the Army Special Forces as the enemies. The terrorists in the action genre are sometimes third world radicals and sometimes ex-CIA operatives; sometimes they are just evil individuals. The films' attitudes toward the official state enforcement apparatus, be it the military or the police, is similarly varied, ranging from selectively contemptuous (in the *Rambo* and *Die Hard* films) to adoring (in *Navy Seals* and *Delta Force*). It does seem clear that any understanding of the politics of action films as a genre cannot simply be read off their plots, which seem to gleefully insert left- and right-wing (or apolitical) bad guys, as well as racially diverse male and female protagonists, with barely a ripple on the surface. Ultimately, the significance of the genre derives not from the films' choice of enemies, nor from the race and gender of their heroes, but from their construction of the American family as that which must be saved.[72]

The 1986 action thriller *Delta Force* is a particularly interesting example of the post-Iran antiterrorist film, not because it has a more sophisticated plot or more developed characterizations than other films of the genre but precisely because it does not. *Delta Force* is outstanding only in the degree to which it is animated by a virulently racist and patently militarist fantasy of rescue and revenge, which manages to place only the thinnest gloss of plot and characterization over its love affair with military hardware, body counts, and men on motorcycles. (When it was released, the film was the object of a nationwide protest by the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee.)[73] But as part of the routine B-level output of the studios, *Delta Force* is telling because of the ways in which it makes ob-

vious its own adherence to a sense of the emerging formulas and require-
ments of a genre-in-the-making.

The film opens with a shot of a single helicopter in a desert at night. A
caption reads, "Iran, Desert One, April 25, 1980," the date of the U.S. mili-
tary's failed hostage rescue attempt. As the camera lingers on the helicopter,
it explodes. In the ensuing scene, the Americans begin a rapid evacuation,
but one marine, Captain McCoy (Chuck Norris), goes back into the burning
helicopter to pull a trapped comrade from the wreckage. As flames leap be-
hind him, Norris carries the wounded man in his arms across the desert to-
ward the last departing military plane. On board, he complains to his colonel
about the poor planning of the hostage rescue attempt. "They [the top lead-
ership] thought their plan was better," the colonel tells him. Norris responds:
"I spent five years in Vietnam watching them do the planning, and us the
dying. As soon as we get home, I'm resigning." Norris's character makes
what is essentially a generational link between the iconic status of Vietnam
for baby boomers and the reality that, by the mid-1980s, the film's target
audience of teenage males would not have been born when the war in Viet-
nam ended. For this younger generation, at least, *Iran* was the touchstone for
American failure.

The plot that unfolds over the course of *Delta Force* is not about the Ira-
nian hostage situation, however, but about another hostage taking and an-
other rescue attempt. It is a fictionalization of the 1985 TWA hijacking, in
which an Athens–New York flight was forced to fly to Beirut. *Delta Force*
recounts the story of the actual hijacking in great detail, including the fact
that the plane was flown several times back and forth between Beirut and
Algiers before the approximately twenty hostages were dispersed into var-
ious holding cells in Beirut. In the end, all the hostages were eventually re-
leased after negotiations between the U.S. government and the Shiite fac-
tion, Hizballah.[74] Despite its obvious interest in reproducing a sense of
"authenticity," however, it is this real-life ending that *Delta Force cannot* re-
produce. In the movie, negotiations with the terrorists quickly prove futile,
and the army's Delta Force, with help from the Israeli military, rescues the
hostages in an impressively pyrotechnic operation. (Norris's Captain
McCoy returns from retirement for the express purpose of joining this res-
cue.) If the opening credits of the film were not clear enough in situating
Iran as the back story to the retelling of this new hostage crisis, the charac-
ters repeatedly refer to the failed rescue attempt. On at least four occasions,
Norris or one of his comrades makes reference to the Iran "fiasco," asking
themselves or their commanding officers whether "this time" they will be
allowed to go in and "get those people out of there."[75]

The story of the hijacking begins in the Athens airport, with vignettes that introduce several of the passengers and establish their embeddedness in families. Two happily married older Jewish couples strike up a conversation; one of them has just returned from celebrating their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary in Israel. The two women go off to shop, sharing stories of their grandchildren, and one woman shows the other her wedding band, which is inscribed in Hebrew. Also on the ground, several suspicious-looking dark-skinned men signal each other, then board. Once the plane is off the ground, it is taken over by the fanatic-looking terrorists, who are clearly Arab (they speak Arabic) and apparently Shiite Muslims (they ultimately make a connection with Ayatollah Khomeini).

As events unfold onboard, long, often melodramatic sequences outline the relationships among passengers and establish types: the brash-but-lovable Jewish women and their caring husbands; a noble Gentile priest and the two nuns who act as his family; a brave stewardess; three loyal young American navy divers; and a young family with a small daughter. Several connections unfold around the little girl and her doll, and when her father is separated from the other passengers, she gives him her doll for comfort. These sentimentalized characters caused more than one reviewer to complain that *Delta Force* was really trying to be one of the *Airport*-style disaster films that had been popular in the 1970s, "complete with a not-quite-all-star supporting cast."[76]

What the reviewers missed, however, were the ways in which these airplane scenes owed an even greater debt to the iconography of the films made about the Israeli rescue at Entebbe. In *Delta Force*, Entebbe functions as the successful (Israeli) model that could revise the U.S. failure in Iran. This link can be traced literally: *Delta Force* was made by the Golan-Globus production company and directed by Menachem Golan, the same Israeli team that made the Entebbe movie *Operation Thunderbolt*, which Israel submitted as its official entry to the Academy Awards in 1977. But it can also be seen on screen: *Delta Force* employs several of the actors from *Operation Thunderbolt* as passengers/hostages and draws on a similar set of characterizations of the passengers. The Arab terrorists, the Holocaust-scarred Jews, and the noble Gentiles are all near-direct replications. The final scenes of *Delta Force* and *Operation Thunderbolt* are also virtually identical: on the flight home after the rescue, the joyful hostages celebrate in part of the plane while the soldiers attend to one of their members who is dying. The fact that only one commando dies in *Delta Force* is also a direct reference to the loss of Jonathan Netanyahu at Entebbe. Thus *Delta Force* constructs a layered palimpsest in which the failures of the U.S. military in Iran are revised

through the production of narrative and iconographic links with the successes of the Israeli military.[77]

Delta Force also adds several new elements, however, which serve to both update and Americanize the film. The most obvious is the significance of television. Television is a character in *Delta Force,* albeit one that plays a rather contradictory role. At the level of plot, the film is very critical of television. Lee Marvin's Colonel Alexander comments knowingly that the terrorists "have gotten the attention of the world, so now they manipulate the media. Perfect." But at the level of the image, the film depends on television as its authenticator. *Delta Force* is meticulous in re-creating some of the images made famous by television and print media during the actual TWA hijacking. In one scene, for example, the American pilot of the hijacked plane, with a terrorist holding a gun to his head, leans out the cockpit window on the ground in Beirut to answer questions from reporters—an exact replica of a famous news photograph. The reporters in the movie roll their cameras and snap photos, making the images that the film's viewers are invited to "remember" from the coverage of the hijacking story only a year earlier. *Delta Force* thus references news reporting of the original event, using television images to establish a relationship of authenticity between the film and the historical events it recounts and revises. Like *Black Sunday* almost ten years earlier, the film depends on the audience's memory of television to signify its own "realism."

Despite this commitment to realist signifiers, *Delta Force* is also clearly a film that inserts itself in "history" in order to revise that history's unwelcome outcome. After the plane lands for the final time in Beirut, and hostages are dispersed to areas around the city, the Delta Force team is dispatched to rescue them. From that moment on, the film begins energetically telling a story that definitively did *not* happen, but that the film invites its audience to imagine as the superior alternative to the mere negotiations that in reality ended the crisis. After the team arrives in Beirut, there is plenty of action, as the rescuers blast their way through the city, basically leaving Beirut in shambles. They whoop joyously as they race through the streets in a car chase, dispatch dozens of terrorists, blow up buildings, and—along the way—get the hostages to safety.

Even once the hostages have been saved, the hero McCoy stays behind to confront the head of the terrorists, Abdul (Robert Forster). In this penultimate scene, the film's vengeful fantasies are highlighted, as McCoy refuses to use his superior weapons to dispatch Abdul, instead lingering over a hand-to-hand battle. Of course, this extended scene gives Norris an opportunity to display his martial arts skills, but since Abdul is not a martial

arts master, this is not one of the impressive showdowns that sometimes climax such films. Instead, it functions as something like a torture session, where vengeance is enacted slowly on the body of the Arab. He is badly beaten, slowly enough for the audience to enjoy each close-up of his increasingly bloody face, before he is finally dispatched with a small rocket launcher. The scene ends with McCoy back on his motorcycle once again; vengeance enacted, he smiles slightly and takes off to rejoin his team.

The final moments of *Delta Force* are focused on reunion and return. Once aboard the plane that will take them home (first via Israel), the hostages shower the military with thanks. The shots of the plane landing in Israel, where the waiting families stand anxiously on the tarmac, are designed to recall the mass-mediated memory of both the homecoming of the Iranian hostages and the Israeli return from Entebbe. Families introduced at the beginning of the film are reunited; couples kiss; the little girl gets her doll back from her daddy. The sober military men disembark silently, separate at first from the happy homecoming. But as the rescuers get on their military jet, with the U.S. flag emblazoned on the side, the hostages cheer them, throwing flowers at the departing plane. In this moment, the civilians recognize the movie's fundamental truth: the protection of their domestic tranquillity requires active military intervention. Public institutions must act to keep the private safe, and in that sense, private life is a public concern.

A year after *Delta Force*, another captivity and rescue drama appeared on the U.S. cultural landscape, this one in the form of the autobiographical account *Not without My Daughter*. Betty Mahmoody, the author of the book, was a middle-class housewife in Michigan, married to an Americanized Iranian doctor. In 1984, she and her daughter went with her husband, Moody, on what they thought was a family visit to Tehran; instead, they were forced to stay in Iran for more than seventeen months, during which time her husband and his family apparently colluded in keeping them from leaving the country. Mahmoody's captivity eventually ended with a desperate and dangerous, but successful, run across the border into Turkey. When *Not without My Daughter* first appeared, in 1987, it was reviewed positively and prominently in the major book publications; reviewers called it "compelling drama" and a "riveting inside look at everyday life in the Ayatollah Khomeini's revolutionary paradise."[78] Mahmoody's story of being held hostage in Iran was considered to have great commercial potential, and the movie rights were sold before the book was even begun.[79]

Mahmoody's tale was yet another hostage story but with a crucial difference; the site of her captivity was the home, not an embassy or a cell, and

the domestic nature of her drama was significant. Mahmoody's rescue came not with the arrival of the Delta Force but through her manipulation of her husband's expectations and the strength of her determination to protect her daughter. Unlike action movies and spy novels, her maternal melodrama seemed to solicit a female audience. When the movie *Not without My Daughter* was released in 1991, it starred Sally Field, whose acting roles had long identified her with emotional, female-centered characters.

In fact, gender is the central structuring problem of *Not without My Daughter*, as it was, in a different way, in *Delta Force*. Mahmoody's deep investments in what she sees as appropriate gender roles frame not only her understandings of Iran and Islam but also her sense of what has happened to her family. At first, Mahmoody focuses on her belief that she has been taken hostage by her husband because *he* has been taken hostage by a fanatical religion that teaches him that women should be submissive. As time goes on, however, Mahmoody seems convinced that the real horror of Iran and the bankruptcy of Islam are signified less by Iranian women's restricted lives than by their domestic failures.[80]

When Mahmoody first arrives in Tehran, she resists the imposition of Islamic dress and codes of behavior, claiming her rights as an American woman to live and dress freely. Over the course of the coming months, however, she (and eventually her daughter) are forced to wear increasingly restrictive clothing: the chador on the street and conservative, heavy clothing at home. Mahmoody painstakingly details these impositions and links them to the narrow, shallow lives the other wives lead. She describes the women as fearful and dependent, the husbands as selfish and brutal men who often beat their wives: "Iranian women were slaves to their husbands, . . . their religion as well as their government coerced them at every turn" (34). In her account, the political nature of Islam creates a particular gender ideology, which insists that women are limited to the private sphere, the servants of men.

There is no reason to doubt either the reality of Mahmoody's suffering or her general account of an increasingly restrictive environment for women in Iran. Although Mahmoody does get a good many facts about Iran and Shiite Islam wrong, she clearly is giving her best understanding of events and beliefs that obviously confound her. Unquestionably, an American woman living in Iran in this period would have found herself subject both to her own sense of cultural disjuncture and to condemnation by patriotic Iranians. In the mid-1980s, Iran was still a revolutionary society, one in which increasingly strict interpretations of Islamic law were imposed, including rigid rules about the appearance and behavior of women. The combination of these constraints, enforced by harsh punishments meted out by

the courts, and the impact of the terrible war with Iraq, made life in Iran, particularly Tehran, difficult—even oppressive—for many of its inhabitants. By the time Mahmoody arrived in Tehran, many exiled Iranians, even those opposed to the Shah, were speaking out against the new government.[81]

The remarkable, and deeply problematic, aspect of Mahmoody's account is not that she raises questions about the treatment of women in Iran, albeit in a crude way. Rather, it is that even as she raises those questions, they are secondary. Instead, much of the book is devoted to enumerating the failure of Iranian women to live up to a particularly American domestic ideal. From the minute Mahmoody arrives at her in-laws' home in Tehran, the one thing that bothers her more than the restrictions on her as a woman is the failure of other women to keep house properly. She is appalled by the lack of cleanliness in the homes of various family members, particularly the bathrooms. She insists that neither men nor women shower enough, that their clothes are filthy, that everyone around her stinks (26). And she is deeply offended by the food, by the fact that Moody's mother is such a bad cook. She fumes over the improper washing of rice and the inability of her in-laws to use utensils properly.

In contrast, Mahmoody takes real pride in the kind of housekeeping she does for her family, despite her furious hatred of her husband. As described on page after page, she carefully picks through the bug-infested rice; she thoughtfully shops for fruits and vegetables that are not moldy; she sweeps and mops the various houses she and her family live in, keeping them scrupulously clean, despite the fact that she can't get Saran Wrap (35) and even though her rude in-laws drop their sugar on the floor when they make tea (292). The months are punctuated by the "real American" meals she occasionally manages to cook; at the same time, she prides herself on her ability to cook Iranian food that is better than Moody's mother makes. If cleanliness is next to godliness, then American life and the American home are symbolized by Good Housekeeping.

Whether or not the upper-class Iranian women in Mahmoody's circle were in fact terrible cooks or their homes were in fact covered in cockroaches is less the point than how these images are used to bolster the larger logic of the book. The fanatical adherence to Islam has made something go very wrong for the domestic lives of these women and their men. Mahmoody's reaction connects her story to the long history of imperialist writing, and specifically to nineteenth-century European depictions of the colonized world. As Anne McClintock and others have shown, the "cult of domesticity" in the Victorian era meant that middle-class homes came to be characterized by their cleanliness and "refinement." Scrubbed floors, washed curtains, and polished boots not only distinguished the private home from the public world of work but also

differentiated the middle-class European from others less clean. "Housework,"
McClintock argues, "is a semiotics of boundary maintenance."[82] These "dirty"
others included both the industrial working class and the racialized inhabi-
tants of Europe's colonies. By the late nineteenth century, the use of soap
(made available through raw materials from the colonies) became a central
symbol of the progress of the imperial nations over the "primitives" in the
empire.[83] Mahmoody's disgust also resonates with the long history of anti-
Semitic stereotypes: the dirty Jew, which in other circumstances becomes the
dirty Arab, now the dirty Muslim.[84] Mahmoody's story mobilizes that his-
tory, focusing particularly on women and their homes as a site of uncleanliness.

The kind of confinement and limitation Mahmoody faced in Iran was, in
her view, based not on nature or social convention but on politics. The threat
to the family created by Islam came from the ideology that overly confined
women in the home, making them "slaves" to men. Yet Mahmoody also in-
sisted that "free" women would carry out their household duties properly.
She suggested that seclusion in the home made Iranian women not *more*
feminine but less so; covered in Islamic dress and thoroughly domesticated,
the women of Iran had nonetheless failed as housewives.

Mahmoody presented her existence before Tehran as a life of gender
freedom that was simultaneously universal and particularly American.
Mahmoody's freedom did not consist in *not* being responsible for cooking
and cleaning but in being able to dispatch those responsibilities with rela-
tive autonomy. The status of women as independent-minded caretakers of
the domestic order looked a lot like the "freely chosen subordination" of
women that had signified the privileged nationalist spaces in the biblical
epics. But the idea that the liberalization of American women's roles might
have come about through political and even ideological struggle was pre-
cisely *not* the argument of Mahmoody's book. Instead, the white suburban
domestic arrangements she defined as "American" were understood as nat-
ural, and the specific position of women in the United States was presented
as the gender order that emerged when there was no ideology present. The
implication, therefore, was that only people and cultures who were hyper-
politicized by religious ideology would see gender any other way.

Mahmoody's account was symptomatic of the ways in which the devel-
oping sense of American militancy in the 1980s was framed by the logic of
the captivity story: a private person, wrested from his or her home by sav-
ages, wants nothing more than to return to the family he or she left behind.
But the time spent in captivity also teaches the hostage that the private life
that makes one "innocent" of politics is also the thing that makes her most
representative of her nation. Indeed, well before the Iran crisis, the foun-

dation of Western liberalism had been its promise of a "private citizen"—
the private sphere as protected by national citizenship.

PRIVATE LIVES IN PUBLIC

In the years after the Iran hostage crisis, an impressive array of cultural and
political texts described American bodies as vulnerable to a terrorist threat
mapped as Islamic and Middle Eastern. The problem of the decline of Amer-
ican world power in the years after Vietnam and the militant answer sym-
bolized by Israel were brought home by the failures of the Iran hostage cri-
sis. The discourse of *America Held Hostage* was energized by the implied
contrast between U.S. humiliation and Israel's successes in rescuing its
citizens.   .

U.S. nationalism in the 1980s insisted that its self-justification lay in
America's respect for the public-private distinction, in the protected interi-
ority of its citizens. This vision of Americans as private individuals living in
families characterized by proper domesticity was certainly not new, or
unique to this period, or to writings about Islam or terrorism. But the image
of that private domesticity as imperiled, as under imminent and severe
threat from the outside, and particularly from the Middle East, underlay a
significant strain of nationalist discourse in the years after the Iranian
hostage crisis.

In this logic, the nation-state itself was identified with the private sphere
that it was said to protect. Thus the nation's necessarily public character was
concealed by the logic that constructed its legitimacy. The United States'
interventionism abroad was justified because this world of personal feeling
and domestic ties was threatened from the outside. State-sponsored activi-
ties like counterterrorism or military force could be undertaken for the sake
of something identified as private—love, the family, revenge.

Several years after the publication of Mahmoody's book, in early 1991,
the film version of *Not without My Daughter* opened at what turned out
to be a fortuitous time, just after the launch of the Gulf War against Iraq.
Although the war pitted the United States against Iraq, not Iran, and al-
though Iran had in fact just ended its own long and devastating war against
Iraq, the spillover effect was remarkable. With the movie's release, a mass-
market paperback issue of *Not without My Daughter* was catapulted onto
the best-seller list, where it stayed for almost four months.[85] It was perhaps
not surprising that as the United States turned to a major military action
against Iraq, the Iranian captivity story was revitalized. Terrorism's pres-
ence on the world stage enabled a narrative that constructed the United

States as an imperiled private sphere and the Islamic Middle East as the pre-eminent politicized space from which terrorism effected its invasions. For more than a decade, that narrative had worked to produce a certain type of American identity, defined by the production of individuals who were "free of politics." Within this world of vulnerable families and lovers, terrorism threatened precisely what *had* to be threatened in order to establish the dis-interested morality of the state's militarized response in the international arena. In the early 1990s, that sense of threat would be mobilized again, when, with the start of Operation Desert Storm, the United States launched its first all-out war against a Middle Eastern nation.