
How Vietnam War Influenced the Start of the Iranian Hostage Crisis and Nationalism in the U.S.

United States's sense of nationalism eventually began to grow again after the dispiriting loss of the Vietnam War. The reverberations of this loss also eventually contributed to major foreign policy issues. David Farber, author of *Taken Hostage: The Iran Hostage Crisis and America's First Encounter With Radical Islam*, and other historians have argued that through a sort of domino effect the Vietnam War and "Vietnam syndrome" greatly influenced the formation of the Iranian hostage crisis in 1979, and the rise of nationalism in U.S. citizens in the years leading up to it.

The United States mostly focused their foreign policy in Europe and Asia in an effort to control communism and encourage capitalism for a large part of the twentieth century. Containment was the main goal in both the Cold War, and the Vietnam War after that. Because America was so preoccupied with the goal of stopping the spread of communism, leaders completely overlooked a rising issue looming around the corner: Islamic radicalism in the Middle East. It is argued by some historians that if the United States hadn't been focused on Vietnam in the mid twentieth century, the threat in the Middle East might have been recognised and dealt with instead of fighting and losing the war in Vietnam. The focus of the United States in Vietnam and the obliviousness to the potential threat in Iran and the Middle East eventually lead to conflict with rebels and the Iran hostage crisis.

The "Vietnam syndrome" is a sort of retreat to an isolationist attitude of the American people after the Vietnam War. The defeat overseas encouraged the people to doubt the United States' government's ability to make decisions in foreign policy and introduced a "defeatist attitude towards American involvement abroad" (Cummins). It is also often believed that the Vietnam syndrome in the United States is what lead to President Carter's failure to return the American Hostages in 1980. Had the United States been more supportive of taking action in Tehran, Carter would have been able to create a more viable plan, retrieve the hostages and end the crisis in half the time it ended up taking.

Another contributor to the cause of the 1979 hostage crisis is the rise of nationalism in the United States as it was healing from the embarrassment of the Vietnam War. America was torn between the lasting effects of the Vietnam syndrome and the rise of patriotism in the time before the major conflict in Iran began. Farber argues in *Taken Hostage* that the United States' nationalism at that time blinded the government to what America's foreign policy decisions looked like on the outside. The United States' decision to let the Shah of Iran receive medical aid was what triggered the Iran hostage crisis, and it is believed that a better decision could have been made by the United States had they acknowledged the threat of the rebels in Iran that had been working so hard to overthrow the Shah. The Iranian people had reason to think that the Shah getting medical care in the United States was a sign of a conspiracy to bring him back into power in Iran. In an interview with the Princeton University Press, Farber states that "there was a tremendous asymmetry of memory between the American people's perception of their relationship with Iran and the Iranian's perceptions of that relationship".

The Iranian hostage crisis in Tehran was the result of American preoccupation with containment

earlier in the century, the effects of the Vietnam syndrome after a loss in Vietnam, and the subsequent rise in nationalism of the United States people. If the United States had adopted a more isolationist view on foreign policy before entering the Vietnam war, the Iranian hostage crisis and modern conflicts and issues in the Middle East might not have been issues today. The influence of the Vietnam War on the United State's history and foreign policy was large and has not dissipated since.

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