

HOSTAGE TO IRAN

"Don't go wobbly, George!" On the eve of the first Gulf War, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher reminded President George H.W. Bush to remain steadfast and resilient. They both did. PM Tony Blair may need a little of this in light of the recent illegal hostage taking of British sailors and marines. One could argue that America and Great Britain seem a bit snake bit by Iran and tread lightly in reply. Provocations continue in word and deed and one wonders at what point, some retaliatory action of significance will be taken. Or just wait and see.

Seems we have heard this song before and the lyrics are provocative and memorable: 4 November 1979...when the American Embassy in Iran was surrounded and fifty-two personnel were taken hostage. In the twilight of the Carter Presidency already beset with the fall of Iran's Shah and the coup/invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviets- this appeared to be a spontaneous attack by the people against 'the Great Satan(United States)condoned by the new leader, Ayatollah Khomeini and his Republican Guard. As an apparent result of these flagrant moves by the Soviets and the Iranians, President Carter warned: "A threat to the Persian Gulf Region would be met by US resolve and military force." It was January 23 1980...a time for soul-searching, war-planning and solution to the hostage crisis in Iran. Tactical nuclear weapons could be on the table

Hijacking was in vogue and two responses got the world's attention: Entebbe(Zaire)and Mogadishu (Somalia)where Israelis and Germans recovered hijacked planes respectively with counter-terrorism attacks killing the terrorists. US planning responded.

Col Bull Simon's Son Tay raid-an attempt to free US prisoners in North Vietnam(1967)along with Ranger/Special Forces expertise, SAS(Special Air Service), forementioned counter-terror units was grist for Colonel Charlie Beckwith's massaging of his new unit(Delta Force). Beckwith had served with British SAS(4-man units)and was impressed with their skills, competence and fortitude to live/fight behind enemy lines. Born in the heat of Africa when British Long Range Desert units penetrated German lines to cause havoc to include an attempt to assassinate the Desert Fox, fabled Erwin Rommel. Beckwith had employed small Delta Force units in the last years of the VN war with some success. An ideal idea to free the US hostages in Iran and Carter approved.

History reminds the operation failed: Involving Marine Helicopters from the USS Nimitz, AF-C141 Transports carrying Delta Force from an island near Oman to Desert One rendezvous, the eight RH-53D helicopters were reduced to six, ultimately to five via navigational problems and sand storms; Arriving an hour late, the pilots were shaken. Beckwith decided to abort the mission due to insufficient helicopters and received permission. As they began to leave one of the helicopters ran into a loaded C141 transport, killing some and initiating a huge fire. Heartbreaking!

When asked by Senator Nunn at the exit briefing, "what happened, and what did we learn?", Beckwith said: "A thrown together Ad Hoc organization of several services and chiefs had good intentions but it was an imperfect scenario. All assets needed to be in a permanent unit under one command." So it went!

In almost theatrical irony, Col Bull Simon with a small Delta-like unit slipped into Iran and freed Ross Perot personnel from detention and got them home.

