

Soundoff continued

The Iran editorial: another reply

Editor's note' Due to an error on our part, a significant portion of this letter was omitted last week. This week we are printing the letter in its entirety. Our apologies to those involved.

Dear Editor:

Some years ago, when the world was young and I was a fearless underground press editor, I wrote a four-word headline most critical of the Shah of Iran (exact wording available upon request) which brought me warm congratulations from the dissident Iranian students of Berkeley, California. But that was back when such dissidents were some sort of left-technocrats, still carrying the torch of the Enlightenment, and not Islamic fundamentalists, and we could appreciate each other. Now, however (perhaps I'm getting middle-aged?) I can find nothing sympathetic about recent Iranian behavior and I therefore would like to take this opportunity to make several mildly dyspeptic observations regarding your chortling editorial of January 30th entitled "The Hostage Crisis: A Bitter Defeat For The U.S.", in which the United States is accused of having an altogether too "weak and fluctuating" policy regarding barbarians.

My general line of objection to the editorial, aside from its piercingly shrill tone, is that the writer puts the U.S. into something of a "double bind," in which either the "doveish" policy usually followed or its "hawkish" opposite seem to be equally worthy of condemnation; damned if you do, damned if you don't. Whatever subjective needs such a line of analysis may fill for the writer of this (unsigned, name not, by local journalistic convention, available even on request) editorial, it seems to me to be less than astute political criticism and rather tricky journalism. (It isn't very neighborly, either, come to think of it, but that gets us off into a whole different subject, etiquette, one no longer much taught).

To start with, the "bitter defeat" point raised in the headline and in paragraph two is dubious indeed. One could as well argue, if one were fairly disposed, to view it as neither "bitter," since the U.S. acted with uncharacteristically doveish restraint, (for the most part, anyway) nor as a "defeat," lest the impression be communicated that the writer is good buddies with kidnapers and credits such with "sweet victories" for

behaving in ways most civilized people find downright tacky. It also, by implication at least, calls for some other, unspecified, course of action--but which? What, Mr./Ms. Editorial writer, would you have said if the U.S. had blasted the hostages free, or, perhaps, had kept Iran's money and left the hostages to rot? I think I can guess what you would have said then.

Furthermore, it wasn't, reportedly at least, "U.S. gold" from Ft. Knox but frozen Iranian assets that were to be turned over in exchange for the hostages; why gratuitously make it worse than it has to be? More "skinnykid machismo" perhaps? (Please excuse if you are female). And regarding the perhaps ill-considered but hardly "arrogant" invitation to the sick old Shah to receive treatment in the U.S.; it could well have been construed as ingratitude and cowardice by you and everyone else if the opposite course had been taken, and surely, the U.S. would do the same for Pierre should Albertans ever stage a Canadian equivalent of the Ayotollah's coup. And in any case, when the Shah left for Mexico by mutual agreement, why would that have to be construed, as you did, as "admitting defeat" instead of, say, admirable flexibility and willingness to compromise? Your interpretation sounds to me like a case of "Heads I win, tails you lose."

More importantly, it is patently and mischievously false to assert that the U.S. tried to "bomb, invade or otherwise seriously maim the audacious Iranian regime; if that sort of thing had happened, they'd all have been granted their oft-expressed wish for martyrdom, probably along with who knows how many others here and everywhere else. Things like the ill-fated rescue attempt are only "bad" by hindsight; when and if they work, people like you are likely to be when you grow up will turn them into lucrative video, film and instant book fortunes, as with Entebbe. Aside from the hindsight issue, we are once again confronted with your silly posturing, although this time you are fluttering with the doves instead of scolding insufficient American hawkishness. It is not at all a good idea to equate the helicopter raid with raining molten megadeath on simple camel jockeys; as a noted Canadian author has put it, "never cry wolf."

Regarding your confusing statements on American

'agony', it is not at all clear to me whether you cite it to show that even the American citizenry correctly perceived the depths of U.S. humiliation, or whether you intended to stress the way the media "intensified" domestic reaction to the point of creating widescale "breast beating." Presumably not the latter, since you rather touchingly refer to your grandmother's tears for the rescue team members who perished in the desert. I'd rather not think that CBS orchestrated the tears of your grandmother and other Americans and doubt that you think so either, so why didn't you make at least one kindly observation here, to the effect that crisis can still bring out something like a "collective conscience" in America if the crisis is a worthwhile one. But here as

elsewhere it is difficult for the reader to be sure which shell your pea is beneath.

As to the rejection by the hostages of Carter's attempt to "salvage some of the outgoing administration's pride," that indeed smarts, and it is a fair parting shot at one of the world's great born-again losers. However, it is patently disingenuous and, again, falsely macho, to equate "pride" with the line his successor might well have taken; do not feed old tigers red meat, it only angrieys their blood.

As to the last point you raise, that of continued European trade with Iran during the debacle and the recent frantic bids on the part of U.S. business interests to resume trading with the enemy, I must

admit that I again share your feelings to some extent. How ironic it is to be more patriotic than the business classes; one reflects on Lenin's comments as to where one might purchase the rope with which to hang certain people. But there may after all be a secret plan here; perhaps the West is scheming to buy up all of their oil, not only to assure that we do not freeze in the dark, but also to corner the market on a well-known oil derivative, petrolatum, without which they, addicted as they have been since classical antiquity to a peculiar form of interpersonal relations, will of necessity burn in the dark.

A side comment, if I may, regarding your literary style,

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**Crack a pack of Colts
along with the cards.**