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France-U.S. Negotiations on Iran Sanctions during the 1979 Hostage Crisis (Based on France's Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs Declassified Archived Documents)*

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Abstract

One of the most critical issues in Iran's foreign policy is European countries' foreign policy toward the Iran-US crisis. The hostage crisis in Tehran on November 4, 1979 (Aban 13, 1358 SH) was the first Iran-US crisis to affect Iran's relations with Western countries. This study aims to investigate the following question: "What were the French policies toward the hostage crisis, and how were they formed?" To answer this question, the "strategic autonomy" framework was utilized to comprehend France's foreign policy. This research employs a "historical case study" methodology, which critically analyzes historical documents, such as press documents, official reactions, and diplomatic documents. The findings of this study indicate that the French foreign policy of this period can be analyzed using the concept of "strategic autonomy." In its relations with Iran, France adopted the policy of "independently regulating relations with a third country," "independence in foreign policy decision-making," and "ensuring the well-being of citizens," whereas in its relations with the US, it followed the policy of non-interference in the US's reciprocal crisis with the third party and maintaining economic interests.

Keywords: France, Hostage Crisis, Iran, the U.S., Sanctions, Strategic Autonomy

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1. Introduction

France's relations with Iran have been ambiguous and complicated throughout the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI)'s history, both as a western ally of the US and as a country with historical links to Iran. During the first decade after the victory of the Islamic Revolution, this relationship went through several ups and downs, including good IRI-France relations as a result of France hosting *Imam Khomeini*, as well as crises such as the hostage-taking in Lebanon, the failed assassination of *Shapour Bakhtiar* (the last Prime Minister of Iran under the Pahlavi regime), France's generous aid to Iraq during the Iran-Iraq imposed war, and finally, the process of normalization.

Meanwhile, the takeover of the US Embassy in Iran by Muslim Student Followers of the Imam's Line on November 4, 1979, was one of the most influential historical moments in IRI's foreign policy toward the US, simultaneously affecting Iran's relations with the West. During the hostage crisis, the US made numerous efforts to enlist the support of its allies. France was one of America's allies with whom the U.S. negotiated to encourage its support for sanctions against Iran. Although the hostage crisis narrative mentions that America's allies did not comply with the sanctions against Iran, no detailed research has been conducted on the relationship between the U.S. and its European allies. Now, four decades after the crisis and the declassifying of its documents, it is possible to examine the foreign policy of America's European allies more closely, particularly America's sanctions policies.

On November 23, 1979, just ten days after the hostage-taking began, Jimmy Carter, the Acting U.S. president, issued an executive order and used "The International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA)" to seize Iran's property in American banks.

Then, the U.S. government imposed additional sanctions against Iran and requested that its allies enact them. Although the Soviet Union vetoed the sanctions resolution proposed by the United States on April 13, 1980, the United States began an all-out effort to convince its allies to support these unilateral sanctions. The support of European allies, particularly the nine members of the European Economic Community (France, West Germany, Belgium, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Denmark, Ireland, and the United Kingdom), as well as non-European allies, i.e., Japan, Australia, and New Zealand, was crucial for the U.S. In December 1979, the administration of Jimmy Carter began extensive negotiations with these countries to encourage them to join the sanctions against Iran.

According to most available sources, the reasons for Europe's non-cooperation with the U.S. are concerns about the radicalization of Iranian revolutionaries, protection of their country's economic interests in Iran, or fear of Iran's proximity to the Eastern Bloc. Despite these, details on America's policy toward its allies during this period are ambiguous and have not been independently investigated. In this research, however, we discuss that the non-cooperation of European countries with the US punitive policy can be studied in relation to the concept of "strategic autonomy".

The "strategic autonomy" of European countries, particularly France, towards third countries became important with the establishment of the European Union. However, understanding the context of this idea's formation in France can provide insights into the way in which European countries' perceptions and behaviors, notably France's relationship with mutual issues of America and the European Union with third countries, are formed. At the same time, a detailed examination of the actions and analyses developed in the

form of a historical case study (in this paper, the hostage crisis) can provide a more accurate view of the formation and implementation of this idea. The article attempts to answer the following question: what were French policies toward the aforementioned hostage crisis, and what perceptions led to the formation of these policies?

To answer this question, this study employed a "historical case study" approach. On this basis, research has been conducted on the "hostage crisis" as an instance of Iran-US issues that then affected Iran-France relations. Two types of historical documents have been collected as research data: First, archives of newspaper articles and other news stories published contemporaneously with the hostage crisis, as well as official remarks published in newspapers, and second, declassified documents from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The records in the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs archive center contain over 300 documents related to the hostage crisis. Ten of these documents detail the US-France negotiations and France's actions. Given the considerable time gap between press views and comments, official comments, and diplomatic institution analyses, this research required a critical comparison of declassified documents and the official or overt report about events in order to examine France's reactions at the time, and the reasons behind them.

First, the article will discuss the official and apparent positions of France, and then America's requests and demands and the multilateral sanctions issued by the "European Economic Community" will be addressed. Finally, documents relating to France's diplomatic negotiations and assessments of the hostage crisis will be examined.

1. 1. Literature Review

Numerous works in English have addressed the hostage crisis issue. Some of these works, for example, Williamson (2020), have dealt with the fictional dimensions of the problem and American operations to rescue the hostages (Wright, 2020). Others, such as Bawden (2006), have addressed the historical narrative of the hostage crisis from the American perspective. According to Bawden, this crisis represents America's first encounter with radical Islamism. Although he has described the problem from a foreign policy standpoint, he has barely discussed the position of America's allies in this regard. David Farber (2005) examined the hostage crisis from a historical perspective and using documentary research. Like Bawden, Farber sees the hostage crisis as America's first encounter with Islamic fundamentalism. He also has minor regard for America's other allies' reactions.

In Persian and French, generally, two groups of studies deal with French politics (either as an independent country or as a member of the "European Economic Community"). The first type includes works specifically addressing Iran-France relations after the Islamic Revolution. Safoura Tork Ladani (2018) mentions the hostage crisis briefly by discussing the departure of the French ambassador (Raoul Delaye) from Iran on November 4, 1979 during the crisis, as well as a meeting with his deputy chief of mission, Louis Amigues (the first adviser to the French ambassador, 1978-1981). Imam Khomeini gives Amigues permission to meet with the American hostages. The ambassadors of Syria and Sweden, as well as the *chargé d'affaires* of the Algerian embassy, accompanied him to this meeting. Tork Ladani concludes that this meeting demonstrates the IRI's and France's good relations at the time. However, she also explains that, in the end, this incident led to

distrust and insecurity on the French side due to the possibility of similar attacks on other embassies. Hellot-Bellier (2007) mentions the same incident as part of the events surrounding Delaye's embassy. He mentions a meeting between the French embassy's first advisor, Louis Amigues, and the American hostages held in various buildings. This meeting was made possible thanks to Abolhassan Banisadr's mediation and Imam Khomeini's consent. The author also mentions the French Embassy's concerns about French citizens in Iran being held captive.

The second type of research examines the policies of the European community as well as the punitive policies of the United States. According to Ebrahim (1387 [2008 A.D.]), European countries did not support US sanctions for three reasons: first, they believed that "reciprocal economic measures" against Iran would be ineffective; second, the economic sanctions imposed "heavy damages" on the European Community's wallet; and third, there was a legal gap in implementing some sanctions. At last, in order to avoid crippling NATO, European countries only agreed to impose minor sanctions against Tehran on April 22, 1980. Following America's defeat in Operation Tabas (Operation Eagle Claw), Edmund Muskie (the then US Secretary of State) asked European foreign ministers in Brussels and Vienna to impose more targeted Iran-specific sanctions. As a result, European countries decided to impose new sanctions on Iran on May 17 and 18, 1980, in Naples. Nevertheless, they mitigated the sanctions' impact by excluding all contracts signed before November 4, 1979. Britain, too, only imposed sanctions on "spot contrasts," thereby increasing the gap between European Community members.

Davood Aghaee (1385 [2006 A.D.]) briefly discusses the European Community's role and policy in the hostage-taking crisis.

Aghaee believes that the European Community maintained low-level relations with Iran during the hostage crisis in the hope of resolving the problem diplomatically. In contrast, Iran hoped the European Community would side with it against the US because of its reliance on Iranian oil. According to Anthony Parsons (1989), France and the United Kingdom voted in favor of the sanction proposed by the UN Security Council in January 1980. However, as per Parsons, due to the failure of the US-proposed resolution in the UN, European countries were not inclined to adhere to the sanctions. This reluctance stemmed from two factors: first, from Europe's perspective, sanctions would strengthen the Islamic Republic's extremists, and second, sanctions would bring the Islamic Republic closer to the Soviet Union. Parsons further adds that Europe's support for the previously stated resolution intended to help a troubled ally, rather than to end the crises.

1. 2. Conceptual Framework

The actions of European countries, particularly France, can be examined through the lens of "strategic Autonomy." In the past few years, this concept has been widely adopted in the strategic documents of the European Union and European nations such as France, particularly to identify an independent European policy concerning the US-China disputes and the minimization of US military support for Europe. It is essential to note that the concept of "strategic Autonomy" did not originate in the European Union. This concept originated in France and was subsequently introduced into the political literature of the European Union.

Although the concept of "strategic autonomy" was first issued at the European Union on the 4th of December 1998 and during the

British-French summit joint declaration in Saint-Malo (Damen, 2022, p. 15), it has a lengthy background. Jean Monnet, a French diplomat and the next president of the High Authority of the European Coal and steel community, first proposed the concept in 1950. Later, Charles de Gaulle used it to describe the French-American relationship. This concept first appeared in "The French White Paper on Defense" forty years later, replacing the idea of *L'Europe Puissance* (the European Power). It implied that, in the face of two superpowers, European nations have control over their security and independence (Ryan, 2020, p. 40).

Generally, there is no broadly agreed definition of the concept of "strategic autonomy," although all definitions focus mainly on "decision-making independence." The European Parliament has provided the following definition of strategic autonomy: "EU strategic autonomy (EU-SA) refers to the capacity of the EU to act autonomously – that is, without being dependent on other countries – in strategically essential policy areas. These can range from defense policy to the economy and the capacity to uphold democratic values" (Ryan, 2020, p. 43)

The German Institute for International and Security Affairs defines this concept as described in the following: "The ability to set priorities and make decisions in matters of foreign policy and security, together with the institutional, political, and material wherewithal to carry these through – in cooperation with third parties or, if need be, alone" (Damen, 2022, p. 1).

Finally, Niklas Helwig provides the following definition: "The political, institutional, and material ability of the EU and its member states to manage their interdependence with third parties, with the aim of ensuring the well-being of their citizens and implementing self-determined policy decisions" (Helwig, 2021, p. 21).

This research can demonstrate the origin of the concept of "Strategic autonomy" by examining a historical period in which France, as a European nation and the source of the concept, was faced with deciding whether to adopt the punitive policies of the United States. Although some issues brought up in the last two decades, such as the role of democratic norms in economic relations or technological relations, are not the focus of the paper, the background of "strategic Autonomy" is discussed in terms of three key aspects of the provided definitions. These aspects are "independently regulating relations with the third party" to "ensure the well-being of citizens" and "ensuring independent foreign policy decision-making."

2. France's Official Stance on the Hostage Crisis

The French government issued its first official reaction to the Iran-US hostage crisis on November 21, 1979, after a 17-day delay. Based on this, the French officials issued a statement condemning Iranian hostage-taking. The following is the content of the diplomatic telegram sent by France's Ministry for Foreign Affairs on November 23, 1979, to this country's embassies in the Middle East:

France recognizes the principle of respect for the independence of states and their right to freely determine political, economic, and social opinions. This principle is applied in France's relations with Iran, as well as its approach to the Iranian revolution and adherence to diplomatic immunities under international law. There is no reason to seize an embassy and hold its citizens hostage. France reminds the Iranian authorities not to resort to methods that the international community

inevitably condemns and to resolve their disputes using only methods that are consistent with international [translation ours] law (Bressot, 1979, p. 1).

The French president at the time, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, had no negative feelings about the Islamic revolution and saw it as a decolonization movement rather than a fundamentalist revolution. Despite this, some printed sources at the time referred to the movement as an extreme Islamist action (Nahavandi, 1980, p. 555), a medieval barbaric movement (Woudrow, 1979) or some kind of "sublime" Islamic racism (Broumberger & Digard, 1979). However, it appears that French diplomatic sources viewed this movement as a reciprocal issue between Iran and America and as another historical chapter of Iran-American relations. According to the French president, however, this movement was more akin to "accelerated decolonization" than Islamic terrorism. In an interview on November 29, 1979, d'Estaing stated:

... This is what we usually refer to as a religious force. This revolution expresses the discontentment, suffering, and needs of people who have been held poor politically and socially for many years and have now found a voice. These people use religious language to express their desires, but I am convinced that it is not the religious responses that will bring the Iranian people's revolution to an end [translation ours] (Giscard d'Estaing, 1979).

Afterward, he characterizes the Iranian revolution as a reason for emphasizing the significance of North-South dialogues, which are required to save developing nations from poverty and misery. D'Estaing also evaluates the hostage-taking crisis to the disadvantage of the southern countries and adds that the loss of international legal frameworks will have a greater

negative impact on the countries of the south than on the great powers:

A violation of international law is unacceptable, and it is evident that, as always, such a violation will ultimately affect the most vulnerable. It appears that the United States is currently experiencing this issue. However, the stronger nations can eventually protect themselves or their rights. If we allow international law to be destroyed in the diplomatic field or in the financial field - by non-repayment of debts - these smaller countries, the underdeveloped nations, will be the victims because there will be no international credit system for their benefit, and they will be unable to defend themselves [translation ours] (Giscard d'Estaing, 1979).

Despite viewing the hostage crisis as an extension of the historical dispute between Iran and the United States, d'Estaing voiced his optimism that the crisis would be resolved through the mediation of international organizations at the conclusion of this interview. In response to criticism that the French government has not reacted effectively and quickly to the hostage crisis, he mentions his steps, including his phone call to the American president, as well as France's chargé d'affaires' meeting with the hostages in Iran (Elkabash & Duhamel, 1979).

Even though the French authorities appeared to demonstrate their solidarity with the United States, they refused to make an unambiguous commitment to their ally. A diplomatic telegram sent to the French ambassador on December 24, 1979, advises him to provide vague responses to hostage crisis-related questions: "The United States has received active comprehension and effective cooperation from its allies and supporters in the upcoming debate in the United Nations Security Council. Different governments are

unwilling to provide additional information" [translation ours] (De Laboulaye, 1979, p.2). In an action that can be viewed as a type of cooperation with the United States, on December 22, 1979, the French government rejected the request to hold the "Russell Court" to deal with Mohammad Reza Shah's crimes because the International Criminal Court was noticing the hostage-taking case against the revolutionaries at the time, and the Russell court could have favored the hostage-takers' movement (*Le Monde*, 1979b).

3. United States Requests of France to Deal with IRI

Shortly after the hostage crisis, the United States began consulting with member states of the United Nations Security Council to encourage them to impose sanctions on Iran. However, the 4 December 1979 and 21 December 1979 UN resolutions 457 and 461 did not impose any sanctions on Iran. Resolution 457 only requested that Iran immediately release the hostages. This resolution also urged Iran and the United States to end the conflict through diplomatic channels (UNSC, 1979a). Notably, resolution 461 established a deadline of January 7, 1980. According to this deadline, Articles 39 and 41 of the UN Charter would be implemented against Iran if the hostages were not released (UNSC, 1979b). The Iran sanction resolution was finally presented to the United Nations Security Council on January 13, 1980; however, the Soviet Union vetoed the resolution. The French representative had voted in favor of all resolutions, but this did not imply acceptance of all sanctions proposed by the U.S. Finally, on May 17 and 18, 1980, European Economic Community members unanimously approved sanctions against Iran, though the sanctions were not very effective.

Since December 1979, the United States has requested that the European Community and the Group of Seven (G7) take punitive measures against the IRI. Nonetheless, these punitive measures were never fully implemented in accordance with U.S. demands. The documents obtained from France's Ministry for Foreign Affairs mention negotiations between U.S. officials, including Richard Cooper (Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs), and French, British, and German diplomats.

According to a document, which dated to April 16, 1980 (Lecomte, 1980a), the punitive measures requested by the United States were divided into two categories: voluntary measures and mandatory measures.

The voluntary measures were:

- Refusal to grant the IRI new credit lines
- Refusal to open new bank accounts for natural and legal entities affiliated with the IRI
- Refusal to accept new non-dollar deposits in IRI-related bank accounts.
- Refusal to purchase Iran's crude oil at a high price (higher price than OPEC).
- Immediate announcement of the due date following Iran's delay in repaying debt installments
- Sanctions against the shipment of weapons.
- Only pay Iran in dollar

The mandatory measures were:

- Prohibition of selling products to Iran, with the exception of food and pharmaceuticals

- Prohibition of land, air, and maritime transport of embargoed goods
- Prohibition of loading the products mentioned above onto Iranian air and maritime vehicles (ships and planes)
- Prohibition of extending new credits or loans to Iran, rejection of any significant increase in Iranian bank deposits denominated in a currency other than the dollar, and quick punishment of Iranian debtors.
- Prohibition of entering into any industrial service contracts with Iran
- The above measures are not binding on existing contracts.
- Reducing the number of Iranian diplomats as much as possible.

Finally, we should mention the European Economic Community sanctions against the Islamic Republic of Iran, which were endorsed by the ministers of foreign affairs of the European Economic Community on May 17 and 18 in Naples, Italy, with the support of Norway, Canada, Japan, and Australia (Payé, 1980). These sanctions included the following:

- Prohibition of selling or providing any goods, commodities, or [industrial] products to government entities in Iran or to all Iranian individuals or institutions, or to their destination, or to any other person or institution for use in Iran via member countries, irrespective of whether these products were manufactured on these countries' territories. The only exceptions to this sanction are food products, pharmaceuticals, and medicinally-exclusive raw materials.
- Prohibition of transporting products and goods by ship, plane, train, or any other vehicle that is registered in Iran, owned by Iranian citizens, or rented by them, and the prohibition of transportation of all property, goods, or products included in

article "A" through all land transportation vehicle and through members' territory to the IRI or any Iranian individual or organization, or for any purpose in Iran.

- Refusal to grant any new credit or loan to any individual or entity controlled by Iranian government agencies, objection to these individuals and entities' access to non-dollar deposits, and refusal to assign extra favorable payment methods than the methods that are typically used in international commercial transactions, mandating the debtors to adhere to the rules or act similar to those who have not paid their pertaining-to-loan debt or credit debt, and requiring all natural and legal entities within IRI's jurisdiction to act the same way.
- Prohibition of entering into new service contracts for Iran's industrial projects, with the only exception of contracts that involve medical and pharmaceutical care (Guillaume, 1980b, pp. 1-2).

4. France's Concerns in the Negotiations with the US on Sanctions against Iran

4. 1. France's Responses to the US in Bilateral Negotiations

The archived documents compiled by France's Ministry of Foreign Affairs mentioned the dialogues and negotiations between the two sides' officials. Richard N. Cooper, the economic deputy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the Carter administration, and Jean-Claude Payé, the director of financial and commercial affairs at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (the next head of the OECD), participated in these negotiations

According to the reports, the United States hosted the first

meeting between the parties at the United Nations on December 20, 1979, prior to the veto of the resolution during a quartet meeting with British, French, and West German officials (Payé, 1979). During this meeting, requests were made to the representatives of the three countries to impose the following measures: sanctions on the delivery of weapons, refusal to open new credit lines for Iran, refusal to open new accounts, refusal to increase existing bank accounts, announcement of the due date of bank debts, and payment for oil purchases in dollars only. The document references the responses Jean-Claude Payé provided to the American representative:

Regarding the purchase of arms, France did not enter into a new agreement with Iran (apart from the contract to sell twelve "Vedette Combattante" or French missile boats to Iran). Harpoon missiles, which should have arrived with the boats, had supposed to be supplied by U.S. Nine of these vessels had already been delivered, leaving only three in the Cherbourg port. According to this declassified document, if Iran met its obligations, the Vedette Combattante would be given to Iran with a slight delay, although France was in no hurry to deliver them.

France consented to the embargo prohibiting French financial and commercial credit lines. Regarding the prohibition on opening new bank accounts, however, it stated that this sanction was against France's interests. The interests of France required that Iranian accounts remain in France because, at the time, "Compagnie française d'assurance pour le commerce extérieur (COFACE)" had guaranteed more than twelve billion francs worth of contracts with Iran. Furthermore, there was no assurance that French banks could profit from Iran's blocked accounts with the U. S. In the following lines, the French representative

(Payé) is advised to respond to Cooper as follows: "This is not an issue to consider because Iranians have enough accounts in French banks".

Due to the lack of legal tools to manipulate bank accounts, the French government also refuses to manipulate bank accounts. These bank accounts belonged to foreigners who could evade the regular filters, and the "Banque de France" could only obtain information about these events. According to the remainder of the report, the only option for French banks was to negotiate with national banks in order to refuse to accept significant account changes. This paragraph adds the explanation that the Minister of the Economy was also opposed to these measures.

This declassified document also indicates that the United States has requested French banks that extend commercial credits to Iran through banking syndicates to pursue Iran for the total debt and interest in case of a delay in installment payments. In their meetings with the banking syndicates, French and Japanese banks reportedly refrained from the abovementioned measures because they believed them to be contrary to international law and their interests. European and Japanese financial institutions, thought implementing such policies, would prevent Iran from repaying its debts. In other words, refusing to acknowledge these banks' access to Iran's blocked accounts in the United States could only harm European and Japanese big banks.

Regarding the sanctions against non-dollar payment of oil, Payé reassured Cooper that this was not a concern, as France had no plans to purchase oil from Iran, and in the event that it did, France had no interest in its currency being used as the reserve currency of other nations. As a result, non-dollar payments were essentially

excluded. Prior to that, one month after the onset of the crisis, major Western oil companies had halted imports from Iran. Even Japan, which relied heavily on Iranian oil, prohibited the purchase of oil at a higher price than the set price.

4. 2. Economic Concerns

On the other hand, it appears France was concerned about specific ongoing projects in Iran. For instance, the French ambassador (Delaye, 1980a) considers the following projects to be of utmost importance for France: *Tabriz* thermal power station, the *Tehran-Khorramshahr* railway, electricity production and distribution equipment, the *Toroq*, *Kardeh*, and *Karun* dams, oil pipeline projects, radio and television projects. This telegram proposes that sanctions against the infrastructure, electricity and communication sectors be lifted.

France was also concerned about Iran's potential use of revolutionary discourse in Arab countries. This concern is raised by the diplomatic telegram (Delaye, 1980b) sent by France's Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the French embassy on April 14, 1980. Accordingly, the Islamic Republic of Iran could manipulate Islamic world discourses and bring up issues such as the Algerian war, the French colonial history, the coup against *Mossadegh*, etc., in order to persuade Arab nations to impose an oil shock against the West. This telegram adds that even if such a sanction is not implemented, Arab countries may be unwilling to compensate for Iran's embargoed oil exports. In addition, France was concerned that the Islamic Republic of Iran would call for a strike by employees of oil companies in Muslim countries. The then-president of Iran, Abolhassan Banisadr, expressed this concern in the form of a threat

in an interview with the French newspaper *Le Monde* on November 14, 1979, at the same time that the U.S. announced the freezing of Iranian assets. In this interview, Banisadr stated, "Oil workers will defend us with all available means, and we will make total chaos throughout the entire Middle East" (Rouleau, 1979). It appears that the simultaneous decrease in Iran's oil production, the cessation of exports to the United States, and the reduction of OPEC oil due to the rise in oil prices caused the Ministry for Foreign Affairs analysts to predict such a threat. During the hostage crisis, the oil price more than doubled, reaching 37 to 39 dollars per barrel (*Le Monde*, 1979a).

4. 3. Concerns about Possible "Dangerous Precedents" in the France's Foreign Policy

In a report, which dated to January 17, 1980, on the meeting between Cooper and Payé (Lecomte, 1980b), a second meeting between the United States and France is mentioned. In this meeting, Payé notes that "the US-Iran issue is a bilateral problem, and if France were to implement sanctions that the UN Security Council had not previously approved, it would be detrimental to France's reputation." In addition, the implementation of sanctions was fraught with legal and political complications, and these sanctions would only be effective if third-world nations supported them. At the conclusion of the report, it is stated that Carter's delegations were merely assessing the situation, and they did not insist on imposing their decisions during the meeting.

The following declassified document (Guillaume, 1980a) mentions Payé's legal arguments. His first legal argument is that the circumstances in France are distinct from those in the United States. Iran has violated international law against the United States

of America. This permits the United States to implement punitive measures against Iran. While France's rules have not been directly violated, its legal options for retaliation are more restricted. Moreover, if France participates in collective sanctions, it will face a legal issue under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. The seventh chapter of the United Nations Charter has subjected the monopoly of punitive measures to the authorization of the United Nations Security Council and delegated it to regional organizations in accordance with Article 53 of the United Nations Charter. France argued that, based on the very law, this country did not accept the Arab governments' sanctions against Israel because the military conflict between the Arabs and Israel allowed the Arab countries to justify their sanctions by applying the principle of legitimate defense.

4. 4. Concerns about the Ineffectiveness of the Sanctions

Other declassified documents indicate that the United States sanctions have been inefficient (Lecomte, 1979). This declassified document presents Washington's economic sanctions policy as somewhat absurd. The France side deemed this policy absurd because, in their opinion, Iran could implement a variety of solutions, such as oil barter, to deal with the sanctions-related pressures. This policy is absurd to the point that it contains implications of admitting a rather long war. These policies only send the message to the other side [the Iranians] that if they cross the invisible red line, the United States will take alternative actions. It is assumed that the United States is seeking minimal support and cooperation from the international community and that neither side wishes for this crisis to escalate beyond a slight strain.

According to this document, France is also concerned about the

United Kingdom's noncompliance with European Economic Community sanctions. Under its restrictive laws, the British only included contracts signed after May 30, 1980. Thus, all contracts signed prior to this date that were subsequently revised or renewed were exempt from sanctions, provided that the parties and the subject of the contract were the same as before.

In certain cases, British companies were able to compete with French companies by utilizing the Iran Sanctions Law. Typically, they could obtain contracts more quickly, evade sanctions, and acquire some contracts (for example, the helicopter engine repair and maintenance contract). For this reason, France did not reject any exemption requests since June 1980, according to this document (Guillaume, 1980b).

5. Conclusion

Despite the fact that France's policy towards the Iran-US hostage crisis was not evident due to the significant disparity between its declared and actual policies, it reveals the country's historical preference for "strategic autonomy." If we define "strategic autonomy" as "independence in regulating foreign policy toward a third party," then this independence rests on two pillars: "independence in foreign policy decision-making" and "prioritizing the well-being of European citizens."

France's independent foreign policy is reflected in its approach to negotiations with the United States and its "moderate" implementation of sanctions against Iran. These negotiations show a certain conservatism and reluctance to provide straightforward and honest responses to the US's requests. For instance, despite France's opposition to preventing Iranians from opening new bank

accounts, the economic representative of the French Ministry for Foreign Affairs was advised to make this prohibition seem irrelevant. In another instance, the French ambassador to Iran was advised to refrain from mentioning sanctions or punitive policies against Iran in his responses to reporters, instead referring to general or vague policies. In contrast, the French government endorsed nearly all requests for exemptions in trade with Iran.

Diplomats and analysts of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs interpreted this crisis as a mutual crisis between Iran and the United States and therefore deterred from adapting their foreign policy based on a mutual crisis between the U. S. and a third country. In fact, the French foreign policymakers' perception of the Iranian revolution was founded on the premise that it was a social phenomenon induced by widespread poverty and deprivation. Therefore, they viewed the conflicts between the United States and Iran as a result of America's colonial legacy in Iran and not as a fundamental conflict between Iran and the West. Furthermore, in the French Ministry for Foreign Affairs analysis, there is little concern about the risk of similar actions toward other embassies or establishing a dangerous precedent in violating the Vienna Convention.

From a legal standpoint, this perception of the crisis manifests itself in the argument that the Iran-U.S. relationship is a state of war and that the U.S. can punish Iran on the basis of legitimate defense. From this perspective, this argument did not apply to third countries such as France, and it could even create an adverse precedent for this country's foreign policy. As a result, France avoided becoming too involved in the dispute.

The second factor influencing French foreign policy in this

period is the protection of France's financial and economic interests in Iran. This factor can be examined under the heading "putting the interests of our citizens first." Not only was the Iran-U.S. dispute viewed as threatening, but it could also pave the way for the United States' withdrawal and the emergence of other competitors. At the same time, the inability of French banks to access blocked Iranian accounts in American banks could harm these institutions. In addition, Europeans viewed Iran as a potential consumer market that could be controlled by rivals in the absence of coordinated international sanctions. The inefficient implementation of sanctions by the United Kingdom heightened this concern. French projects in Iran at the time, which could have been halted due to sanctions, were another economic concern for the French ambassador in Iran.

From an economic standpoint, France's conflict with Iran could endanger Europe. There was concern regarding Iran's potential influence on oil exporters. In the diplomatic telegram of the French ambassador in Iran, for example, the remarkable increase in oil prices in 1979 and the discursive power of the Islamic Revolution in influencing the oil company employees of Muslim countries were mentioned. Another aspect of France's concerns would be the ineffectiveness of sanctions due to the lack of cooperation from developing countries.

In general, France's reaction to the hostage crisis was characterized by a lack of practical cooperation with America, a lack of transparency in negotiations, and a tolerant implementation of sanctions against Iran. The most important reason for this policy was France's belief in the "reciprocity of the crisis," as well as "economic concerns" such as the possibility of an oil embargo by Muslim countries and the loss of economic benefits.

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