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Christian Emery. "The Transatlantic and Cold War Dynamics of Iran Sanctions, 1979-80." *Cold War History* 10: 3 (August 2010). DOI: 10.1080/14682740903218854.
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Review by **Scott Kaufman**, Francis Marion University

When Iranian militants overtook the U.S. embassy in Teheran in November 1979 and seized several dozen American hostages, the administration of President Jimmy Carter enacted a number of measures to punish Iran and force the hostages' release. These steps centered around an embargo of Iranian oil imports, the freezing of Iranian assets in U.S. banks, and the curtailment of commercial ties. Christian Emery points out that the Carter White House sought European support to make these sanctions effective. However, it was not until the spring of 1980 that America's European allies agreed to follow the U.S. lead.

Focusing primarily upon Great Britain, West Germany, and Italy, Emery argues that there were several reasons for the Europeans' reluctance to adopt sanctions against Iran. A desire not to disrupt important trade relations and a fear that sanctions might undermine "the position of moderate factions in Iran" or "invite Soviet interference or throw Iran into economic dependence on the Eastern bloc" (378) all played their part in allied decisionmaking. But Afghanistan and Carter's political fortunes changed the minds of leaders in London, Bonn, and Rome. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the subsequent rise in superpower tensions made European officials desirous to avoid "undermining transatlantic solidarity" (383). Meanwhile, growing pressure within the United States upon the White House to free the hostages---pressure that had been taking a toll on Carter's bid for the Democratic nomination for the presidency---made Carter give military intervention in Iran far more attention than he had before. America's European friends believed that by accepting sanctions, they could maintain unity with Washington while hopefully preventing armed U.S. action against Iran.

As it turned out, Carter approved the infamous and disastrous effort by the U.S. military to rescue the hostages. Moreover, while Europeans still adopted sanctions, they did not make those trade restrictions retroactive, thus weakening their impact. Additionally, Emery explains that had Europeans offered to impose more stringent trade limitations, it would have made little difference, for the Soviet Union could veto any initiatives brought forward to the United Nations, and Iran could “indirectly import goods through third countries” (387).

Emery emphasizes that the purpose of his article is not to assess whether the sanctions succeeded but instead to examine the domestic and international determinants behind the U.S. decision to impose sanctions and the willingness (or lack thereof) of America’s allies to follow suit. To support his argument, the author relies upon documents obtained from the National Security Archive, the Carter Library, the Declassified Documents Reference System, and the internet; memoirs; and an array of secondary sources. I note that he did not use several works which address Carter’s foreign policy, including those by John Dumbrell, Robert Strong, and me, or monographs by Mark Bowden or David Harris on the hostage crisis.¹ Admittedly these books tend to focus more on bilateral U.S.-Iranian relations, but they could have buttressed Emery’s case. Both Bowden and Strong give attention (albeit limited) to the difficulty of getting international support for sanctions. Bowden further explains that the Iranians had every intention of holding onto the hostages as “a final insult to” Carter, which reinforces Emery’s contention that tougher sanctions would likely have made little difference.² Additionally, the author did not include material from European archives, though the necessary documents may not have been declassified when he wrote the article.

There are two broader, interrelated questions that Emery does not answer and which offer opportunities for further research. First, what does the Iran episode say more broadly about the difficulty of achieving multilateral sanctions? Second, what does it suggest about American and European views of using sanctions as a weapon? To me, the back-and-forth between Washington and West European capitals regarding Iran sounds very similar to their differences over the trade restrictions imposed upon the Soviet Union

¹ John Dumbrell, *The Carter Presidency: A Re-evaluation*, 2nd ed. (New York: Manchester University Press, 1995); Robert A Strong, *Working in the World: Jimmy Carter and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000); Scott Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled: The Foreign Policy of the Carter Administration* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008); Burton I. Kaufman and Scott Kaufman, *The Presidency of James Earl Carter Jr.*, 2nd ed. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006); Mark Bowden, *Guests of the Ayatollah: The First Battle in America’s War with Militant Islam* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2006); David Harris, *Crisis: The President, the Prophet, and the Shah - 1979 and the Coming of Militant Islam* (New York: Little, Brown, and Co., 2004). I am not including in this list Betty Glad’s book, *An Outsider in the White House: Jimmy Carter, His Advisors, and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009). In light of the lag between acceptance of an article and its publication, it is likely her book came out after Emery’s article was accepted.

² Bowden, *Guests of the Ayatollah*, 407-8, 629; Strong, *Working in the World*, 236.

and communist China earlier in Cold War. For instance, when the United States sought to convince its allies to impose an embargo on trade with China, it encountered resistance. The British, as in the case of Iran, contended that an embargo against China would endanger their commercial interests and undermine any hope of moderating Beijing's attitude toward the West. West Germany also viewed trade relations with China in monetary terms.³ There has been some work on multilateral sanctions, but it tends to use case studies and modeling to assess the success or failure of those sanctions as opposed to the process of establishing and maintaining them.⁴ What is needed, therefore, is a good multi-archival *history* of trade as a weapon. In this respect, Emery has provided an important piece of a much larger story.

Scott Kaufman is Associate Professor of History at Francis Marion University where he teaches courses on U.S. foreign policy and American military history. He has authored or co-authored six books including, most recently, *Plans Unraveled: The Foreign Policy of the Carter Administration* (DeKalb: University of Northern Illinois Press). He is currently finishing a manuscript on Project Plowshare.

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³ See, for instance, Rosemary Foot, *The Practice of Power: U.S. Relations with China since 1949* (New York: Oxford, 1995); Victor S. Kaufman, *Confronting Communism: U.S. and British Policies toward China* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001); Michael Mastanduno, *Economic Containment: CoCom and the Politics of East-West Trade* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); Jeffrey A. Engel, *Cold War at 30,000 Feet: The Anglo-American Fight for Aviation Supremacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

⁴ On this score, see Mastanduno; Donald L. Losman, *International Economic Sanctions: The Cases of Cuba, Israel, and Rhodesia* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1979); Lisa L. Martin, *Coercive Cooperation: Explaining Multilateral Economic Sanctions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Daniel W. Drezner, *The Sanctions Paradox: Economic Statecraft and International Relations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); William H. Kaempfer and Anton D. Lowenberg, *International Economic Sanctions: A Public Choice Perspective* (Boulder: Westview, 1992); and Gary Clyde Hufbauer, et al., *Economic Sanctions Reconsidered*, 3rd ed. (Washington, DC: Peterson Institute for International Economics), 2007.