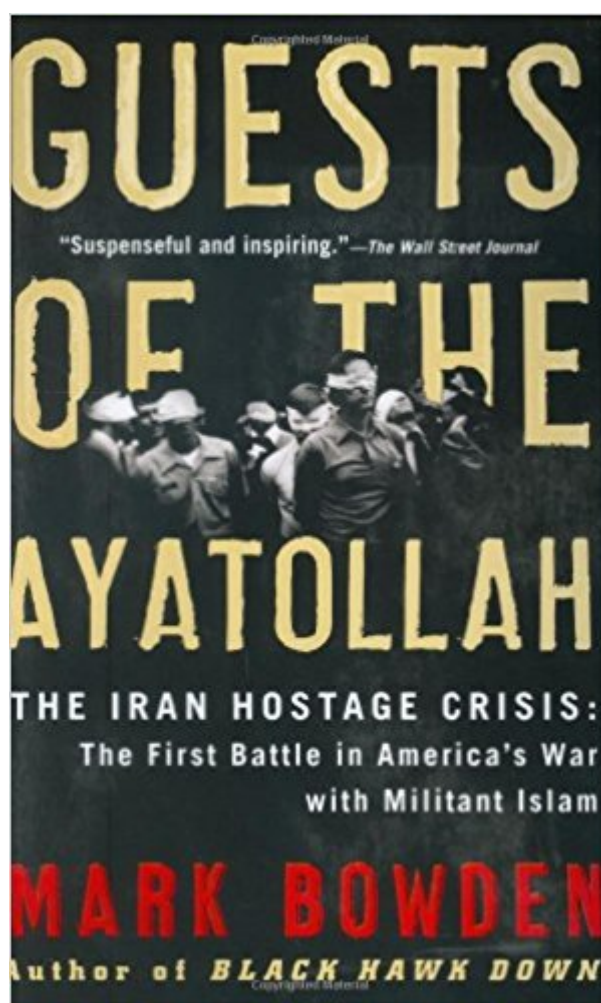


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# Guests Of The Ayatollah: The Iran Hostage Crisis: The First Battle In America's War With Militant Islam



## Synopsis

From the best-selling author of *Black Hawk Down* comes a riveting, definitive chronicle of the Iran hostage crisis, America's first battle with militant Islam. On November 4, 1979, a group of radical Islamist students, inspired by the revolutionary Iranian leader Ayatollah Khomeini, stormed the U.S. embassy in Tehran. They took fifty-two Americans hostage, and kept nearly all of them hostage for 444 days. In *Guests of the Ayatollah*, Mark Bowden tells this sweeping story through the eyes of the hostages, the soldiers in a new special forces unit sent to free them, their radical, naïve captors, and the diplomats working to end the crisis. Bowden takes us inside the hostages' cells and inside the Oval Office for meetings with President Carter and his exhausted team. We travel to international capitals where shadowy figures held clandestine negotiations, and to the deserts of Iran, where a courageous, desperate attempt to rescue the hostages exploded into tragic failure. Bowden dedicated five years to this research, including numerous trips to Iran and countless interviews with those involved on both sides. *Guests of the Ayatollah* is a detailed, brilliantly re-created, and suspenseful account of a crisis that gripped and ultimately changed the world.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Bowden, whose *Black Hawk Down* won him a National Book Award nomination, turns his sights to the 1979 Iran hostage crisis. The audio abridgment is generally smooth, though it's often difficult to keep the cast of characters straight: 66 original hostages, dozens of Iranian captors and untold

numbers of diplomats, bureaucrats and family members. On audio, such a dizzying array of stories and backstories can become confusing. Bowden is a capable and competent narrator; while there are no tour de force performances here, the reading is solid and consistent, with no annoying vocal tics or other distractions. The real bonus of the audio over the print version is the final disc, which contains several visual enhancements: a PDF map of the embassy compound; a map of Iran, with markings not only for cities but also the landing site of the ill-fated 1980 rescue mission; and, most impressively, almost nine minutes of footage from the Discovery Channel's four-part documentary *Guests of the Ayatollah*, featuring compelling interviews with surviving members of the rescue team. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

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Mark Bowden proved he knows how to tell a gripping narrative in *Black Hawk Down* and *Killing Pablo*. In this latest book he takes on a story with more immediate topical consequence, with similar results. It's a "painstaking recreation of those 444 days" (Cleveland Plain Dealer), told mostly from the red, white, and blue perspective. Some reviewers knock Bowden for focusing almost exclusively on the American captives and providing little insight into the motives and emotions of the Iranian hosts. Others note a tendency to get caught up in the finer details of the hostage crisis. But the skill with which he tells his story trumps all such concerns. Copyright © 2004 Phillips & Nelson Media, Inc.

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It was too long and not because it was overly detailed. It was repetitive at times and some of the details were interesting but felt out of order. The first third of the book was really great. The story of the hostage takeover and first few months of captivity were excellent. The story of the end game and ultimate release was good as well and could have been more detailed even. He did get slightly political and took a shot at Reagan but I don't think it was intentional. The middle just started to drag. At times I felt like a hostage to it myself. I am not one to "skip ahead" but I got close a few times. The discussion regarding the rescue was excellent and perfectly detailed I thought. The other thing that might have been missing was discussion of what some of our allies did or did not do, could have done, or how their citizens considered the crisis. I would recommend the book but skipping ahead some in the middle would not be frowned upon.

This is a fascinating, gripping non-fiction account of the Iran Hostage Crisis of 1979-1981. I bought this book after seeing "Argo." This book is definitely not an account of the true "Argo" story; in fact,

the six workers who were the subject of that film are mentioned only very briefly in this book (as in, maybe ten sentences). This book gives a brief background of the events leading up to the overthrow of the shah and the Iranian Revolution in the late 70s. Prior to reading this book, I only knew that there had been a revolution and that it had involved a retreat to a more fundamentalist Islamist state. That was the extent of my knowledge of the revolution. I knew nothing about the crisis itself. "Guests of the Ayatollah" starts with a concise history of shah's rule, the revolution, and America's involvement in putting the shah into power. There is definitely more in-depth reading available on the subject, but the details provided in the book gave me enough background to sufficiently understand the political climate at the time of the takeover. The book weaves the story of the takeover with the ongoing political change in Iran, the stories of the hostages' experiences in captivity, the failed rescue attempt by a U.S. special forces outfit, and the Carter Administration's response to the crisis. The book jumps around among these different topics, but it's in chronological order, is easy to follow, and is very engrossing. The only real issue I had was keeping track of the various hostages. The author doesn't provide accounts of all 52 hostages who spent the entire 444 days in captivity. But he follows enough people, who for the most part all seemed to have similar diplomatic roles, that I did get their jobs/titles/responsibilities confused. It turns out that this doesn't matter much - you become acquainted with the hostages throughout the book as they endure their captivity, and the author re-references some of their background details. Some other reviews of this book have complained that the descriptions about the hostages' daily life got tired and tedious. I did not find that to be the case. I found that reading about how they developed communications systems when they couldn't talk, interacted with the guards, and got on each others' nerves was extremely interesting. Different people responded differently to the captivity, and the ways some of them tried to torment their guards were actually pretty amusing. The inside account of the Carter Administration's approach to the crisis was also very interesting. I walked away from this book feeling as though Carter made decisions based on what would preserve lives, and not what was politically advantageous. One final note: I recommend buying this book on an e-reader if possible. I ordered the paperback version, and it's pretty hefty. So I returned it and bought the e-book. The Kindle version was properly formatted and contained all the same pictures as the paperback version. (There aren't many photos in this book. If you are looking for pictures of all the hostages, you won't find that here.)

Fantastic book, well written, researched, fast paced. I learned a lot from this detailed accounting of the Iranian hostage taking that so paralyzed America for 444 days. Bowden went to Iraq, spoke with

key participants from there, thus shedding light on their thoughts, motivations and observations of what happened then and since. Pictures and maps are excellent! Narrative Journalism is alive and well as long as Mark is out there digging into the facts, interviewing folks, seeing the places - his work really shows in the final product - his books. Absolutely must reading for anyone who grew up around that time, historians or anyone curious to see one aspect of how things in the Middle East got to be the way they are today

How to review this book? Mark Bowden is one of my favorite authors, and I normally love his work. But the Iranian hostage crisis is, at least to me, one of the most infuriating incidents in my lifetime. In the end, I decided that a masterful account of a horrible incident is still a masterpiece.=== The Good Stuff === \* Bowden does a nice job of capturing the incident and keeping his own viewpoints in check, at least until the final chapter. He manages to present the views of the Iranian "students", and while I don't agree at all with their logic, I can see how they got to their viewpoint. Bowden also gives a look into Iranian politics, and shows how Iranian, as well as American, politics played into the crisis. As usual, Bowden's works are well researched and carefully related. \* The personalities of many of the main characters are captured quite well. We get a look at what is going on in the minds of Jimmy Carter, Delta Force team members, several of the hostages, some Iranian leaders, and even some of the captors. Bowden avoids getting too caught up in the hero-worship of the former hostages, and gives a fairly unbiased account of some of their strengths and foibles.\* Bowden rewards his (American) readers with a few tales of the hostages' resistance. Even while blindfolded and handcuffed to a chair, some of the captives had a remarkable talent for annoying and challenging their captors. In one particularly memorable incident, a hostage is being led, blindfolded, through a hallway when another captor points a pistol at his head. The hostage is able to see enough through his blindfold to grab the pistol away from the guard, twirl it around, then hand it back to the captor. The hostage pats the guard on the head and warns him against pointing weapons at people he doesn't intend to shoot. We also hear of one terrorist's later ambition to join the diplomatic corps, and his disappointment that his role in storming an embassy has evidently disqualified him for a career in diplomacy.=== The Not-So-Good Stuff ===\* The book runs a little long, as did the crisis itself. I enjoyed it, and found it to be complete and thorough, but I could see how some readers might become bogged down in the details. I didn't find it to be repetitive or padded, but in creating a full and accurate account of the crisis, Bowden includes quite a bit of detail.\* I was aggravated by the book-not the way it was written, but the underlying events. I lived through the events the first time, and reading the book just brought back memories of an unhappy time.\* I think the book came

up a little short at the end. My own personal opinion is that Carter and Reagan played a masterful game of good cop/bad cop, and used Reagan's perceived militarism as a stalking horse to force a resolution. Bowden sort of hints at this, but doesn't really develop a supporting or conflicting argument.=== Summary === If you a Mark Bowden fan like me, or if you like good quality investigative reporting, this is one of his better efforts. The underlying tale is infuriating, and the book is capable of dredging up bad memories. However it is a very good account of the crisis, and it is well presented from multiple sides. I'd recommend the book to anyone interested in the hostage crisis or American reactions to terrorism.

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