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Bill Moyers' Journal

"Voices on Iran"

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Voices On Iran

[Tease — videotape of interview with Zbigniew Brzezinski, April 27, 1980]

BOB CLARK (ABC correspondent): Hasn't the failure of that rescue mission effectively ended any prospect for an early release of the hostages?

BRZEZINSKI: I would not draw that conclusion. I hope that it brings home to Teheran a very important message, which until a week ago the Iranians were inclined to discount, and the message is this: Do not scoff at American power, do not scoff at American reach. It is in Iran's interest to resolve this problem peacefully. It is our preference to resolve it peacefully.

BILL MOYERS: The president's national security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, hopes for peace but talks tough. And tensions between the United States and Iran are building. A lot of people I respect fear our two countries are heading for a confrontation — indeed, toward war. We know what our own government is saying. For days now, President Carter, Brzezinski, Defense Secretary Brown and other officials have been holding press conferences and talking privately without attribution to reporters and congressmen. I intend to listen to some other voices tonight, including the Iranian ambassador to the United Nations. How accurate is our understanding of what's happening in Iran? Or their understanding of us? At a threatening moment, this is a modest effort to stop, look and listen. I'm Bill Moyers.

[Bill Moyers' Journal opening]

[Interior, studio]

MOYERS: Lyndon Johnson used to say that a man's judgment is no better than his information. Yet, he fell upon hard times in Vietnam, partly because our actions there were based mostly on the official view of the roots and reasons for that revolution. Now we are dealing with a revolution in Iran, and it seems judicious to consider if we really know what's happening there. People who study ways to settle things without violence say you begin by really trying to understand your opponent's goals, limitations and political situation, and how working toward a solution might make each side look good to its own people. In that spirit, somebody wrote a letter to the *Washington Post* the other day and suggested that what the White House really needs to help with the Iranian crisis is a corps of anthropologists like the late Margaret Mead. She understood that most political conflicts are played out against cultural, historical, social backgrounds that negotiators ignore at peril to us all. Before we go to war with Iran, then, it might be a good thing to hear from other than official American voices what's happening there, and how Iranians see, themselves, the nature of this conflict. Until the revolution that overthrew the Shah last year, the general wisdom in this country was that he was a stable American ally and that things there were under control. It seems fair to ask, how well did we understand this nation of 35 million then and how well do we understand it now? Most of us rely on our information about Iran from American newspapers and television. How well has the press performed? Professor William Dorman, you head up the journalism department at California State University in Sacramento, and you've been studying the print media and how it has covered Iran over the last three years. What have you found?

WILLIAM DORMAN: Well, I've found that they have done — the print media, and I would also add television, there haven't been many significant differences — that the media have in general misinformed us, I think, to a degree that is frightening.

MOYERS: In what specific ways?

DORMAN: Well, I think we have to go back to when the press began covering Iran for Americans, and that's 1953, the CIA-engineered coup that overthrew Mohammed Mossadegh. At that time he was portrayed as a senile communist — he was portrayed in ways that set the scene for what's happening today — when indeed he was a nationalist, a patriot, an enormously popular politician in Iran. He was overthrown. We were told that it was necessary to stop communism. Well, then we come up to the more recent present, 1978, the demonstrations in Qom.

MOYERS: That's the holy city, so-called?

DORMAN: Right. And at this point the press— understand that before 1978, January roughly, Americans were— knew very little about Iran. Most Americans thought it was an Arab nation, for example. There must be some sand involved, perhaps camels— this kind of general sense of the place. But it was a land of mystery. They may have heard of the shah, but more because of his lavish life style and because of his rule over his people. So, in just a year's time, the American media convinced Americans that the revolutionary movement in Iran had no legitimacy, it did not deserve the support of the American people. Not only did they— it convinced us that they did not deserve our sympathy.

MOYERS: I know you wrote somewhere that the American press coverage has denied the Iranian dissidents 'the legitimacy they believe their cause deserves.' Explain that.

DORMAN: All right. What happened, in just a year's time, was — well, let me recite some examples. Here's a headline: 'Fourteen Die in Iranian Riots Opposing Modernization Plan.' Here's a lead from a United Press International story early in the crisis: 'Iran clamped martial law on three more towns yesterday to halt rioting by religious extremists opposed to the shah's liberalization.'

MOYERS: All right. Now, what's your objection to those two headlines? One's saying that it was all because of opposition to modernization, and the other—

DORMAN: Modernization, that the shah was a great modernizer— I sum it up here in an Associated Press dispatch: 'The source of the current turmoil is Iran's rush into the twentieth century, engineered by the shah over the past 15 years. In 1963, a decade after the United States helped him seize power, he began his effort to bring Iran's feudalistic society into the modern world.'

MOYERS: Well, interpret that. What is objectionable about that?

DORMAN: All right. What is objectionable is that the press continually stressed certain themes: one, that the shah was a great modernizer; two, that he brought about land reform; three, that he had brought about women's emancipation. Now, for Americans, particularly the liberal element, the nominally suspicious element created by the Vietnam experience, this effectively cut off the Iranian people from their support — the group most likely to raise questions about American involvement in Iran — because, how could a western intellectual, a liberal, be in favor of a group that supposedly opposed women's emancipation, that opposed land reform, that opposed progress?

MOYERS: Modernization.

DORMAN: Exactly.

MOYERS: Well, what are some of the specific things you've noted in your examination of stories out of Iran?

DORMAN: Well, the religious ethno-centrism that we see in the American press over the last— and I'm talking about before the hostages were taken— the theme continuously drummed into our heads that the Iranian people were nothing more than a superstitious lot, who were resisting being brought into the twentieth century, that their religion is mysterious, that it is somehow a hateful, darkness-ridden kind of religion. For example, the press would consistently describe mullahs, the religious teachers and figures in Iran, as black-robed.

MOYERS: The 'black-robed mullahs.'

DORMAN: Right. I have yet to see the American media portray priests in the Vatican — covering the Vatican — as 'black-robed.'

MOYERS: Well, what does that indicate to you? Misunderstanding, or an easy resort to a simple adjective that discloses— that conceals more than it discloses?

DORMAN: Well, I think that what it represents or signifies is the American reporter coming out of a media system which is nominally Christian but effectively secular, being struck by images — literally, images — that offended their sensibilities. I'm talking a Eurocentric view, a western view.

MOYERS: What do you mean, a Eurocentric—

DORMAN: Our reporters are Americans, they're acculturated in the society, and, more importantly, they're part of

the western European experience. So, they see Islam and its symbols as being strange, exotic somehow. They have no understanding of them. I think at the height of the revolution there 150 reporters or so in Teheran; only one of them, a Britisher, spoke Farsi — or Persian. American reporters felt that it wasn't necessary. They depended instead on their professionalism. Well, I argue that professionalism, a commitment to fairness, simply cannot overcome ethnocentrism and ideology.

MOYERS: So, what is the consequence of all of this? What *have* the consequences been on our understanding of what's been happening in Iran?

DORMAN: Well, the consequences are that for the first time in my study of the mass media and political order, for the first time since the Spanish-American War, in such a short period of time the media managed to convince us that we know a lot about a culture when indeed we don't. And that basis has established, long before the hostages were taken, has established a situation where Americans viewed with some open hostility the Iranian efforts to overthrow the shah.

MOYERS: So that the seizing of the hostages was one more act of hostility that had already been exaggerated? Or massaged?

DORMAN: Well, I think— In a way, I argue that had the press done a better job of portraying what it was like to live under the shah, the fact that there are an estimated one SAVAK secret police informer or agent for every 400 population, that he had *not* been a land reformer — he only distributed about 10 percent of the lands, most of which his father had stolen by confiscation, under his reign — that he was not a woman's emancipator. If you read his interview with Oriana Fallaci in 1976, he made his views on women very clear, that unless they were beautiful they had no part in his life. In other words, he was none of these things. These were all myths.

MOYERS: What I hear you saying is that we reporters tended to look at events in Iran through western eyes.

DORMAN: Exactly.

MOYERS: But, isn't that just a given?

DORMAN: Well, it may be a given, but why is it that American reporters could not read a land reform study? To my knowledge, I have not met one western reporter that's taken the time to read land reform studies, to find out what the claims were, whether they were justified. Why is it that American reporters, for some reason — I suspect I know why — refused to look at the academic literature that has been out for 10 to 20 years, demonstrating in detail what it was like to live under the shah. The hundred thousand or so — some estimates range as high as 200,000 people — that were imprisoned—

MOYERS: Well let me ask you this.

DORMAN: —since the 1960s.

MOYERS: How do you think the Iranian press has covered America's reaction to the events in Iran? Understanding must cut both ways, is it possible that Iranian journalists have looked at us through eyes as clouded or as confused by their own origins as ours?

DORMAN: Of course, of course. But the difference is that the Iranian people did not train our F.B.I., did not arm this country, did not impose its set of values and corporate values on the United States. That's the essential difference. Of course, they are misconstruing many things.

MOYERS: So you think when the hostages were taken as a result of the coverage that we were not in a position to truly understand the nature of that revolution?

DORMAN: Exactly. This goes back to an earlier point I tried to make. Had the press done a better job of portraying life in Iran under the shah, no American president in his right mind would have allowed that man entry into this country.

MOYERS: Thank you very much for that analysis of how the American press has covered events in Iran. There's a lot more to be said about the subject, and about television in particular, and maybe we could come back to that one day. But for the moment, what you have talked about is a good setting for my next guest. His name is Mansour

Farhang. He's the Iranian ambassador to the United Nations. He was only 16 years old when the shah seized power in the '50s with the help of the CIA, and as a teenager Mansour Farhang joined the anti-shah movement, was arrested twice, spent time in jail, and then in 1960 became a student in the United States and a leader of the opposition in this country to the shah's regime back in Teheran. Ten years ago, while teaching at California State University, he began traveling between the United States and Iran and worked there with many Iranians who are now leaders of the revolution. He was named ambassador to the United Nations six months ago, after serving as senior political advisor to the foreign minister. Mr. Ambassador, do you call yourself a 'revolutionary', and what does that term imply to you?

MANSOUR FARHANG: If 'revolution' is defined as a quest for freedom — that is, an effort by human beings to change conditions of oppression and exploitation in their societies — yes, I do call myself a 'revolutionary' because I believe we as a people have lived under conditions of oppression and exploitation managed by the Pahlevi regime—

MOYERS: By the shah's regime.

FARHANG: —and assisted by the United States. So, revolt against those conditions and the desire to create conditions of equality and freedom is by definition a 'revolutionary' aspiration.

MOYERS: It seems to some people, over here at least, that what happened in Iran was a transfer of power from one strong man wearing a military uniform to another strong man wearing a cleric's robe. What's your reaction to that?

FARHANG: Well, it's a complete misperception of Iranian reality. Under the deposed shah, the country was fundamentally managed by coercion and corruption, using the institutions or the instruments of coercion as the principal way of making people behave. Following the revolutionary overthrow of the shah, the army was completely disintegrated, the police force disappeared, it was no longer effective, and the gendarmerie in the countryside was destroyed by the peasants, and Ayatollah Khomeini became the most popular and the most beloved leader of the Iranian people. His power, from the very beginning up to the present time, is fundamentally moral power.

MOYERS: Moral power.

FARHANG: Moral power. That is, people's relationship with Khomeini is based on the moral appreciation, gratitude and support for him as the leader of Iran. There is a qualitative difference between the way Imam Khomeini relates to the Iranian people and the way the shah did.

MOYERS: What was the basic motive for the people who overthrew the late shah— the former shah?

FARHANG: Well, we really have to get into a more in-depth analysis if we are going to deal with the motives. The motives were multi-faceted. They related to the objective conditions of inequality and exploitation in the society that for about 10 years prior to the overthrow of the shah, Iran — even though the gross national product was increasing and even per capita income was increasing — but the difference is in inequalities in distribution of wealth was widening. From the standpoint of middle and upper-middle class elements who seemed to be benefiting from the economic growth of the country, they were subjected to a new form of cultural imperialism which led to the alienation and unhappiness of even the middle class and upper middle class elements—

MOYERS: Well, let's stop right there. What do you mean? Do you mean that, as Professor Dorman said a moment ago, that modernization, westernization being brought about by the industrialization promoted by the shah, was antagonizing basic roots, basic ideas of the Iranians about themselves?

FARHANG: If modernization is supposed to improve the quality of life in a society, if it is supposed to reduce alienation among men and women, there was no modernization in Iran. It was modernization of instruments of coercion — that is, a very modernized military and modernized police force — but not modernizing the conditions of life and learning. During the same period that we spent 25 billion years [sic] for our military institution, 70 percent of our people remained illiterate and 60 to 70 percent of our people in the countryside didn't have access to elementary medical facility, and during the same period we did not at all develop our institutions of higher learning to the extent that we had to become dependent on the outside world — practically, the United States — for our students to go to universities. Our agriculture was completely destroyed, going from self-sufficiency in early 1960s to dependency for 70 percent of our foodstuff in the late 1970s. These developments do not constitute an improvement in the conditions

of life and learning. They only produced alienation. The Iranian upper class elements, who were in complete—cooperative, in complete cahoots with the ruling elements in the United States, they constituted not only islands of wealth and power in the sea of Iranian misery, but also islands of imported culture—that is, the definition of what is good, what is bad, what is ugly, what is beautiful, was being imported against the traditional values of the Iranian civilization. In other words, modernization—if it is authentic, if it is organic, it must be rooted in the native values and aspirations of the people. You cannot import values for a society.

MOYERS: Much of what you said about the opposition to any strong military dictator or autocrat can be applied to many of the revolutions that have often swept the human panorama. Is the nature of Iran's revolution because of the Islamic component different from the other upheavals that have swept regimes from power in the last 100 to 150 years?

FARHANG: Well, I would say every revolution is unique, if it's a genuinely authentic revolution. Iranian revolution is unique because it is ideologically very native. It was immensely populist, and it has nationalistic and religious roots in our own society. In this revolution there are diverse elements, diverse and conflicting tendencies. We are in the revolutionary process. Exactly in what direction this revolution will move remains to be seen. But this—

MOYERS: You say we are in it right now. It is still going on.

FARHANG: Sure.

MOYERS: So, the absence of an effective government—which you acknowledge there is an absence of—is intrinsic at this moment of the revolution. That is, you couldn't have a strong central government right now, because the revolution is still sweeping across Iran, is that correct?

FARHANG: That's right.

MOYERS: There was a widespread interpretation in the American press when the shah fell that his downfall was, as Joseph Kraft called it, 'a calamity' for American national interests. Given American fears of Soviet power in the Persian Gulf, and the reliance of our economy on oil, weren't those fears justified?

FARHANG: Fear of—?

MOYERS: Fear of Soviet power moving into the Persian Gulf. Fear that we might lose access to the oil. Fear that the loss of the shah—a good ally, stable ally by our definition—was going to throw everything into chaos and invite the Soviets to move into a region they had long had their eyes upon. Do you think our fears were justified?

FARHANG: Well, these are—I don't know. The fear of imperialism is always justified.

MOYERS: Well, it was the fear of a national interest.

FARHANG: The fear of those who want to exploit others of being caught by the people who are being exploited is always justified. That fear is endemic in the nature of any exploitative system.

MOYERS: You think we were unjustified in being fearful of Soviet influence in the Persian Gulf?

FARHANG: Well, American imperialism was not at all unjustified in fearing any threat from outside, because it is always in competition with others but American people. And the genuine, legitimate interests of American people have nothing to fear from an independent, progressive and democratic government in Iran. That is, if we establish a government which makes decisions on the basis of what is in the interests of Iranian people, in the interest of peace and security in the region, the legitimate interests of overwhelming majority of American people coincide with such a government. If we want to see—define American national interests the way Henry Kissinger or Brzezinski define it, that is in the interests of corporate America, less than one percent of the people who own more than 86 percent of all stocks and bonds and resources, then of course an independent, progressive and democratic regime in Iran is against the interests of the United States government or those who rule it. But, in my view and in the view of Iranian revolutionaries, there is no contradiction between the legitimate interest of the American people and the legitimate interests and aspirations of an independent and democratic Iran.

MOYERS: Then why is there so much animosity among the Iranian revolutionary leaders toward the United States?

FARHANG: The animosity is not at all toward the American people. The animosity is toward the American government because the American government from the very beginning of its entrance into the Iranian political scene in the post-World War II period chose to defend the very oppressive status quo and use the military as the principal instrument of its policy, with the Pahlevi regime as the dominant ruler of that military institution. They gave us the 1953 military coup, they gave us the SAVAK in 1958, they gave us the so-called 'white revolution' and the destruction of Iranian agriculture in 1963, they gave us a parasitic military institution wasting the resources of Iran and pumping our oil and paying for completely irrelevant high technology weapons — irrelevant in terms of improving our conditions — and yet, for over a year, when the shah was ordering the death of destruction of our people and political organizations in the country, the United States gave its full support to such a regime. And, even after the overthrow of the shah, when the shah left the country in January of 1979, when the entire world was awed with the popularity and immensity of the Iranian revolution, the United States was planning a military coup.

MOYERS: How do you know that?

FARHANG: Because it is common knowledge in Iran — the strategy of the United States in early January, 1979, was to keep the Iranian military intact so that political authority in Iran is reinstituted, therefore a military coup is theoretically or logically possible. We read in the press accounts today — and those of us who have been closer to the literature in the past year know that Bakhtiar was chosen by the United States not to give the Iranian revolutionaries the reign of power but to be intermediary between the shah and the reimposition of another American-made general or the shah or someone else.

MOYERS: You really — you believe, yourself —

FARHANG: Oh, no question about —

MOYERS: — You're obviously a very educated man, you have spent a lot of time in this country, you do represent your government. But, as an individual, as a citizen, you really do believe the United States was going to put the shah back into power or try to put a military regime in power again in Teheran?

FARHANG: There is no question in my mind that the United States government in the past or at the present time has not really recognized the reality of the Iranian revolution. And in the past they — their strategy was to keep the Iranian military intact so that they could use it at the right time when the success was a logical possibility. Even up to the present time, I maintain that strategy failed because of our understanding of that strategy and the destruction of the Iranian military apparatus and elimination of those elements within the Iranian military who were loyal to the United States or the shah and not to our country.

MOYERS: Would you concede that Mr. Kissinger, Mr. Brzezinski, whom you mentioned a minute ago, might have as their chief aim not the maintenance and power of the elite in Iran but the prevention of Soviet designs in the Persian Gulf? Would you be willing to concede that?

FARHANG: Not at all, not at all. American imperialism does not — did not begin with the Bolshevik revolution in Russia.

MOYERS: Do you — May I interrupt you and ask you: Do you think the Soviets are not an imperial power?

FARHANG: Sure, the Soviet Union is an imperialist power, and we know that. We know that by experience. And we also know that the best way, the most effective way to confront an imperialist power is to have a satisfactory life situation for the people, to have a government which represents the interests of the people, the government which receives its legitimacy from the will of the people — only just a government can confront the aggressive designs of foreign power. From the standpoint of Mr. Brzezinski or Kissinger, they are not really dealing with communism, but they're dealing with big power and the only way they can confront that big power is with their own power. And they are always willing and ready to sacrifice the interests of the native in order to pursue their own interests. Iran is not at all an exception in the general US strategy toward the third world.

MOYERS: Whom do you consider potentially Iran's greatest threat — the Soviet Union or the United States? The Soviet Union is there on your border, we are thousands of miles away.

FARHANG: I don't think those distinctions are very useful, because they can change. At the present time it is the

United States government which is threatening the Iranian revolution; that Iran as a revolutionary society seems to pose a threat to American design in the region, it is possible that in the future this threat can change and come from the other side. But, at the present time, it is the United States which is confronting us as a revolutionary society.

MOYERS: And yet, we do not have thousands of troops on your border as exist in Afghanistan with Soviet troops not far from your border—

FARHANG: In August 28, 1953, you didn't have any troops in our country, and you succeeded in engineering a military coup and overthrowing one of the most populist governments we have ever had. In Chile in 1974, the United States didn't have any troops but succeeded in overthrowing a very democratic and populist government.

MOYERS: And you think that those precedents could mean it happens again?

FARHANG: It *can* happen again, and in order to confront it we have to be alert and united.

MOYERS: You see, I am an American who loves his country as much as you do yours. I'm also a journalist who wants to know what the other people— what people *believe* about these situations. And it does seem to me that there's as much misunderstanding on both sides about the nature of the two countries as there is on any one side. Do you concede that?

FARHANG: Well, I really don't think so, in terms of understanding the American people and society — sure. Most of our people have not been, you know, exposed to the realities of American life. And most of them have not had the opportunity to study American life. But, based on our experience, of how the United States has treated us during the past four years, we have every reason to be suspicious.

MOYERS: You do not believe we understood a revolution was taking place that had its roots deep in the desires of the people themselves?

FARHANG: Precisely for that reason, the United States was opposed to our revolution, because it was populist, because it was rooted in the interests of the people. That is, the United States in Iran has always chosen a minority armed with sophisticated weapons to represent the American interests. In other word, from the very beginning and particularly during the past 10 years, there has been a convergence and confluence of interests between the American policy makers and the Iranian upper class elites. It was the destruction of that elite by the popular revolution which frightened the United States, and because it was populist and rooted in the authentic interests of the society, the United States opposed it.

MOYERS: Let me come to the issue at hand, the hostages. Do you personally consider the seizure of the American embassy to be lawful?

FARHANG: Not at all. If we limit our understanding of the seizure of the American embassy to the illegality or even immorality of the action itself, we can feel very self-righteous, but never be able to do anything about it. But if we—

MOYERS: I don't understand.

FARHANG: In the sense that we have to understand the seizure of the American embassy in the context of US-Iranian relations. That is, there was an intense widespread anger in Iran against the United States. The shah's admission to this country was perceived by us as a conspiratorial act.

MOYERS: You really believe that. What did you have to fear from an ailing former monarch being admitted to a hospital in New York City thousands of miles away?

FARHANG: No, that is not really the case. As early as last June, the United States government, the State Department, was corresponding with the American embassy in Teheran concerning the possibility of admitting the shah to the United States and consequences of such act, even though Secretary of the State Vance promised us the shah will not be admitted to the United States. Even though he announced in October, 1979 at the United Nations that it was against the national interest of the United States to admit the shah to the United States, suddenly he was admitted and it is becoming increasingly clear that he was not admitted to the United States for medical reasons at all.

MOYERS: But why did—

FARHANG: It was a political act.

MOYERS: But why should you care?

FARHANG: Well, you see, if you are dealing with a country which has imposed a government on you that is a regime which produced 25 years of exploitation, brutalization, of your society, it has given you the SAVAK, it has given you an immense military apparatus, it is perfectly natural, particularly for a country like Iran, which has a very long history of being exploited and abused by imperialist powers, to perceive that act as a part of conspiracy. Now, you might look at it from the outside as a non-rational perception. But in the context of our history, in the context of our experience with the United States, it is perfectly rational to see the admission of the shah to the United States as a political act which is by its very nature a hostile act against the Iranian revolution.

MOYERS: So you consider the seizing of the hostages unlawful but justified? Is that what you're saying?

FARHANG: Well, not justified in the sense, in the moral or ethical sense, not at all.

MOYERS: Historically, perhaps.

FARHANG: Historically, that is, it is understandable.

MOYERS: It's a consequence, you are saying?

FARHANG: If it is understandable, then we have to begin to deal with what is to be done about it. How do we resolve the problem? Not emphasize and re-emphasize the fact that it was against the law, or it was not an ethical act. Those arguments could be very strong, but not very useful in resolving the conflict.

MOYERS: We will come back to a discussion of how to deal with the present consequences, whether we think they're lawful or unjustified, or what, in just a moment with a couple of other guests. But I'd like to go on to something very troubling that is deeply a part of the misunderstanding on both sides. President Carter has condemned your country for its treatment of the bodies of the servicemen who lost their lives in trying to rescue the hostages. I'd like your reaction, and that of our other two guests, who are going to join us. But defending America's actions, here is what the President said.

[Videotape, President Carter's press conference, April 29, 1980]

Pres. JIMMY CARTER *[on film]* This is in sharp comparison to the ghoulish action of the terrorists and some of the government officials in Iran in our embassy this weekend, who displayed in a horrible exhibition of inhumanity, the bodies of our courageous Americans. This has aroused the disgust and contempt of the rest of the world. It indicates quite clearly the kinds of people with whom we have been dealing in a peaceful effort to secure a resolution of this crisis. They did not bring shame and dishonor on those fallen Americans. They brought shame and dishonor on themselves. The man who supervised the desecration of the bodies was a member of the Revolutionary Council. I think it is accurate to say that other members of the Iranian government did publicly condemn this abhorrent act, and have now promised to deliver the American bodies to intermediaries to be delivered ultimately back to our country. We hope that this commitment will be kept, and I pray that it will. But, the fact that the terrorists participated in the desecration is an indication of the kind of people they are, and a vivid indication of the difficulties that we have experienced in getting what seems to be required, a unanimous decision by terrorists, top officials, the Revolutionary Council, and the Ayatollah Khomeini, before this crime can be terminated.

[Interior, studio]

MOYERS: Mr. Ambassador, the president's reaction seemed to me not only an American— basic American reaction, but a basic human reaction. And my question to you is, what are Americans, what are human beings to think of Iran and Iranians when we see the behavior surrounding the display of the bodies that so agitated the president?

FARHANG: First of all, the president is wrong in describing the man who displayed the bodies as a member of the Revolutionary Council. He is not. Second, I can assure you that the overwhelming majority of the Iranians Mr. Carter has been dealing with, are very unhappy about the display of the bodies. Even though they are totally committed to expose and defeat the hostility of the Carter administration to our revolution. The display of burned,

mutilated bodies is a product of anger, caused by war and aggression. Such an act is totally alien to our culture and civilization, and it would not have happened if the United States government was not actively involved in a quarter century of torture and exploitation of Iran by the regime of the deposed shah, which was itself imposed on us by the United States of America.

MOYERS: But you will acknowledge that, irrespective of the background, that very incident itself is bound to inflame passions on this side of the—

FARHANG: Yes. Those incidents produced by war always inflame passion and touch humanity.

MOYERS: Why were the bodies of the dead Americans delivered by the government to the terrorists in the embassy? Are they working together?

FARHANG: They were not delivered by the government. I think that—

MOYERS: I thought the government picked up the bodies in the desert. Am I misinformed?

FARHANG: I don't know.

MOYERS: Thank you. We've been joined by two gentlemen who have spent much of their lives studying Iran and the Islamic world. Professor Edward Said of the English Department of Columbia University, he's an expert on Islam and the Middle East, Middle East as it's defined from the United States. Mr. Eqbal Ahmad is an acknowledged authority on the Middle East. He is with the Institute for Policy Studies, and has been a guest columnist of *The New York Times*. Gentlemen, we have been talking about the past and, most recently, the present, the realities that exist today, and Mr. Ahmad, I think that you summed up the predicament more aptly than anyone, and I'm quoting from you in this statement. 'The Iranian people seem quite united in feeling that they must not give up the hostages until they can bring the former shah to justice and redeem the assets that he has stolen from Iran. The American people seem quite united in feeling that their government should not negotiate with the Iranians on the question of the shah, or the assets he stole, while the hostages are being held in violation of international law.' Now, I ask both of you gentlemen, how is that predicament to be resolved? Where do we go from here? Mr. Said?

Prof. EDWARD SAID: Well, it seems to me that we have to go, if we're not to go to war, we have to go to understanding and a serious investigation of what it is that separates the American people and the Iranian people. I think for our country, for the United States, I think we have to, for the first time, I think, in our history, in dealing with Iran, we have to understand that there is another thing in the world besides our view of things and that there is a specific Iranian history which we cannot simply dismiss as ancient history, as President Carter said some time ago in the State Department. That is to say, we have to understand the sufferings, the tribulations of a people which are genuine, and mean something very, very concrete to this people. And we have to understand that there are other processes of history than ours, and that we cannot control them.

MOYERS: Let's say that the majority of the American people would abide by that. Let's say they were to be empathetic and sympathetic and say, 'we understand that in the past there have been dealings with Iran that have been unjust in the eyes of the large majority of people in Iran today. But, we can't,' as Mr. Ahmad wrote, 'we can't really face that historical process until we see that our people presently held in that embassy are liberated.' How do we deal with that particular fact?

SAID: Well, I think, if I might just put it simply, I think we simply have to change the context. If the context is one exclusively of hostility and confrontation, the crisis will not only continue, but it will deepen. And it will lead to a protracted and unfortunate end. Now, the alternative is that we have to change the context in such a way as to understand and to deal with it with a new understanding. Now, it isn't a matter simply of the American people *feeling* empathetic. It has to be reflected, it seems to me, directly, in our government's policy and, more importantly, in the positions that we take collectively as a people. And until now, the only position that we seem to have taken vis-a-vis Iran is the position of hostility and confrontation.

MOYERS: Mr. Ahmad, how would you resolve the very predicament you've formulated. How do you deal with the hostages so that the context, as Mr. Said said, may be changed?

AHMAD: I think you, at the introduction of your program, more or less defined how to deal with it, namely the first

effort has to be made to understand both why Iran and Iranians have acted the way they have acted, and I think also why the United States has acted the way it acted, what brought about the crisis leading to the taking of hostages and everything that followed. I think the first challenge before us is to understand that, and understand that reality in order to change it. Changing would mean moving from confrontation to politics, to diplomacy. But, understanding would require some sacrifices, particularly on the part of the United States.

MOYERS: Don't you think— I mean, in your judgment, has the president for the last several months, 180 some-odd days, not been restrained, not been willing to deal politically?

AHMAD: He has been, until last week, been restrained but not been willing to deal with it politically. I'll take several examples. What underlies this crisis are basically three things, if I may say so. One, deeply felt historical fears of the Iranians that they are likely to be subjected to another foreign intervention. This feeling Ambassador Farhang referred to, Professor Said referred to, should be understood in historical terms. This is the sixth time in 100 years — 1872, 1895, 1911, 1921, 1963, 1978-79 — when the Iranian national movement has won a major battle against foreign corporations and its domestic allies. It has been in power for about a year, two years — in 1905-1911, six years — before another foreign intervention has occurred and their gains have been destroyed.

MOYERS: Therefore?

AHMAD: Therefore, a very deep fear on their part that the shah who comes here returns here, only a year after — in fact, nine months after — the Carter administration has cooperated in supporting the shah to the point of about 55,000 dead. When the shah comes to a New York hospital to be treated by two Canadian doctors without even renouncing his claim to the throne — he still hasn't renounced his claim to the throne — it is unlikely that the Iranians would think that this is just one more humanitarian gesture by a human rights president who didn't care about their killings only a year earlier.

MOYERS: I can understand that, but the reality is that the American president's in a political year, too. We're asked to understand what's going on in Iran — that it's a revolutionary time and there's no central government that's effectively in power. Well, we're in a political year over here too! And the president has to deal with those political realities, even as the Iranian government does.

AHMAD: Yes, that is true, which means that we ought to — and I think here the responsibility is more of the media and the public — so the second question that we have to raise is how did it happen that after nine months of refusal to admit the shah, and under intense pressure refusal to do so, as the State Department documents, two of which I have in my possession right now, seem to indicate — the Carter administration admitted. In other words, there is a very immediate problem of a cover-up. Cover-up between the — of the relationship between the shah and an American elite: David Rockefeller, Henry Kissinger, Jerry Ford, have all been involved in bringing the shah. I think we as a public have a duty and a responsibility to ask through congressional hearings, through public hearings, through media research, for full disclosure.

MOYERS: Are you saying that before the situation can be resolved there must be some kind of formal hearing in this country on these allegations that you have raised?

AHMAD: I am saying that for the situation to resolve, what is most important to happen is for the truth to come out. It is in the interest both of the Iranian people and the American, for the people, for the truth to come out and what has made it, this locking of two people, possible. When the truth comes out, the loosening will occur.

MOYERS: Mr. Ambassador, are — is your government going to continue to support the people in that embassy holding the Americans there until there are such concrete developments as Mr. Ahmad just described?

FARHANG: The whole question of government supporting people at the embassy is really a questionable statement, because no one has spent more time and energy to resolve the hostage situation peacefully than President Abolhassan Bani-Sadr, who from the very beginning criticized the act of hostage-taking and thought that it is not in our interest or in the interest of peace and security in the region to prolong the confrontation.

MOYERS: Why is he powerless to do anything?

FARHANG: Well, he is — It's because right now the legitimacy and power in Iran really lies in the people.

MOYERS: He got 75 percent of the vote.

FARHANG: Yes, but at the same time the students who are occupying the embassy have received support from the general population — very intense and widespread support. So, it is not possible for our president to confront a very significant segment of the public by any coercive means.

MOYERS: You mean, he does not have the ability to impose his decisions?

FARHANG: Well, no one has the ability; we are against imposition of any decision. The purpose is to resolve the problem peacefully in the interest of the hostages themselves, as well as in the interests of Iranian society and the Iranian revolution.

MOYERS: But can't your journalists, can't your media, can't *your* press try to promote understanding among the Iranian people of Bani-Sadr's desire to have the hostages released?

FARHANG: We are trying, and such understanding is not very easy. It has been going during the past six months. But, we have been confronted with continuing threat by the United States which has made it very difficult for people like Bani-Sadr to provide the kind of understanding you're talking about.

MOYERS: Will all due respect, Mr. Ambassador, it seems to me that the problem is that your government is unable to deal effectively with the terrorists, militants, whomever they are, holding those hostages. Now, it's not the United States government that's preventing it.

FARHANG: No, the United States government is not preventing it. But, you see, when we talk about a conciliatory attitude by the United States, we have to understand that the United States has chosen conciliation for a period as a *tactic* which always employs threats, and it never involves an understanding of the other side. What we need is conciliation as a state of mind which does not use —

MOYERS: How? Tell us what we should do.

FARHANG: Abandonment of all threats, sanctions, imposition of any political, diplomatic, or economic sanctions. In January of this year, we proposed to the Security Council of the United Nations to form an international commission of inquiry to investigate the crimes of the deposed shah and American policies in Iran. At that time it was the United States government which rejected our proposal and they chose to impose sanctions which only aggravated the situation. Two months later, when they were ready to accept the idea of the commission, the conditions and situation in Iran were changed.

MOYERS: All right. But, you know, Mr. Ambassador, in London today three Iranian arabs have seized the Iranian embassy and threatened to blow it up along with 19 hostages, unless your governments frees 91 political prisoners. Your foreign minister told the terrorists in London that Iran would not meet their demands and that if the hostages were harmed an equal number of the political prisoners would be executed. How can your government expect our government to give in to political terrorism when your own government refuses to do so? Isn't there a double standard there?

FARHANG: Yes, there is. [*silence*]

MOYERS: Well, what do we do then? What is your — How do we all deal with terrorism?

FARHANG: It still, even if we recognized the double standard, we haven't solved the problem. We still have to understand the problem, as they were explaining, to see what is to be done about it.

MOYERS: Do you have a specific proposal that the United States government might do that might alleviate —

AHMAD: Sure, there is a number of things. I think, first thing that the United States government should understand is what Ambassador Farhang was saying. The president of Iran has been on record now for several months as favoring a political solution to the hostage crisis. He doesn't really approve of continuing this crisis. It is also true — we should recognize that as a reality — that there is in Iran at the moment no authoritative government. President Bani-Sadr's writ runs just about as far as public opinion and the climate of politics in that country would allow. And therefore, thirdly, the United States government could have made some effort — without conceding its positions on

the hostages — could have made some effort to give a meaningful support within Iran and for Iran to that group of people which was keen on resolving the conflict.

MOYERS: How could they do that, Mr. Ahmad?

AHMAD: Give you an example. The international commission that the United Nations formed and which the United States agreed to, failed because of one main reason: all the opponents of Bani-Sadr's were quick to point out once the commission had arrived in Teheran that it had absolutely no teeth. All that the commission was allowed to do was to go to Iran and look at the damage done to the Iranians by the shah's regime. There was no commitment on the part of the United States that they will open up their files — for the information is there — the files of Grumman Aircraft or Lockheed or Bechtel Corporation or Northrup, all of which have been involved in something like a \$35 billion deal involving kickbacks, payoffs, illegal activities, SAVAK's relationship to the CIA, Mossad's relationship to SAVAK and CIA — all these were evidence of the damage.

MOYERS: Are you saying that before there can be any progress toward a peaceful resolution the United States has to acknowledge previous misbehavior unsatisfactory to the ruling regime of Iran now?

AHMAD: I think acknowledgement is not as important as starting the process whereby both the Iranian and American people can feel that we are getting rid of the burdens of the past.

SAID: I might add to that. I think it's most important thing is what's been said so far, with which I completely agree, is that we seem to have a fear of history. It seems to me that we're always trying to shut things down and say, 'well, you do this and we will consider that.' Whereas the main problem between the United States and Iran — going beyond, it seems to me, even the hostage crisis which is, you know, an awful thing — is this opening up of the whole situation, this idea that we have, and that governments perhaps all have to a certain extent of just shutting down things that seems inconvenient.

MOYERS: How do you do that, Mr. Said, given the political realities?

SAID: Well, I think the political realities are harsh. I agree with you. But I think, for example, that the press in this country plays a very, very important role. It seems to me that what has not — if you look at, as I've looked, at the media over the past few months,—

MOYERS: We have one minute left—

SAID: Yeah— the right questions have never been asked. The focus has always been on what you might call the very narrow instrumental thing: get the hostages out, how do we get them out? The right questions are: What is the situation as a whole that produced this. Once you understand that, then you defuse the situation, you begin to move towards a reconciliation. The more you insist on what is just before your eyes, the more aggrieved you feel — and the more the Iranians feel aggrieved. I mean, if you look at a bit of evidence, you could always find evidence to show that you are the nice guy who's been kicked around, you know. So—

MOYERS: I regret very much that television deals in finite time, because I really believe we are about to begin, at the end of this hour, to move to some very important considerations. I hope that perhaps in *Journals* to come we can pick up right where we are now and deal with the longer process. I appreciate very much all three of you coming. Mr. Ambassador, Mr. Ahmad, Mr. Said. I apologize for the fact that we deal with a finite amount of time, but maybe at least there's a beginning here of something that might prove useful, at least in my business— is understanding what's happening. Thank you all very much. I'll be back next week with a long conversation with the philosopher and syndicated columnist Max Lerner. I'm Bill Moyers. Good night.

Other transcripts available at press time: #M-27, "Our Times" (commentary on the end of the '70s and arrival of the '80s); #M-28, "The World of David Rockefeller"; #M-29, "What's A Party For" (about Maine politics); #M-30, "A Reporter's Notebook" (about John Anderson and political advertising); #Spec 2/24/80, "The Politics of Regulation" (about the Federal Trade Commission); #M-31, "Barry Commoner: Politics of Energy"; #M-32, "A Conversation with George Bush"; #M-33, "Vietnam Remembered"; #M-34, "The Black Agenda"; #M-35, "The Detroit Model"; #M-36, "Texas Notebook" (about politics Texas-style, and an interview with economics professor Clifton Grubbs, University of Texas); #M-37, "Big Business: Doing Well or Doing Good?"; and #M-38, "The MX Debate". For a transcript of any of these shows, send \$2 and the number of the show to: Bill Moyers' Journal, Box 900, New York, N.Y. 10101.