The hostage crisis: a bitter defeat for the U.S.

The U.S. hostage crisis ended as dramatically as it had begun: but not, perhaps, as people hoped: U.S. Air Force jets took off from Fort Knox, Kentucky with 2.5 billion dollars in U.S. gold. The gold was en route to London, for subsequent transfer to Iran after the hostages' release.

What this illustrates is the bitter defeat of U.S. foreign policy in the hands of Iran these past 14 months. Because of a weak fluctuating policy, the U.S. hostages and the people themselves have been forced to put up with 444 days of anguish.

In America the breast-beating has far from subsided:

Tuesday, American T.V. cancelled all regular programming to broadcast a parade in Washington for the freed 52. But the roots of the situation illustrate far better its true nature than the recent belated celebrations.

In October 1979, the U.S. admitted Iran's former Shah to New York for cancer treatment. The Iranians deserved a fresh approach from Washington: accept past mistakes, and plan for a new, more equitable relationship with Khomeini's new government. Instead, the U.S. provided shelter for the shah, offering him American medical attention he did not actually need, as many U.S. physicians have asserted. The simple gall bladder operation on the shah could have been performed in Mexico where the ill shah had been living.

But the U.S. chose arrogance, and now they must accept humiliation.

After the embassy takeover in November, the U.S. only then had two viable options: the first was to deport the shah, which would have been to admit defeat. The second was to bomb, invade or otherwise seriously maim the audacious Iranian regime. The Carter administration, in doomed efforts to get their people home, tried both: by sending the shah to live in secluded warmth in South America and sending three helicopters to burn in the Iranian desert The Iranians continued to mock the Old Glory's traditional invulnerability.

Media attention intensified the American people's agony: on the day of the failed rescue mission, I was living in the States, and I saw the resignation on concerned peoples' faces: including my grandmother, who cried when she heard of the eight soldiers who died in the desert.

The suffering of the captives is now coming out, as well: news reports note, for example, that "Jimmy Lopez was kept in a small, stinky celi, so cold that he often had to break ice off his water bucket, and where he was awakened by centipedes crawling on his face."

In a conflict where both sides dealt bitter blows, the Iranians won. Canadian External affairs Minister Mark Macguigan's assessment of the Algiers agreement last Monday as a 'triumph of international law' is laughable at best. Equally funny is Carter's comment: "Iran has suffered severely. Their attempt to extort money from us did not work."

The obvious response to this came from a liberated hostage himself: "I don't think there were two people on that plane (from Iran, via Algiers) who cared whether President Carter was there in West Germany to meet them or not."

President Carter tried to use the crisis' resolution to salvage some of the outgoing administration's pride, but he did this only superficially. The hostages are home, but only because the U.S. met Iran's demands. A Harvard Law School professor commented: "I don't know of a situation in modern times when a European or American government extracted compensation for illegal detention of its citizens."

A New York Times article this week further signifies the U.S.'s impotence: "despite European sanctions on trade with Iran, there was an increase in trade between the countries during the hostage crisis." This shows that the hostage taking,because America did not deal with it effectively, was accepted and ignored by the rest of the world.

Furthermore, the shallowness of American business interests is easily seen in their almost immediate inquiry to the state department, even before the hostages were on U.S. soil: "when can we resume trade?"

Ronald Reagan is now faced with returning direction to crippled American policy, which, stripped of its finesse, threatens to become significant for only one rather blunt reason: they have the H-bomb.

