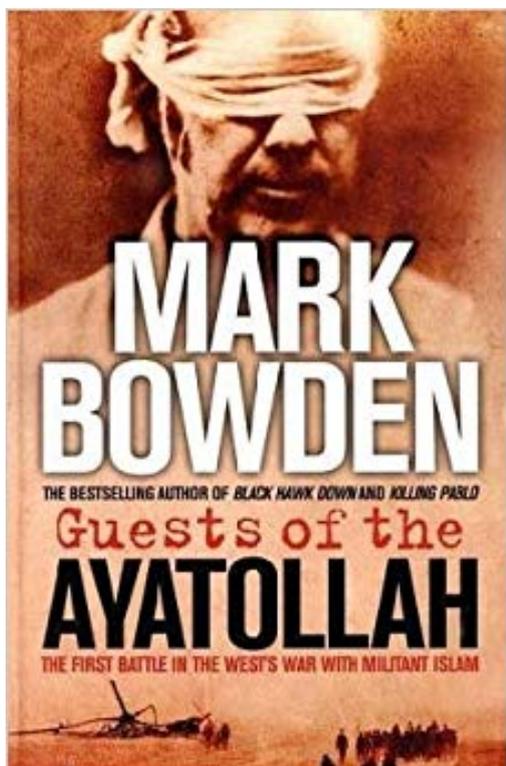


Guests of Ayatollah : The First Battle in the West's War on Militant Islam *by* bowden-mark



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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.



Reviews of the **Guests of Ayatollah : The First Battle in the West's War on Militant Islam** by bowden-mark

Skrimpak

I was born toward the end of the Iran hostage crisis, so clearly don't remember it. Although I've known it as an important part of modern American history, it's mostly been through movies like *Argo* or familial denigration of Jimmy Carter. Mark Bowden's *Guests of the Ayatollah* more than makes up for any former lack of understanding. Bowden painstakingly goes through the 444 days of the crisis from the planning by Iranian student groups up until the release. He relates stories from several hostages of different backgrounds and positions in the embassy, which gives it a feeling of completeness. The story is also deeply enriched by interviews with some of the Iranians involved. While the writing is not sympathetic to the Iranian students, their perspective gives important context to the whole affair. Likewise, the American story doesn't happen just in the embassy compound, Bowden covers how the crisis played out for the Carter Administration and families across the United States. The book reads like a novel in many places, as the story is truly incredible. Afterwards, I enjoyed looking up where some of the main characters are now - some of the Iranians got their first taste of politics in the takeover and have risen quite far in domestic politics. It's also a humbling reminder that America cannot control all, nor can it always rely on allies for support.

Arrayar

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.

Eseve

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

Skilkancar

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.)

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