

U.S. helpless giant after Iran takes bodybuilding course

WASHINGTON—You remember the Charles Atlas ads in the back of the old comic books. The 98-pound weakling on the beach with his girl when this big bruiser comes up and kicks sand in his face.

Some time later, after a Charles Atlas bodybuilding course, they meet again on the beach. This time, the former weakling beats hell out of the big bully. Very satisfying.

william raspberry

Question: What satisfies when it's the scrawny guy who kicks the sand?

What brings this to mind, of course, is the apparent popular consensus that, sooner or later, the muscle-bound United States must do something about the "98-pound" Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

THE CONSENSUS is that, while it may be a painful necessity for President Carter to practice restraint until the immediate problem of the American hostages is resolved, the Iranians must not be allowed to get away with their insult. The United States will have to do something.

But what? If there were the slightest possibility that an Entebbe-style commando raid might have saved the hostages, most Americans would have seen that as the perfect solution. Go in, save the Americans, while we are at it, bloody a sufficient number of Iranian noses.

But suppose the hostages are released without military action. Or worse, suppose one or several of the hostages are killed. What's a decent-minded big guy supposed to do?

There is hazard in discussing the question here, since this column is being written several days before it appears in the newspaper. By the time you read it, the situation may have changed substantially.

But no matter. If I read the public reaction correctly, resolution of the immediate crisis will heighten, not diminish, the demand that President Carter "do something."

CARTER'S DECISION to end U.S. purchases of Iranian oil obviously was an attempt to "do something." But it satisfied hardly anybody. Indeed, it seemed just a matter of time before Iran would have cut off its oil shipments anyway. And since Iran will have no problem selling all the oil it wants to, the Carter action is not punitive, and therefore, not satisfying.

The people want more. But what? A bombing raid when the hostages are no longer in jeopardy hardly makes

sense. What purpose would it serve? Even if—God forbid!—the hostages should be slaughtered, what would be the point of military action? And how much action? Enough to kill 50 Iranians? Ten times that many? The Ayatollah himself?

In the first place, it is by no means clear that the Ayatollah is in control of events in his own country. And in the second, there is the problem of deciding on an action that satisfies both our desire for vengeance and our desire to think of ourselves as decent, law-governed people.

A further complication is the fact that the Iranian militants may be seeing themselves as the former 98-pound weakling and the United States as the big bully whose longtime support of the shah constitutes a generation of sand-kicking.

It goes without saying that we cannot satisfy their quest for justice, as they see it, by handing over the shah, whom they see as a bloody criminal.

We can bring our people home and send theirs packing. We can tell them to take their oil and shove it.

But not much else. That empty feeling of unrequited insult will be with us a long time.

There's humiliation in being a 98-pound weakling. But being a helpless giant is just as hard to swallow.

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to be less the desire for justice than the desire for vengeance. Perhaps there is a fine distinction here. Perhaps we are mistaken. If so, we hope that the Iranians will enlighten us. Perhaps they will explain how the pursuit of justice, as opposed to vengeance, justified the commission of new crimes and the flouting of international agreements.

It appears to me that one goal of defenders of the embassy takeover is to publicize the record of the shah as ruler. In this I imagine they are being successful. They are, however, paying an enormous price in lost American good will.

Bud Narveson
Professor, English

Criticism questioned

How can the Progressive Student Union consider their criticism of the Daily Nebraskan's advertising policies "serious?" Rather, the criticisms are laughable. Where

is the scholarship, where is proof for the accusations presented?

According to the author, the "CIA trained, or is training the most brutal secret police in the world." The letter then goes on to list countries where this alleged conduct has taken place.

Upon what foundation are these accusations based? Are they provable? If so, why not cite the source of information?

Do not misunderstand me; I do not support despotism or abridgement of human rights by any person or nation. I do support proper scholarship and intelligent argument. "Serious" criticism and accusations cannot be based on unsubstantiated rumor. Before the Progressive Student Union accuses the Daily Nebraskan or anyone else of ignorance, they had better be sure they have facts to back up their claims. And be willing to release and defend those facts.

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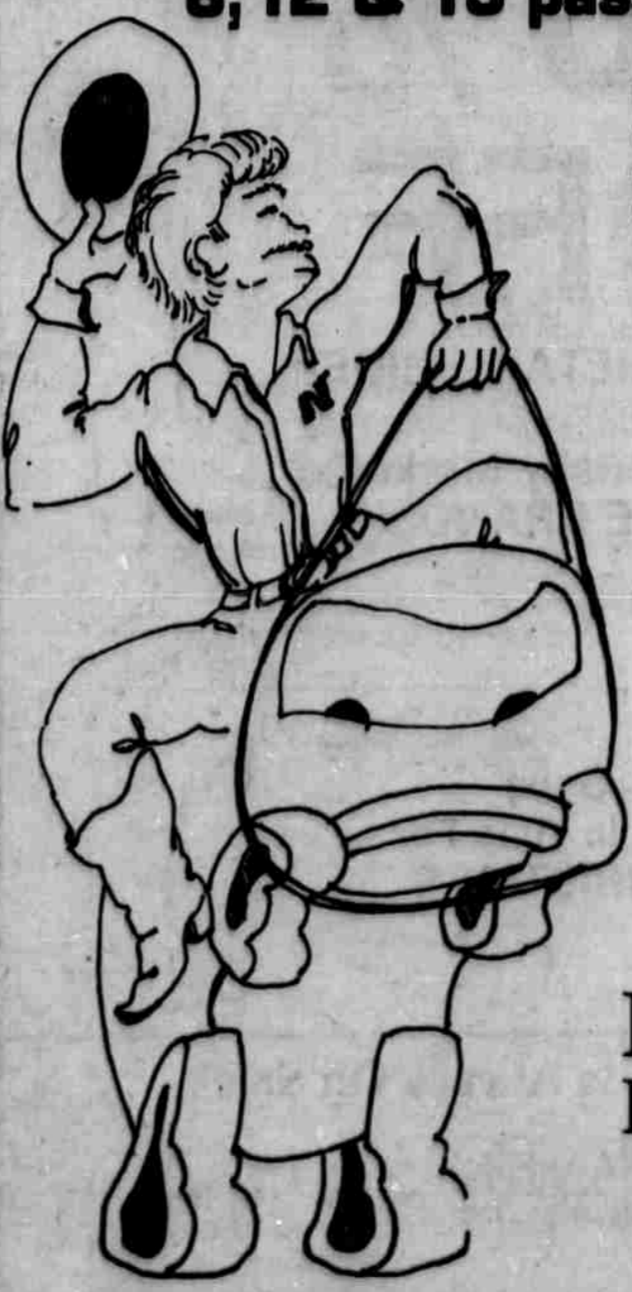
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