

Attacking the British Embassy is an Iranian Rite of Passage.  
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On December 1, Iranian thugs attacked the British Embassy in Tehran in hours-long violence. This recalled the Iranian seizure of the American Embassy in 1979, holding American diplomats hostage for 444 days. When the 1979 assault happened, right after the Iranian Revolution, the Revolutionary Government initially denied complicity (which may have been true). However, in short order, the Ayatollah decided to take credit for this act.

This time, the Iranian press claimed that hundred \223militant students\224 (really Revolutionary Guards) attacked the British embassy compound in Tehran, removed the British flag, burned it, and replaced it with Iran's flag. According to Mehr News, the embassy staff fled through the back door while the thugs were busy burning framed photos of Queen Elizabeth II and Winston Churchill. The protesters also allegedly crushed a statue of the late Shah of Iran while chanting \223Death to the Shah!\224 Law Enforcement finally managed to clear the protesters out of the embassy compound, but according to IRNA, a second wave of attacks managed to break through the police lines and seize the embassy itself.

The mob subsequently released a statement in which they claimed that \223seizure of the British embassy has taken place with 33 years of delay\205 the embassy of the Old Fox should have been seized earlier.\224 They again claimed to be students, but obviously were not.

Iran has well over a century of tradition in which mobs, egged on by either the weak central government or Shiite clerics, storm the British Embassy. Any riot in 19th century Persia (Iran) generated mobs that would immediately head for the British Embassy---some to attack and loot it and others seeking sanctuary. Persian governments have always denied complicity-until the Islamic Revolution. Iran has grown bolder because the world does nothing about it.

Fortunately, this time, the British reacted. They expelled Iranian diplomats in London in retaliation and the French, to their credit, brought home their own diplomats. The United States closed the Iranian Embassy in Washington because of the kidnapping of American diplomats in 1979, and has not reopened it. Unfortunately, not one other country responded to the Iranian disregard for international norms that protect embassies and diplomats, except for Canada. Canada hid some American diplomats from the Iranians, spirited them out of the country, and then closed their own embassy. No decent country should maintain an embassy in lawless Iran.

Safeguarding embassies and diplomats is enshrined in civilized behavior. Diplomats represent their countries in foreign capitals, gather information (yes, some spy), and provide the local citizens an opportunity to know something of their diplomats' cultures. I was in Iran before the revolution, and regularly went to the American Embassy for American breakfasts, celebrations on Independence Day, and other events that welcomed both Iranian guests and those Americans who were studying or representing America there. In those days, Iran was a member in good standing in the world. No more.

The United States now has embassies around the world that must be built like fortresses, preventing access of people who were formerly welcomed. This is the consequence of the Iranian seizure in 1979, and the failure of the world community to respond to this insult. Now no embassy is really safe in the lawless parts of the world, as we can see from this most recent attack. This time, I would have liked to see all other embassy in Tehran close their doors and leave. They will regret not having left when in the future their own embassies are under attack.

Lest there be any doubt that the attack on the British Embassy was done by the government and not by a criminal mob of thugs, the current Ayatollah, Ali Khamenei, praised the attackers saying that they had attacked \223the epicenter of sedition.\224 Parliamentary Speaker Ali Larijani said: \223the wrath of the protesters resulted from several decades of domination-seeking behavior of Britain.\224 This was no spontaneous demonstration. Countries that incite violence against foreign embassies should be cut off; they do not deserve international recognition.

668 words

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