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## Good Try

**S**ORROW AT THE DEATH of eight military men and heartbreak at the failure of the mission are just about the only uncomplicated reactions Americans can have at this moment to Jimmy Carter's rescue effort in Iran. Too little is known, and from only one—the official—point of view, to permit much more than tentative conclusions about an operation that is likely to be dissected from different perspectives now and footnoted for years. The secrecy in which the operation was conceived and executed and the administration's evident vested interest in redeeming a fiasco make wariness prudent.

Still, our first reaction is that it was a reasonable thing to try to do. The Iranians had rejected a negotiated solution to the hostage crisis and were thrusting the issue into a receding and darkening future. The gathering disarray in Iran and the lengthening term of the hostages' incarceration were adding urgency to the matter of their condition and safety. The fresh support of the allies had provided encouragement for, at the least, a non-punitive rescue mission. The crucial element of surprise had been created by the widely held expectation that any military action undertaken would involve mining Iran's harbors and that no military action of any sort would be taken before full allied sanctions had been tested after May 17. The particular plan Mr. Carter had before him—a plan which, in its current dim contours, seems wildly improbable to us—had been studied and rehearsed for months.

Glum in the aftermath yesterday, few people felt it to be fair or necessary to challenge the president for having made an effort that, even in failing, demonstrated a true concern for the hostages and a welcome and, to many, surprising capacity on the part of Jimmy Carter to think boldly, to take risks, to act. Almost everyone was asking, however, how it was

that three of the eight helicopters malfunctioned—it was evidently this that led to the scrubbing of the mission even before a fourth helicopter (and a C130) crashed, killing the eight men. This is slightly incredible and deeply disturbing and deserves the investigation promised by the secretary of defense.

Also under some challenge yesterday was President Carter's apparent failure to consult either the allies or the Congress before the mission. The point should be discussed in a realistic way. The allies unquestionably preferred to remain untainted by advance notice so as to remain free of responsibility. The administration satisfied them in this basic regard. As for the Congress, how seriously does it take the president's obligation, whatever it precisely is, to consult on this sort of military action? The Senate Foreign Relations Committee waited five months after the hostages were taken, and a full 17 days after the president announced a policy of "increasingly heavy costs," to ask the administration (just hours before the rescue mission) to consult. It was not much of a performance.

What now? The inquiry into the incident will continue and so will the argument over whether the president acted foolishly or responsibly, and over whether he confirmed the rap against him of being inept or whether he demonstrated a new dimension of boldness and purpose. It will be an interesting and necessary discussion. We are concerned only that the Iranians not misunderstand it. They would be wise to note that Jimmy Carter acted as a president determined to do what is necessary to reclaim the American hostages. They should mark Secretary Brown's quiet declaration that the United States does not rule out "any options" in the future. Iran may not be dealing with a successful president. It surely is dealing with a serious one.