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**BEN MACINTYRE**

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**SIEGE**

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THE REMARKABLE STORY OF THE GREATEST  
**SAS HOSTAGE DRAMA**



# The Siege

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# The Siege

*The Remarkable Story of the Greatest SAS*

*Hostage Drama*

BEN MACINTYRE



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*For Alexandra*

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## Illustration Acknowledgements

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Ben Macintyre would like to thank those individuals who lived through the siege, and their families, for generously contributing images from their private collections.

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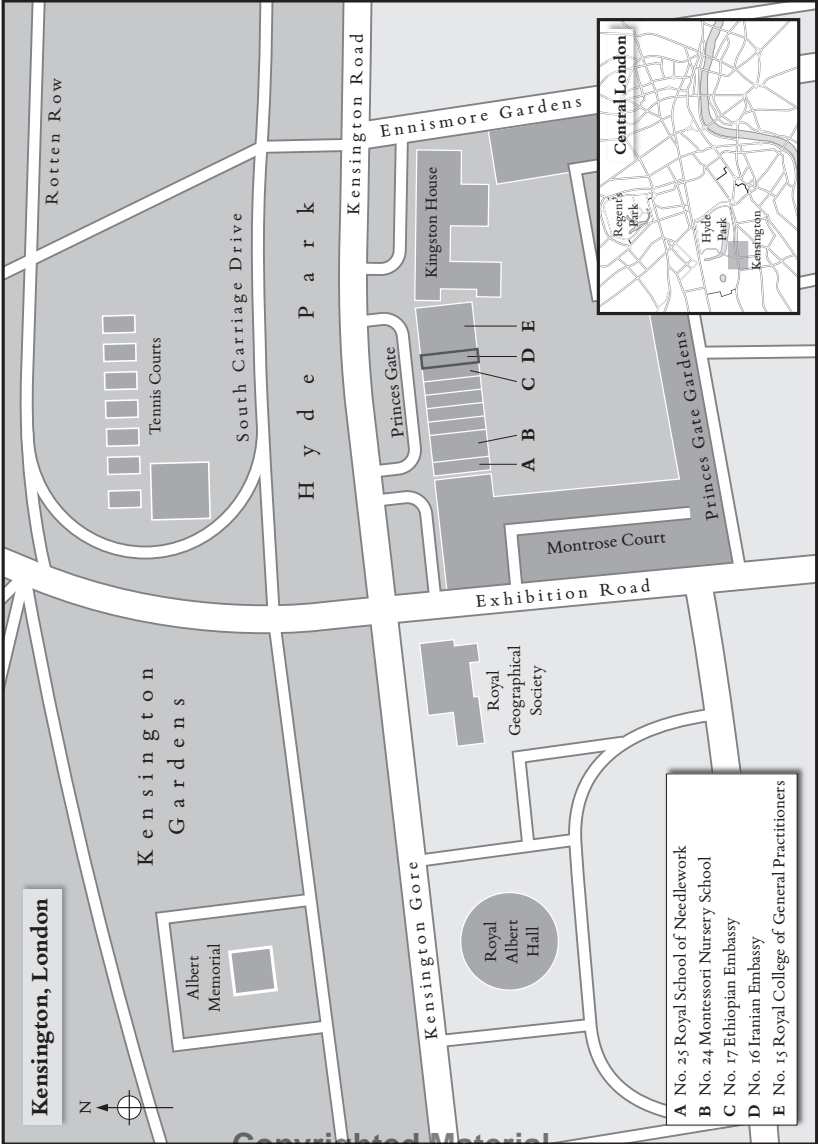
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Gardens

Albert  
Memorial

South Carriage Drive

Hyde Park

Kensington Road

Kensington Gore

Royal  
Albert  
Hall

Royal  
Geographical  
Society

Exhibition Road

Montrose Court

Princes Gate

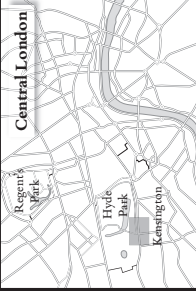
A B C D E

Kingston House

Ennismore Gardens

Rotten Row

Tennis Courts



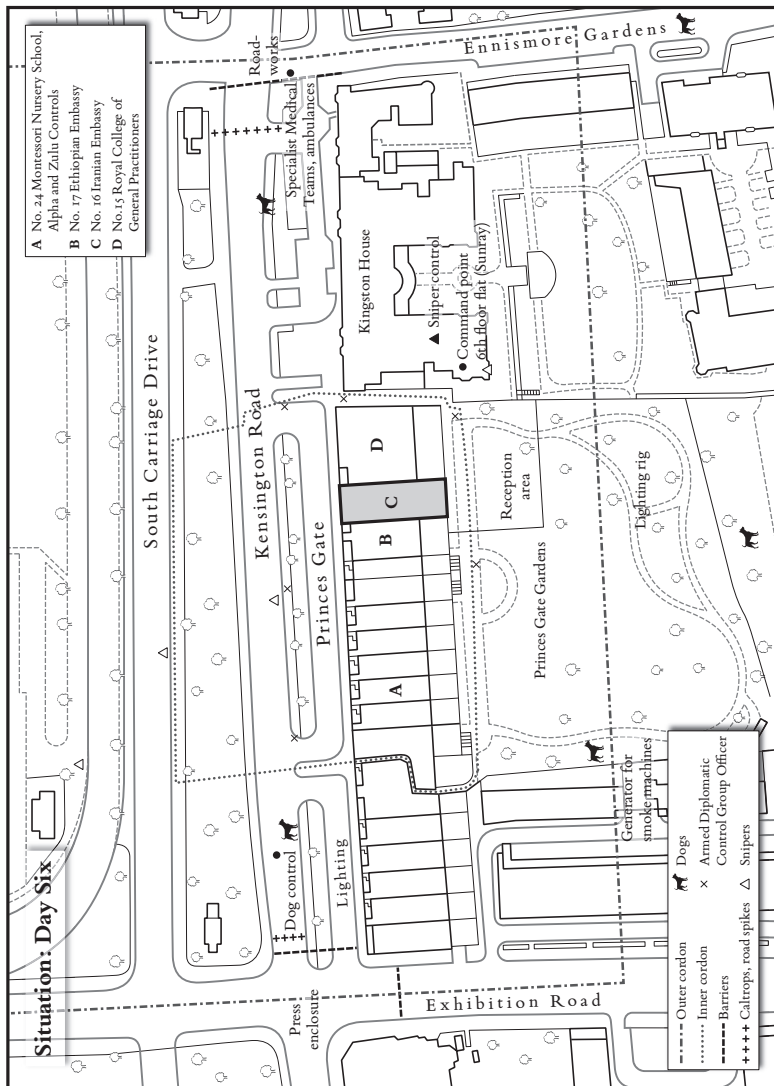
Central London

- A No. 25 Royal School of Needlework
- B No. 24 Montessori Nursery School
- C No. 17 Ethiopian Embassy
- D No. 16 Iranian Embassy
- E No. 15 Royal College of General Practitioners

RED

WHITE

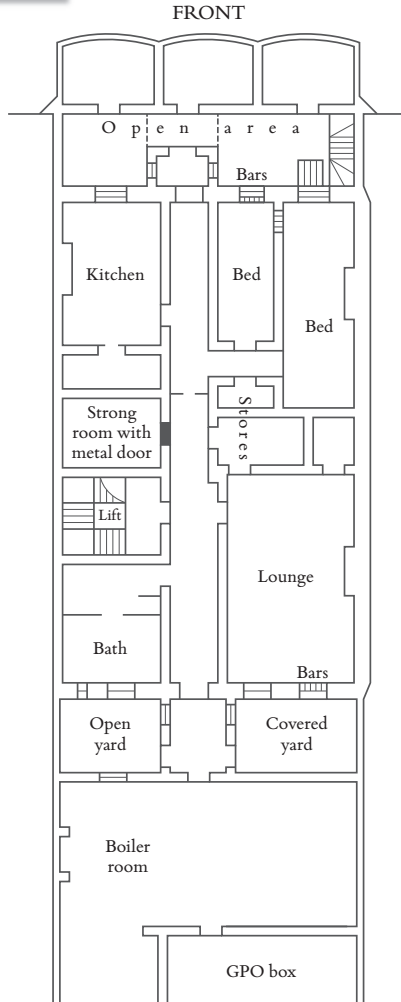
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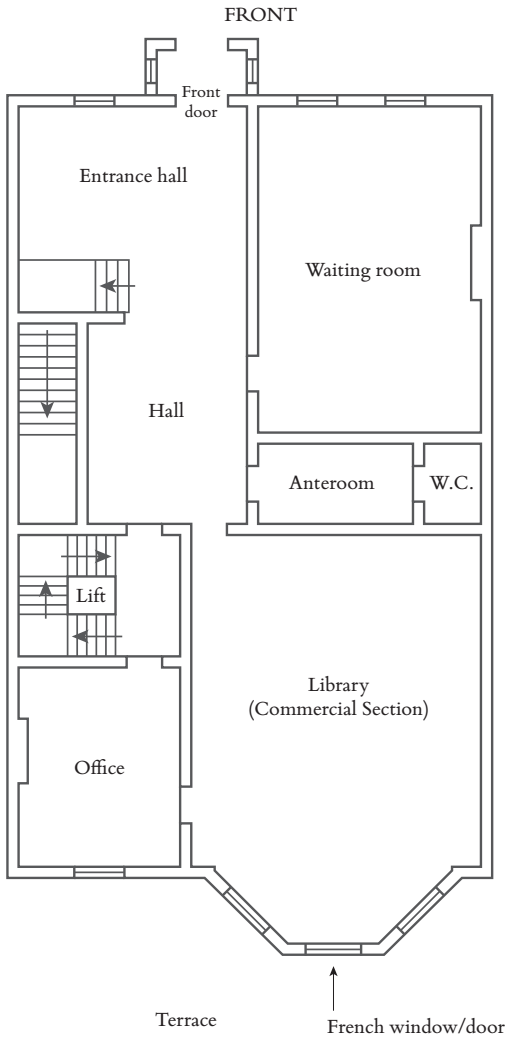
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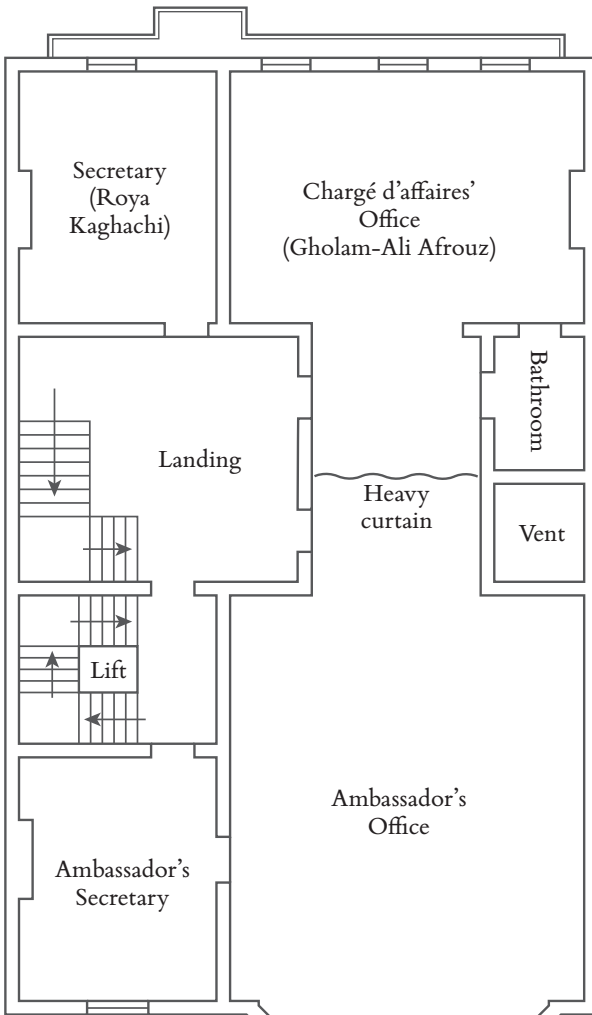
# Princes Gate: Ground Floor



Arrows on stairs point up

**Princes Gate: First Floor**

FRONT

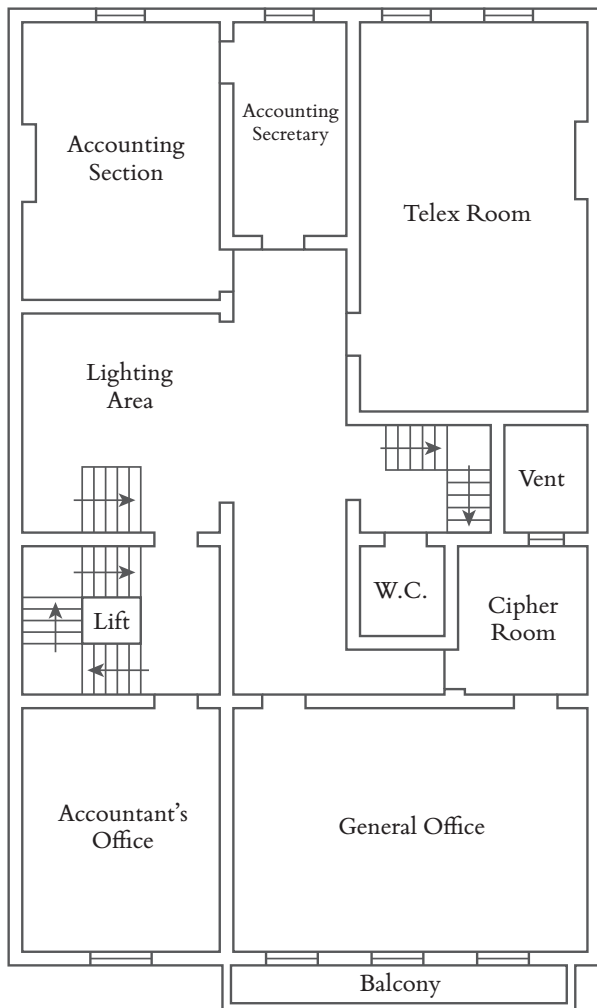


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**Princes Gate: Second Floor**

FRONT

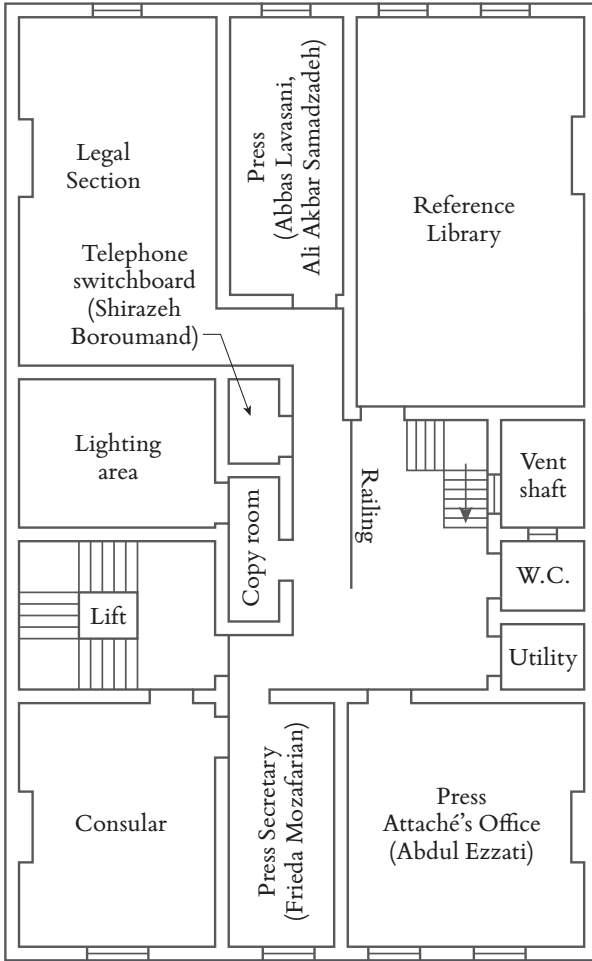


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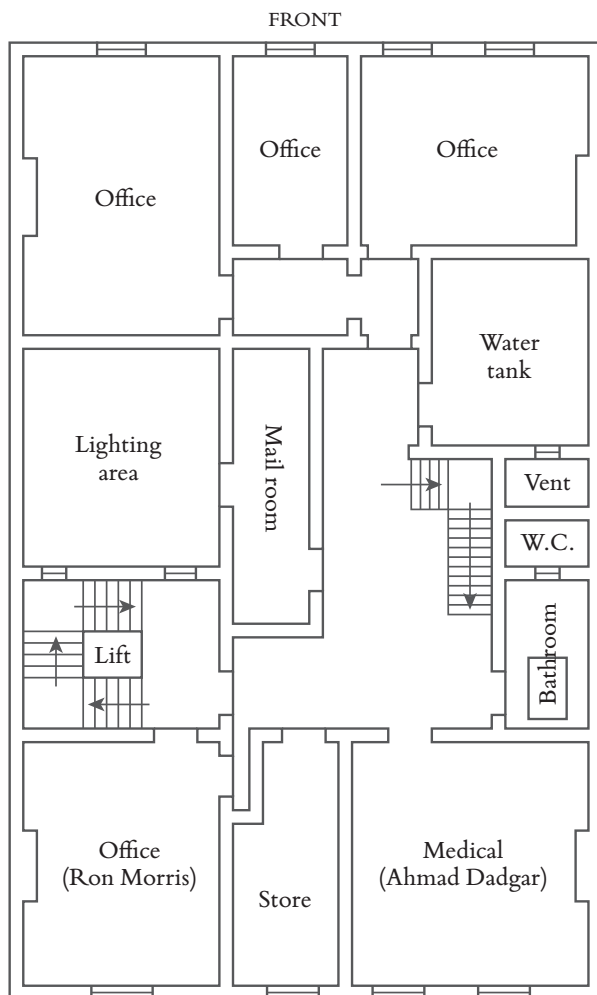
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**Princes Gate: Third Floor**

FRONT



## Princes Gate: Fourth Floor



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## Preface

This is a true story of people thrust into a dangerous situation they could not control: a group of strangers who suddenly found themselves captive and besieged. As always in such circumstances, individuals reacted differently: with courage, cowardice, resilience, terror, desperation or humour. Even the perpetrators were swept along by events, in ways they did not anticipate or fully understand.

The Iranian Embassy Siege gripped the world, and immediately entered national mythology in Britain. For millions it became a historical watershed, a 'where-were-you-when-it-happened' moment, like the JFK assassination or 9/11. Via the new miracle of live television news, the drama was played out on screens in homes up and down the country, day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute; the first-ever hostage crisis to be relayed in real time, it marked a turning point in the relationship between breaking news and the viewing public. Like most legends, the episode was presented afterwards as a straightforward morality tale of military daring, civilian bravery, patient police work and wicked foreign terrorists bent on mayhem. But the siege was more complicated than that, and much more extraordinary.

This is not a simple black-and-white moral fable, in which the righteous triumph and the losers meet their just deserts. Rather it is a tale of human error and unintended consequences, the self-replicating tragedy of man's inhumanity to man, and the collision of intolerant beliefs in an era of political, ethnic and religious violence. The underlying forces that produced the crisis in London more than forty years ago still agonize and destabilize our world, from Gaza to Iran to Ukraine. Britain had never before faced an international hostage-taking incident on this scale, and the siege changed forever the way terrorism was perceived, and dealt with.

Everyone involved was tested to a limit invisible to them at the

time: hostages, gunmen, police, journalists, politicians and the SAS. None knew how the story would end. These were ordinary people, making life or death choices based on instinct and character, for which no training is possible. There are few outright heroes or villains in *The Siege*; only humans, fallible and unpredictable, struggling to survive and subdue a sudden, terrifying storm.

This book offers just one universal truth: no one knows how they will respond to lethal jeopardy, until they have to.

DAY ONE  
Wednesday

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## 1. 16 Princes Gate

At 19.30, on Wednesday, 30 April 1980, a small, secret and exceptionally well-equipped army rolled out of Bradbury Lines, the Special Air Service camp at Hereford.

Locals tended to be over-curious about goings-on at the SAS camp, and so, to avoid attracting attention, the seven white Range Rovers departed at irregular intervals from the three exits, three men lying under blankets on the back seat, with two in the front. These were followed by two white Ford Transit vans and two large yellow furniture lorries.

This small convoy carried forty-five soldiers in civilian clothes, and enough weaponry to fight a medium-sized war.

Each man had a green holdall packed with his personal weapons and kit: a sub-machine gun with four 30-round magazines, a 9mm semi-automatic pistol with two spare magazines of ammunition, a respirator, gloves, a balaclava helmet, body armour, boots, belt and weapons-cleaning kit. In addition, each soldier had a pre-packed long-stay bag with toiletries, trainers, tracksuit and a sleeping bag. The vans carried extra ammunition, tear-gas launchers and canisters, stun grenades, frame charges, sawn-off pump-action shotguns, explosives, gun torches, food, water, radios, medical equipment and spare weapons. The pantechnicians contained the heavy kit: scaling ladders, ropes and abseiling gear, lighting rigs, screens, thermal lances for cutting through metal, smoke machines, generators and battering rams.

The SAS Special Projects team might have been setting out to repel the invasion of Britain – which, in a way, they were.

Shortly before 11.00 that morning, six young men had gathered beside the Albert Memorial, Queen Victoria's ornate tribute to her late husband, opposite the Royal Albert Hall in London's Kensington Gardens, west of Hyde Park. They were Middle Eastern, students or perhaps

tourists, wearing smart new trainers, clean anoraks and backpacks. Around their necks each wore a keffiyeh, the traditional Arab cotton scarf with a red or black fishnet pattern. PLO leader Yasser Arafat wore the keffiyeh, as did Westerners to signify sympathy for the Palestinian cause. The park was almost deserted on a weekday morning, with a handful of mothers wheeling pushchairs in the light rain and the occasional jogger. The men sat on the steps and listened intently as one of their number, a slim, wiry man in his late twenties with a goatee beard and thin moustache, spoke rapidly in Arabic.

At 11.12, the six men rose and picked up their bags. Then they split into two groups of three and headed for Princes Gate, a stuccoed terrace of large houses set back from Kensington Road, separated from the main thoroughfare by an 8-foot-high brick wall and a service road with parked cars. One group entered the road from the east, the other from the west. As they neared the door to Number 16, they wrapped the keffiyehs around their heads so that only their eyes showed. 'Yalla,' said their leader. 'Go!'

To say that Police Constable 469K Trevor James Lock was 'guarding' the Iranian Embassy implies rather more focus and energy than the task demanded. Lock was an officer of the Diplomatic Protection Group, or DPG, the Metropolitan Police unit responsible for security at the 138 foreign embassies and high commissions dotted around London. Most of these premises did not need protection. The DPG was largely diplomatic decoration, symbolizing Britain's duty to safeguard foreign dignitaries. Lock's primary function was to nod in a friendly but official manner to visitors and diplomats as they passed in and out of the building.

The job was one of the least stressful and most boring in British policing. This suited PC Lock just fine.

At forty-one, portly, patient and placid, Lock was a far cry from *The Sweeney*, the popular 1970s TV show in which tough, gun-wielding cops screeched around London in fast cars apprehending villains. He was closer to *Dirty Harry*, another policeman familiar to British television viewers, policing with common sense by standing around on street corners, being avuncular. Some join the

police to fight crime and improve society; Lock became a policeman, as he put it, 'to help old ladies across the road'.

Born into a working-class east London family, Lock had spent most of his life in the Borough of Barking, where he knew every road (and almost every old lady). During National Service with the Army, he volunteered for deployment to Tripoli, in the mistaken belief that this was in Italy. In Libya, he learnt to handle firearms, and how to swear in Arabic. After a stint in the Ford Dagenham factory, he joined the police at the age of twenty-six. Lock worked out of Barking Station, patrolling the world he had known since boyhood. He was part of the street furniture, as familiar and unchanging as the lamp posts: everyone knew Trev. Lock's first wife died in 1971, and he now lived in a council house with his second wife, Doreen, another native of Barking, and their six children, three from her first marriage and three from his. She was a devout Catholic. He worshipped West Ham United Football Club. He also believed in fair play, British cultural values (though he would be hard put to say what these were) and the police. Beneath his mild exterior, Lock was tougher than he seemed, or knew.

After fifteen years on the beat, in January 1980, Lock had requested a posting to the DPG, which was better paid: Trevor and Doreen were saving up for a holiday with the children on the Costa Brava. British policemen did not carry guns in 1980, but Diplomatic Protection officers were an exception. After three days of weapons training, Lock was issued with a Smith & Wesson .38 Regulation Police revolver, which fitted into a leather holster on his belt. Lock was confident he would never have to fire it. 'Police and guns don't go together,' he said.

It was chilly and drizzling when Lock left his home in Dagenham that Wednesday morning, and Doreen insisted he dress warmly since he would be standing outside on the porch of the Iranian Embassy all day: he wore two pullovers and his police tunic, beneath a waterproof gabardine coat. It was Doreen's birthday, and Lock had planned a night out in town. After work they would go shopping in Harrods for perfume, followed by a surprise treat: two tickets for *Ipi Tombi*, the hit musical playing at the London Astoria Theatre in the West End. Doreen liked surprises.

At 11.18, the Iranian doorman Abbas Fallahi popped his head around the front door and offered Lock a cup of coffee. According to police regulations, a DPG officer should not be seen eating or drinking while on duty, and Lock was not supposed to leave his post on the front step. Besides, Fallahi's Persian-style coffee, strong, black and sweet, was 'a cup of yuk' in his opinion. But 'to refuse might offend', and so Lock slipped into the space between the oak outer door and the inner security door of glass and wrought-iron, and accepted the steaming cup.

Abbas Fallahi had worked at the Iranian Embassy for nine years. His first job, fresh from Tehran, was driving the Ambassador around London in a gleaming Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow. His Excellency Parviz Radji represented the Shah of Iran, King of Kings, Light of the Aryans and Sovereign of the Order of the Red Lion and the Sun. The Ambassador lived a sumptuous life of parties and receptions, and he entertained lavishly at Princes Gate, where Fallahi doubled up as a waiter, serving caviar and champagne.

The Shah was then the West's favourite Middle Eastern despot, modernizing, cooperative and oil-rich. He was also haughty, luxury-loving and autocratic. The CIA and MI6 had conspired to strengthen his rule in Iran by overthrowing the democratically elected government in 1953, when it threatened to nationalize the oil industry. The Shah's courtiers flattered and fawned over him; many of his subjects loathed him; all opposition was suppressed with ruthless brutality by his secret police, the Bureau for Intelligence and State Security, known as SAVAK.

The embassy at 16 Princes Gate symbolized the Shah's wealth and power: a huge Victorian town house built in 1849, with fifty-six rooms, five storeys and a basement, in an Italianate row of eleven houses overlooking Hyde Park to the north. It had thick Persian carpets, moulded ceilings, marble flooring, swagged curtains, polished banisters and an air of lofty grandeur befitting the monarch of the Peacock Throne. Former residents of Princes Gate included Joseph Chamberlain and Field Marshal Douglas Haig. The neighbours were illustrious: John F. Kennedy had lived next door when his father was US Ambassador; the Ethiopian Embassy was on the other side, at Number 17.

In 1979, the Shah was toppled by the Islamic Revolution, an event that took him, his Western allies and most of the rest of the world by surprise. Iran's proud monarch was forced into ignominious exile, and the secular Pahlavi Imperial Dynasty was replaced with an anti-Western, authoritarian, Islamist theocracy under the hardline cleric Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini: a militant regime determined to spread Shia Islam across the Middle East and establish Iranian dominance.

Life at the Iranian Embassy in London was transformed overnight, and Ambassador Radji shuffled into exile like his King, replaced by a representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Dr Gholam-Ali Afrouz was a new breed of Iranian diplomat: fanatically dedicated to the Ayatollah, unshakable in his Islamic fundamentalism and almost wholly inexperienced in the ways of international diplomacy. Afrouz had studied psychology and education at Michigan State University before returning to Tehran to join the Islamic Revolution. Arrested and imprisoned by SAVAK, he was released when the Ayatollah swept to power and put to work enforcing strict ideological conformity as a senior official of the new Ministry of National Guidance. In September 1979, at the age of twenty-nine, he was sent to London as Iran's *Chargé d'affaires* (Deputy Ambassador), the most senior Iranian diplomat in the country.

A sleek, self-satisfied opportunist with a paunch and a dignified air, Afrouz brought with him a new Islamic austerity and a cadre of like-minded men, young revolutionaries who mostly owed their positions to religious fervour. A devout Muslim teetotaler, Afrouz's first and very public act was to empty the embassy's outstanding wine cellar and pour every bottle down the drain. The embassy Rolls was sold off. Abbas Fallahi was demoted to doorman, swapping his chauffeur's cap and waiter's tails for a blue suit. The parties ceased.

Contacts between London and Tehran hovered between frostiness and outright hostility, but diplomatic relations had not yet been severed, and PC Lock was the prime

After handing the policeman his coffee, Fallahi poured seven more cups and took them on a tray into the ground-floor waiting room,

where a handful of visitors sat beneath a large portrait of the white-bearded and beetle-browed Ayatollah: two BBC journalists applying for visas to Iran, a student, a banker, two Pakistani tourists and an Iranian rug salesman with an appointment to see the embassy's Medical Officer.

In his first-floor office, Afrouz was delivering a revolutionary lecture to a visiting journalist. In the Press Room two floors above, the Press Attaché chatted to another journalist. Seven female secretarial staff were dotted around the building. Ron Morris was the embassy Major-domo and the only full-time British employee. He kept the place running, ensured sufficient stocks of telex tape, toilet paper and tea, and checked the oil for the boiler. At this moment he was roosting in his small office on the fourth floor having a cup of tea – a ritual he performed with almost religious regularity throughout the day.

At 11.26, there were thirty-one people inside the embassy, none of them doing anything interesting or important.

'Just another Iranian student,' thought PC Lock, as he spotted a young man approaching the half-open front door.

Then he saw the sub-machine gun.

The first bullet smashed through the glass security door, sending shards flying into Lock's face. As he staggered backwards, the gunman fired another volley of shots, shouting in Arabic. The coffee cup and saucer smashed on the marble floor. Blood pouring into his eyes, Lock was bundled backwards into the hall as two more armed men, their faces masked by keffiyehs, burst into the building, firing into the air. 'Don't move!' shouted the leading gunman, in English. 'Put your hands up! Against the wall!' Instinctively, Lock reached for his lapel radio and pressed the emergency button. A second later the first intruder tore it off his tunic. Three miles away in central London, an alarm sounded in Scotland Yard's Information Room.

Chris Cramer, a BBC news producer, was standing in the main hallway when the attackers stormed in through the front door. He stumbled back into the waiting room, where the other visitors were already on their feet. 'There are gunmen here,' he gasped. Two of the attackers charged up the stairs, firing pistols into the air and shouting. Lock raised his hands and backed against the wall of the

reception area, where Fallahi was already standing, wide-eyed, the coffee pot still in his hand.

The gunman pulled down his keffiyeh. 'Please do not be afraid,' he said. 'We get everyone in the building together, make a few speeches and then we go.' Lock could barely see him through the blood. The voice was clear, and oddly calm. 'Don't worry, nothing is going to happen to you. You are all our friends.' But, as he spoke, a second gunman, taller than the first, took a green hand grenade from the pocket of his anorak and placed his finger through the ring holding the firing pin in place. His hands were shaking.

Hearing the commotion below, Afrouz rushed to his office door and locked it just as the attackers reached the landing. The *Chargé d'affaires* and his interviewer stared at each other, speechless, as the intruders hammered on the door with their guns, shouting for the occupants to open up. Afrouz knew enough Arabic to understand what they were saying: 'This is his office, Ali Afrouz . . . don't let him escape.' Then the sound of feet thundering up the stairs to the floor above.

'There's a lot of noise out there today,' Ron Morris thought idly. 'Is it another student demonstration? I think it is. Someone has fired a blank cartridge . . .' He emerged from his office and peered down into the stairwell to see the policeman and doorman being herded up the stairs by a man with a sub-machine gun. He swiftly backed into his room and closed the door.

Morris was not a man who ruffled easily, but nor was he a swift thinker. In his twenty-seven years at the embassy, nothing remotely like this had ever happened before. A man of hobbies, Morris collected replica and toy guns. He had several in the drawer of his desk, including a Diana .177 air pistol, which looked a little like a Browning. Morris took it out, then thought better of that idea and quickly put it away again. The air pistol was useful for killing rats in the embassy basement; it would not be an effective weapon for repelling heavily armed terrorists. Instead, he picked up the telephone and dialled '999'. 'Fire, police or ambulance? Said or voice.' 'Police, please,' he whispered. The shouting and shooting were coming closer. Morris put down the receiver. 'Is it better not to be caught with the phone in

my hand?’ he thought. ‘Yes. And better stay sitting down? Yes.’ So that is what he did.

All over the building, terrified people tried to escape: five succeeded. Two women opened the front door and rushed into the street, screaming. The Chief Medical Officer seized an elderly Iranian clerk by the arm and together they climbed out of her office window at the back of the ground floor. The Iranian Consul General clambered on to the rear balcony and then jumped over to the balcony of the Ethiopian Embassy next door, and went in through the window.

For a moment, those in the waiting room were left unguarded. Among them was a BBC sound engineer, Simeon Harris, known as ‘Sim’. Harris was a veteran journalist, one of the unsung but vital technicians who record the soundtrack to the news. For fifteen years he had travelled the world covering wars, conflicts and upheavals, as well as domestic news. The previous year in Tehran he had been part of the BBC team reporting on the return of the Ayatollah from exile, and the street fighting that accompanied it. When he first heard the shouting, Harris assumed ‘these must be Khomeini supporters’ mounting some sort of demonstration. ‘They are always doing odd things,’ he reflected. While his colleague Chris Cramer struggled to open the window on to the street (which was sealed shut), Harris was disinclined to fuss: ‘They will dash in and run around shouting, and eventually be removed by police.’

Another gunman burst in. ‘Don’t move,’ he said, pointing his machine gun at Cramer’s head. ‘You’ll be killed if you move.’

A group of eight or nine embassy staff rushed up the stairs ahead of the gunmen and dived into a small unused top-floor room. The most senior secretary, 25-year-old Roya Kaghachi, locked the door. They huddled against the wall as the yelling grew closer: ‘Find the Ambassador! Make sure all rooms are carefully searched.’ Frieda Mozafarian, another young secretary, suddenly began to scream uncontrollably. Roya slapped her hard, but it was too late. The door was kicked open with a crash, and a gunman fired into the ceiling. ‘*Dasta bala,*’ he shouted in Farsi, the language of Iran. ‘Hands on your heads! Stand against the wall!’ Frieda screamed again and fainted.

Then, in a surreal moment, one gunman turned to the other and, switching from Farsi to Arabic, asked: 'What do we do now?'

Gholam-Ali Afrouz unlocked his office door and opened it a crack. The landing was empty. He sprinted to the back of the building and threw open the window facing on to the garden. Twenty feet below him was a stone-paved terrace, and the basement stairwell with an iron railing. Afrouz paused on the ledge. He was overweight and out of condition, already panting from the exertion. Then he jumped.

Ron Morris was still sitting down when his door crashed open. 'What's the matter?' the Englishman asked. 'What's going on?'

The tallest gunman had now abandoned his keffiyeh to reveal a bushy, almost Afro hairstyle, and wild eyes. Morris noticed he was wearing cowboy boots. The man pointed his sub-machine gun at Morris's forehead.

'English, English. You my friend. Come.'

Seconds after Lock pressed his emergency button, the Duty Sergeant on the console at Scotland Yard sent out a radio alert to every armed Diplomatic Protection unit. Within three minutes, four DPG officers on motorbikes stationed at nearby embassies had converged on Princes Gate. Another five appeared in two squad cars, two minutes later. All were armed with .38 revolvers.

An announcement swiftly followed on the main Metropolitan Police radio frequency: 'Armed terrorists have attacked and taken the Iranian Embassy.' A second announcement reported that Lock had initiated the emergency-call signal and was not responding to his radio: 'The Iranian Embassy's direct emergency link to Scotland Yard has been activated. All available units attend immediately.' Every police car in the area was soon hurtling to the scene, sirens screeching. The police log reported: 'Unconfirmed reports that embassy staff are jumping out of the back window to escape.'

The writer and journalist Rebecca West was idly staring out of the window of her flat in Kingston House North, overlooking the embassy gardens, when she saw a chubby man climb on to the window ledge of the building opposite and leap off. He bounced off the cast-iron railing and landed with a shocking crunch, spreadeagled

on the flagstone patio. Dame Rebecca was eighty-seven years old. She had reported on pre-war Yugoslavia, the Nuremberg trials and apartheid South Africa. ‘Tremendously excited at the drama being enacted not 50 yards away,’ the veteran reporter pulled up a chair, opened the window to hear clearly what was going on and started taking notes. The threat of nearby violence, she later wrote, ‘caused a sensation in the stomach and bowels which is similar to the kind of seasickness that does not relieve itself by vomiting. This is a malaise that can only descend on one in peace. War prepares one’s nerves for horror. In peace it comes to one uncooked.’ Raw drama was playing out under her very window, and she was not going to miss a minute. Two men in Arab headscarves emerged from the basement, picked up the inert body and dragged it inside.

PC Dusty Gray was on duty in west London when he picked up the emergency signal on his radio. Gray had served nineteen years in D Squadron of 22 SAS (the regular component of the regiment, as distinct from the reserves), including two years in the Anti-terrorist team, before joining the police as a dog handler. He made his way to the embassy, conducted a swift and unauthorized reconnaissance of the area and then found a telephone box, from which he called Bradbury Lines, the Hereford SAS headquarters, also known as ‘The Kremlin’. At 12.07, the operator put Gray straight through to Lieutenant Colonel Michael Rose, Commanding Officer of 22 SAS.

‘I’m standing outside the Iranian Embassy in London and some armed terrorists have just taken it over.’

‘Are you taking the piss, Dusty?’ the Colonel demanded. ‘Are you absolutely certain?’

‘Boss, I’ve seen armed terrorists moving about the building. This is really serious.’

Rose immediately put a call through to Brigadier Peter de la Billière, Director SAS at the Ministry of Defence in London. He then ordered Major Hector Gullan, Officer Commanding, B Squadron, to gather whatever information was available and give an initial briefing once the men had assembled. ‘Tell them all to step on it, in case we have to move fast.’ Without waiting for official authorization

from the Ministry of Defence, Rose ordered the squadron to deploy to London immediately.

B Squadron was the current Special Projects team at Hereford, the standing counter-terrorist force; it was subdivided into two teams, the Red and the Blue. Each team was made up of twenty men: twelve trained in assault and eight snipers (the latter also cross-trained as assaulters), plus officers and others. The Red Team was undergoing firearms training, but by lunchtime most of the men were in the cookhouse. The men of Blue Team were outside the camp, at home relaxing or, in several cases, in the pub. At 11.48, approximately twenty minutes after the gunmen first entered the embassy, the 'live operation code' flashed up on dozens of electronic pagers. '9999', followed by a message: 'This is the real thing.'

Ron Morris was marched down two flights of stairs and into the small Cipher Room at the back of the second floor, where confidential incoming and outgoing messages were encrypted and decoded. It contained just two metal desks, for the Cipher Clerk and his secretary. Now it was packed with twenty-two cowering hostages, guarded by three armed men. The air was electric with shock and fear.

Chris Cramer tried to wipe the blood off PC Lock's face with a crumpled tissue. 'Don't worry,' the policeman kept repeating, as much to himself as anyone else. 'I'm all right. We hope things are going to be all right.' Morris paused in the doorway, and the muzzle of a gun jammed hard into his spine. 'Put your hands up! Stand against the wall.' He joined the other British hostages: Lock, Cramer and Harris.

At this moment, three more male hostages were pushed into the crowded room, including a young man clad in a bright yellow cardigan. 'Afrouz has jumped,' he wailed. 'I saw him on the ground outside. Dr Afrouz is dead. He is just lying there dead!' Some of the women began weeping. PC Lock, back to the wall with his hands up, addressed the room: 'Let's all keep perfectly quiet, especially you, ladies,' he urged. 'They're only firing blanks. Nobody's going to get hurt. Let's keep quiet.' The policeman was ashen, blood dribbling

down his face from dozens of glass cuts. Harris thought he 'looked like he'd been shot with a pellet gun'. The BBC soundman's earlier insouciance had now evaporated. He saw that his own hands were shaking.

All the gunmen had removed their keffiyehs, and the hostages saw their captors' faces for the first time. There was no doubt who was in command. The leading terrorist was slim and slight, with a neat goatee beard, 'in his late twenties, with a round, almost serene face and heavy eyebrows. He moved casually on his feet and cradled a machine pistol in both hands.' Harris possessed an extraordinary knack for spotting details others might miss: he noticed how well-dressed the intruders were. Their leader might have emerged from a high-street-fashion shoot, with fresh blue jeans, a crisp black cotton shirt and expensive-looking red-and-white trainers. The other gunmen listened intently to 'every word he uttered and every movement he made. No one disputed his orders.' They called him 'Salim'. (Sometimes he called himself 'Oan'.)

Chris Cramer was the 32-year-old son of a policeman, and a man whose outward self-confidence concealed an inner anxiety. He looked like a burly hippy, over six feet tall with long hair and beard. Cramer chose this moment to approach the leader, proffering an open packet of cigarettes: 'What do you want us to do? How can we help you?' The lead gunman flinched and raised his gun: 'Get back across the room,' he snapped in perfect English. Then, more gently, he added: 'Please do not talk. I think it is best you keep quiet. Yes?'

Then he switched to Arabic. 'Is this all the hostages?' he asked.

'Yes, I believe so,' answered the tall gunman beside him, his Number 2.

The voice of the third came from the hallway. 'Salim, come here. There is no ambassador. His office is empty.'

Salim shouted back: 'I am coming, be careful, go back to the top and check all rooms one by one, no shooting . . . no shooting, okay?' He turned to his deputy: 'Faisal, search them.' There was a peculiar formality to the way the gunmen addressed each other. These were evidently not their real names.

Faisal patted down Harris, and the BBC soundman got a closer

look at him: 'A type-cast desert Arab' was Harris's assessment, with 'fine features and a slightly hooked nose, an "Afro"-style haircut of black hair and droopy moustache'.

The gunman found Harris's electronic pager clipped to his belt and examined it suspiciously.

'What is this?' he demanded.

'It's my work bleeper.'

'Is connected to police?'

'No, of course not.'

Faisal tossed it on to a desk. He pulled Ron Morris's glasses case from his jacket pocket and threw it on to the floor, where it snapped open, sending the spectacles skidding over the green carpet. 'Hey, go easy. That's my glasses,' said Morris. Lock was next. The tall gunman patted his pockets, felt the bulge of the gun on his side and looked up at the policeman in inquiry. 'Notebooks, maps and the like,' said Lock quickly. He drew a pad halfway out of his pocket, an instinctive deception that may have saved his life. He had not planned to hide his police revolver. He immediately wondered if, by concealing it, he had placed them all in even greater danger.

Without explanation, the hostages were hustled into the larger adjoining room, the General Office, with windows facing on to the rear garden.

'Close curtain,' the lead gunman ordered Cramer and Harris before switching on the overhead fluorescent strip lights, bathing the room in a gloomy yellowish glow. They began dividing the hostages into groups. Women in one corner, Iranian men in another, and a third group consisting of the seven non-Iranians: two Pakistanis, a Syrian and four British citizens.

Moments later, Afrouz was dragged in by two of the other gunmen. Blood poured from a gash to the side of his face, and his left eye was swollen shut. The diplomat staggered a few feet, the leg of his dark brown suit trousers flapping where the seam had ripped, and collapsed heavily on the floor. Frieda Mozafarian screamed and passed out again. In his failed escape attempt from the window, the Chargé d'affaires had broken his jaw and several ribs. He was still alive but too concussed to speak.

Ron Morris knelt to take his pulse. 'Oh, guv, no . . . what have they done to you, sir?' He then turned on the gunmen. 'What have you done to him? Call a doctor at once! This man is very sick.'

Salim briefly conferred with Faisal before answering: 'It is not possible. He is all right.'

'Get a doctor. He might die,' Morris pleaded.

'Please be quiet.' The voice was firm.

Lock spoke again. 'If you bring me my radio telephone, I can talk to the police and arrange for a doctor.'

Salim smiled. It was not an unpleasant smile. 'You're being smart,' he said softly. 'Please be quiet. I want all to be quiet.'

The youngest of the intruders appeared with a vase filled with water from the bathroom across the corridor and offered it to Morris with a wobbling grin. Barely more than a boy, he seemed almost as confused as the hostages.

'It's going to be all right, sir,' Morris said gently, wiping the blood from the injured man's face. 'Don't worry, guv. We'll all be okay.' Afrouz stirred and seemed to revive a little. Morris propped a chair cushion under his head. Roya Kaghachi began to bathe his face, speaking softly in Farsi.

From below came the sound of heavy furniture being dragged across floors: the attackers were barricading themselves in.

The General Office was seldom used and sparsely furnished with empty grey filing cabinets and three steel desks. The hostages sat on the faded green Wilton carpet, stared at the walls in shock or conferred in small groups. The tall gunman guarded the door. The lacerations to the policeman's face had stopped bleeding, but his eye was swelling. Cramer moved over to him and whispered: 'What's your name?'

'PC Trevor Lock.'

'How did they get in?'

'I couldn't get my gun out in time.' Lock looked around and dropped his voice further. 'They haven't got it. They missed it.'

The discovery that the policeman was still armed was encouraging, and also terrifying.

'Do you intend to use it?' asked Cramer.

‘Not at the moment. I’ve thought about that. I can’t take out more than two of them, at the most.’

Cramer was struck by another alarming thought. What if Lock himself were to be shot?

‘I don’t want to be morbid, but, in case anything happens, where is it and how do I use it?’

Lock nodded toward his hip. ‘It’s under my jumper. There’s no safety catch. Just pull the trigger.’

Suddenly a telephone rang. Everyone in the room jumped. No one moved.

After several rings, Salim gestured to the nearest hostage to answer it: a burly, swarthy man of thirty-five with a substantial moustache, a fat tie and a worldly air.

Mustapha Karkouti was a Syrian journalist who spoke Arabic by birth, perfect English by adoption and a decent smattering of Farsi, making him the only person in the embassy able to communicate in all three languages. He also understood the complexities of Middle Eastern politics better than anyone else in the building; indeed, he had lived through them.

At the age of seventeen, Karkouti had been arrested for breaking into his school and daubing the walls with graffiti condemning Syria’s military regime. The son of a grocery-store owner, he was thrown into prison, beaten up by the secret police and then ordered to leave the country. He moved to Lebanon, attended university in Beirut, worked as a teacher and journalist, and became a lifelong supporter of the Palestine Liberation Organization, or PLO, the militant group fighting for Palestinian statehood. A left-leaning Arab nationalist, Karkouti joined the Marxist–Leninist Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (the DFLP), spent his summers working in Palestinian refugee camps and underwent weapons training in Jordan. After helping to found *As-Safir* (*The Ambassador*), a popular left-wing Arabic newspaper, he was posted to London in 1974 as the paper’s Chief Foreign Correspondent, reporting on Middle Eastern politics and religion, specializing in Iran. He adored Britain, a country he had first visited for the World Cup in 1966, and vowed never to leave, but he also remained an active PLO supporter, vehemently opposed to Israel.