



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
Headquarters, 4th Psychological Operations Group
Fort Bragg, North Carolina 28307

AFJK-POG-CO

13 February 1980

SUBJECT: Psychological Operations Plan - Iranian Hostage Issue (S)

Commanding General
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1. ^(U)~~(S)~~ On 8 February 1980, OJCS requested that the proposed National Strategic Psychological Operations Plan be expanded to include a sub-campaign to address the "captors." Specific objectives are:
 - a. ^(U)~~(S)~~ Convince the captors to cooperate with Bani Sadr on the hostage issue.
 - b. ^(U)~~(S)~~ Isolate the captors to eliminate their influence on the hostage issue.
2. ^(U)~~(S)~~ Attached is a sub-campaign designed to convince the captors to release the American hostages. This particular sub-campaign is designed to be used as an integral part of the National Plan using the same methodology and format as the other sub-campaigns. Thematic material is compatible with and reinforces thematic material in the National Plan; however, this sub-campaign could be implemented by itself. This approach offers planners the flexibility of implementing this sub-campaign immediately without detracting from a more deliberate consideration of the National Plan and the concomitant recommendations for its implementation.
3. ^(U)~~(S)~~ This sub-campaign is the only sub-campaign in the National Plan which includes recommendations for the use of "black and gray propaganda." These recommendations are justified by the critical nature of the hostage issue and its potential impact on US foreign and domestic policies.

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1. (U) (S) Statement of PSYOP Objective (U)

(U) (S) Convince militants occupying the US embassy in Tehran to release all hostages without harm.

2. (U) (S) Definition of Target Audience (U)

(U) (S) The militants occupying the US embassy in Tehran have demonstrated a high degree of revolutionary zeal, a continuing firm commitment to the position that the US hostages will not be released before the former Shah is returned to Iran for trial, and a relatively disciplined organization. The militants also have demonstrated a fairly sophisticated understanding of hostage-captor psychological dynamics, a keen appreciation of media manipulation for political advantage, and a willingness to confront Iranian political authorities. They have exploited the political leverage provided by their occupation of the US embassy to have ministers of state replaced, an ambassador recalled, and to exert considerable influence on the 25 January presidential election. It can be presumed that the political influence their status as captors has given them has convinced some of the militants to prolong the embassy crisis as long as possible in order to preserve their political influence. The group holding this conviction apparently dominates the "leadership committee" which governs the collective actions of the militants.

(U) (S/NF) Despite the organizational discipline they have demonstrated and the apparent unanimity of their public statements and actions, the militants are not a homogenous group. Five general sub-groups with overlapping membership have been tentatively identified among the composite force occupying the embassy. These are theological students, university students, Revolutionary Guardsmen, Palestinian-trained Iranian activists and political leftists. The attitudes, perceptions, goals and ultimate loyalties of the sub-groups probably vary considerably. It is highly likely that the theological students, many of the university students and Revolutionary Guardsmen, and perhaps some of the Palestinian trained activists are committed primarily to the goals of the Shiite Islamic revolution in Iran. Most of the militants in this category are devoted to Ayatollah Khomeini as the possessor of both ultimate spiritual and temporal authority. They could be expected to obey Khomeini if he unambiguously ordered release of the hostages. Furthermore, because of their devotion to Khomeini and their commitment to Islamic revolutionary goals, these activists are potentially susceptible to appeals or demands issued by less revered political authorities holding positions approved by Khomeini and acting with his tacit, if not explicit, endorsement. The constitutionally-elected President of the Islamic Republic is one such political authority. The remaining militants probably hold little if any allegiance to Khomeini and the goals of the Islamic Revolution. These leftist militants could be

expected to resist and perhaps to defy orders issued by either political officials or Ayatollah Khomeini to release the hostages. The leadership committee which directs militant activities at the embassy is dominated by the more radical or intransigent elements among the militants and may be dominated, although this is not certain, by leftist elements holding no real allegiance to Khomeini.

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(S) While it is extremely unlikely that a summary execution of any hostage will occur, this radical element may contain a few individuals willing to resort to such extremes if the militants become totally isolated from the Iranian people and government. Such actions would clearly separate the radical fringe from the other captors and the Iranian government. The government would no longer be an appropriate target, but an excellent opportunity would arise for the US to call for retribution against the executioners in particular and condemnation of terrorism in general.

3. (U)
(S) Statement of Themes (U)

a. (U)
(S) The embassy occupation is isolating the militants from the Iranian Revolution. As a collective unit, the militants are extremely vulnerable to loss of the public support and the consequent political influence their seizure of the embassy has generated. Public sympathy and support of their activities are the most important conditions which have allowed the militants to develop and exercise political influence. All of the militants are vulnerable to the loss of this support. Those sincerely devoted to the Islamic Republic and Khomeini are further vulnerable to the adverse ramifications the embassy occupation may have for ultimate international acceptance of the Republic. The criticality of the militants' vulnerability to isolation from public support makes them highly susceptible to this theme, if there is convincing evidence that the theme accurately reflects political reality.

b. (U)
(S) Continuation of the hostage crisis contributes to conditions threatening the survival of the Islamic Revolution. Those militants loyal to Khomeini and the goals of the Islamic Republic are vulnerable to loss of the successes the revolution has achieved. Growing domestic instability and the increasing threat of Soviet intervention both carry the potential to overthrow the Islamic revolutionary leadership and to replace the Islamic Revolution with one seeking different political goals. To the extent the Khomeini devotees perceive these vulnerabilities, they will be susceptible to this theme. Leftist elements among the militants having little or no commitment to Islamic goals are not subject to the same vulnerabilities and, in fact, probably would welcome further turmoil in Iran as improving conditions for a second, leftist, revolution. Consequently, the leftists are not susceptible to this theme.

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c. ^(U)~~(S)~~ There are a variety of legal and internationally accepted methods for airing the legitimate grievances of the Iranian people. The militants are vulnerable to the loss of public support and their own ability to guide the Revolution toward those idealist goals which initially motivated their occupation of the US embassy. In addition to the idealistic motivations, the captors generally are driven by three very primal needs. First, they have an intense fear of the Shah's return to power or the reimposition of a foreign (read US) "satanic" puppet. Secondly, the captors are driven by greed in terms of the exported Shah's wealth. Finally, they have a sense of vindictive responsibility to punish and humiliate the Shah, his supporters and the US. Accordingly, the captors are susceptible to themes which emphasize these vulnerabilities while also offering means through which the militants can retain a vanguard, or at least influential, role in the revolutionary process. Themes addressing the aforementioned vulnerabilities/susceptibilities would have little credibility if they appear to be originating from a US or US influenced source. Therefore a "gray propaganda" effort would be most effective.

d. ^(U)~~(S)~~ The US respects the goals of the Islamic Revolution and the desires of the Iranian people. The vulnerabilities of the militants are those previously described. Under conditions prevailing on 9 February 1980, the theme of US respect for Islamic/Iranian goals does not directly exploit any of the militants' vulnerabilities and, consequently, is not a theme to which they are susceptible. However, other groups within the Iranian population that possess the potential to influence the perceptions of the militants are susceptible to the theme. Furthermore, the militants can be expected to become increasingly susceptible to the theme, as justification for accepting a compromise resolution of the hostage situation, if they become convinced that the hostage crisis must be resolved either to preserve their own political influence or to protect the achievements of the Islamic Revolution.

4. ^(U)~~(S)~~ Effectiveness (U)

^(U)~~(S)~~ As a collective entity, the militants are capable of effecting the release of all hostages without harm by deciding to do so. However, such decisions appear to be made for the total group by a leadership committee dominated by the more intransigent element among the militants. This group probably will attempt to prolong the hostage crisis in order to preserve its own political influence. Militant efforts to avoid compromise solutions and to prolong the crisis can be anticipated to continue until the intransigents perceive that further prolongation of the crisis threatens to convert public support for their activities into alienation or hostility that will eliminate their political influence.

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5. (U) Accessibility (U)

~~(S)~~ (U) Aggressively seeking to influence, if not control, political events in Iran, the militants are highly attuned to all media that indicate the current status of their role in the political arena. Avid consumers as well as manipulators of the domestic broadcast media, the militants are highly accessible through these media. The militants also can be expected to closely follow external broadcasts that provide information, not available in the increasingly controlled domestic media, concerning the impact of their own activities on other political participants, government intentions, and public reactions to both their own and government activities. These also can be carried effectively to component elements among the militant group by influential individuals and groups in Iran. Such people and groups include Ayatollah Khomeini and his representatives, government officials, members of Iran's Revolutionary Council, seminary students in Qum, university students in Tehran, Revolutionary Guard leaders and cadre, respected religious figures, members of Iranian leftist groups, representatives of various Palestinian nationalist groups (notably the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and Fatah), and activists of the communist Tudeh Party of Iran. More general population groups, such as the intelligentsia, the bazaaris and the unemployed lower economic class, also are capable of conveying generalized themes to the militants through personal contact or public displays, such as wall graffiti, speeches and public demonstrations.

6. ~~(S)~~ (U) Conclusions (U)

a. ~~(S)~~ (U) Most Lucrative Target Audience: The militants are a particularly resistant target audience for themes related to hostage release. However, the Khomeini loyalists and other religious devotees will be more susceptible to themes related to release of the hostages than will be the leftists. The leftists, while more resistant to hostage-release themes, will be more effective in ultimately orchestrating release of the hostages than will be the religious devotees.

b. ~~(S)~~ (U) Most Productive Themes: Growing isolation will be the most productive theme directed at the militants as a total group. Of equal productivity for the Khomeini loyalists only will be themes emphasizing the dangers posed to the Islamic revolution by prolongation of the embassy crisis. The theme emphasizing the pragmatic utility of a compromise solution will be productive only when a sense of growing isolation from public support has been engendered in the dominant intransigent element among the militants. Themes emphasizing US respect for Islamic values and the Iranian people will be effective with influential intermediate target audience among the Iranian population but will not by themselves alter the perceptions of the militants.

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c. ^(U)~~(S)~~ Most Productive Media: An unambiguous public statement by Ayatollah Khomeini provides the single most effective medium. Short of such a statement by the Ayatollah, no single medium can be considered particularly more productive than others. A combination of all media does have the potential to convincingly carry desired themes to the militants.

d. ^(U)~~(S)~~ Anticipated Impact: By themselves, psychological operations offer little probability of successfully altering the perceptions and behavior of the militants holding the hostages. However, appropriate communications can both encourage Iranian government authorities to attempt to resolve the hostage situation and provide significant support to Iranian officials in their efforts to resolve the situation. A combination of Iranian government efforts, US diplomatic support for those efforts, and the projection of themes related to hostage release to both the activists and intermediate target audiences, does have the potential to reduce the current political influence of the activists, isolate the activists from public support, and eventually convince the activists that a compromise solution provides greater advantages for them than would a prolongation of the crisis.

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1. (U) Statement of PSYOP Objective (U)

(U) Convince militants occupying the US embassy in Tehran to release all hostages without harm.

2. (U) Definition of Target Audiences (U)

a. (U) Ayatollah Khomeini: Khomeini remains the ultimate legitimizing force for political activities in Iran. He views political affairs primarily in moralistic terms and relies for practical advice, as well as for daily implementation of policy, on a circle of advisors within the Revolutionary Council and, since 25 January 1980, on the elected President of the Islamic Republic. Although Khomeini has endorsed the militants' position that the US hostages will not be released until the Shah is returned to Iran for trial, he is capable of reversing his position and ordering a release of the hostages, if given a face-saving method of doing so.

b. (U) President Abul Hasan Bani-Sadr: Bani-Sadr, the elected President of the Islamic Republic, is the only Iranian official besides Khomeini whose position is legitimized by the new constitution. A de facto political exile from the Shah's regime, Bani-Sadr spent fifteen years in France, where he eventually joined Khomeini's circle of advisors. An ardent anti-imperialist and critic of US involvement in Iran, Bani-Sadr portrays himself as a true revolutionary and leftist. As acting Foreign Minister during most of November 1979, he refused to open direct negotiations with the US to resolve the hostage situation but nevertheless took the position that the hostage seizure had been a spontaneous but mistaken incident that should be terminated as rapidly as possible without the use of force. His previous statements indicate that he probably views his presidential responsibilities as a balancing act in which he must on one hand retain Khomeini's confidence, public support and his own ascendancy over political rivals in both the Revolutionary Council and the larger political arena, while on the other hand taking positive measures to establish an effective "revolutionary" government and solve Iran's pressing foreign and domestic problems.

c. (U) The Revolutionary Council of Iran: While some members of the Revolutionary Council appear to view political affairs primarily from the same moralistic basis as Khomeini, other members take a more pragmatic position on specific issues. The Council has in the past persuaded Khomeini to reverse his publicly-announced position on specific issues. A perception that either domestic instability or foreign hostilities seriously threaten the survival of the Islamic Republic could provide pragmatically oriented members of the Council with sufficient rationale to convince Ayatollah Khomeini to order release of the hostages.

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- d. (U) Religious leaders (mullahs): Combining spiritual with political leadership, the mullahs give pre-eminence to spiritual values and to the necessity of following Shiite Islamic precepts in political life. However, they are highly politicized and are intimately involved in political affairs.
- e. (U) University and theological students: Many of these students are both deeply religious and fervently committed to the revolutionary goal of establishing a Shiite state. They continue to be revolutionary activists and have constituted an important source of public sympathy and vocal support for the embassy militants.
- f. (U) Revolutionary Guards: Primarily youthful, zealous, and at least initially motivated in significant degree by religious commitment, these guardians of the Revolution have cooperated closely with the militants and have provided at least a portion of the militants' numerical strength. Guards representatives may also be prominent members of the militants' leadership committee.
- g. (U) Bazaaris and middle class: The bazaaris can be categorized as both deeply religious and strongly motivated by economic and profit considerations. The middle class generally believes that religious devotion can be compatible with Western life-styles and methods. The middle class is concerned primarily with political freedoms and living standards.
- h. (U) Militant Iranian leftist organizations: Although some of the militant leftist organizations in Iran have contributed members and perhaps leaders to the occupation group at the US embassy, other leftist groups apparently have been barred from the embassy compound by the occupying militants. At least one organization loosely associated with the "Islamic-Marxist" Iranian Peoples Strugglers (Mujahidin) appears to be represented among the militants, although the tightly organized and ideologically cohesive Mujahidin itself may not be. While the leftists among the militants appear to draw support from their families and from associates with similar beliefs, they also appear to be the objects of resentment and passive opposition from other leftist groups. Lack of convincing information about the leftists at the embassy, coupled with historic rivalry among leftist groups in Iran, make the leftist organizations outside the embassy compound difficult to assess as target audiences. Generally, these groups advocate the revolutionary establishment of a classless, socialist state and portray themselves as the vanguard of the anti-imperialist struggle in Iran. Some of the significant groups couple fundamentalist Shiite principles to their socialist ideology.

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i. (U) (S) Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO): Some of the embassy militants almost certainly have personal links with PLO groups. George Habbash's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) is the Palestinian organization most likely to have had past and perhaps continuing ties with at least some of the militants. It is also possible, although not substantiated, that a number of the militants could have past associations with a Shiite militia organization in Lebanon, the Amal, which occasionally has cooperated closely with various Palestinian factions. The organization and conduct of the militants at the embassy indicates that at least some of their leaders have been associated with or trained by experienced guerrillas, possibly a Palestinian organization. Palestinian groups are interested primarily in advancing the Palestinian nationalist cause. Although other considerations are secondary, some Palestinian groups, notably the relatively moderate Fatah of Yasir Arafat, have involved themselves in diplomatic initiatives of virtually every nature in order to attract support for their nationalist cause.

j. (U) (S) International Islamic groups: These organizations attempt to promote the mutual interests of their members by gaining greater recognition for Islam in the world community and by promoting Islamic values within member states. They exercise some political influence and can be manipulated if they perceive the hostage situation as detrimental to Islam.

3. (U) (S) Statement of Themes (U)

a. (U) (S) The hostage crisis contributes to conditions threatening the survival of the Islamic Revolution. Both the president and the Revolutionary Council are in the process of consolidating a tenuous hold on political authority and are acutely conscious of their vulnerability to both internal and external developments that might precipitate either domestic disturbance or foreign interference. They are susceptible to all themes depicting potential dangers to the regime. The mullahs have returned to political influence as a result of the Islamic revolution and are vulnerable to the erosion of this hard won position. They are susceptible to themes articulating the possibility that revolutionary failure will submerge their own position and the influence of spiritual values on the life of the country. To the extent they are committed to both the spiritual and political goals of the Revolution, the students, seminarians and Revolutionary Guardsmen are vulnerable to the loss of these idealized goals as a result of revolutionary failure. They are potentially susceptible to themes announcing realistic threats to the goals of the Revolution. The bazaaris and middle class are vulnerable to the deterioration of economic prospects and living conditions that would accompany further political instability or foreign hostility. They are susceptible to the theme that continued confrontation with the US may be exacerbating domestic and international difficulties. Iranian leftist groups and Palestinian fellow

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travelers are not susceptible to this theme, as in most cases they are pursuing differing goals through the convenient vehicle of an Islamic revolution.

b. (U) (C) The hostage crisis strengthens the political effectiveness of groups with no allegiance to the Islamic Revolution. Bani-Sadr and the Revolutionary Council are vulnerable to a reduction of their political influence caused by the competing influence exercised by the militants. The militants and other political pressure groups challenge legitimacy of the emerging constitutional regime, prevent it from attracting support through resolution of the social and economic difficulties besetting the nation, and threaten to undermine its ability to consolidate itself as a government-in-being. The president and the Revolutionary Council also are vulnerable to a further deterioration of Iran's status in the international community. They are aware already that Iran's status as a responsible nation state and the Islamic Republic's image as a rational and civilized government has been damaged by the intransigence of a small group of student activists. They are acutely aware that their failure to deal effectively with this group will precipitate further damage. They are vulnerable to themes emphasizing the inevitability of unhappy consequences, because both a measure of their continuing domestic legitimacy and their access to the forums in which they can reconstitute Iranian responsibility and status depend upon international support.

c. (U) (C) The embassy militants do not respect or represent the desires of the Iranian people. All of the target audiences that support, actively or passively, the goals of the Islamic Revolution in Iran are vulnerable to counter-revolutions or other political developments that could place desired goals beyond even potential attainment. Other Islamic states, and consequently international Islamic organizations, are vulnerable to secular, and particularly communist, exploitation of Iranian domestic turmoil. The fear of communism, regarded as the antithesis of religious value, coupled with a renaissance of Iranian xenophobia make this theme appropriate for use as "black propaganda." The related suggestion of self-serving factionalism on the part of the militants echoes and reinforces themes in use by the emerging constitutional leadership. The prevalence of factionalism and self-interest among Iranian political groups of all orientations makes all target audiences vulnerable to this suggestion. The sub-theme which stresses the incalculable damage that militant activities are working upon Islam is directed primarily at religious leaders and exploits a critical susceptibility already sensitized by the Iranian experience at the recent Muslim conference.

d. (U) (C) The US respects the goals of the Islamic Revolution and the desires of the Iranian people. The vulnerabilities of all target audiences

except the leftists, Palestinians and Islamic organizations are those discussed previously, with one addition. Each target audience also is vulnerable to the psychic and social disorientation produced by rapid Westernization and the uncontrolled encroachment of Western culture. The target audiences will be susceptible to this theme only to the extent that the US demonstrates a willingness to concede, at least partially, to Iranian political demands and to accept restrictions on its economic and cultural penetration of Iran. To be effective, the theme must be supported by actions that convince target audiences of a US willingness to cooperate with Iran on terms that are fully acceptable to Iran. Even given the necessary and appropriate supporting actions, however, this theme will have low credibility among virtually all target audiences. It is necessary as an anodyne which will form a neutral background to the sharper persuasive/coercive themes.

4. (U) (S) Effectiveness (U)

a. (U) (S) An unambiguous statement by Khomeini ordering release of the hostages would be the single most effective influence on the militants. Most if not all of the militants probably would obey such an order. Militants refusing to obey would be able to generate little public support for their defiance.

b. (U) (S) Bani-Sadr probably remains capable of influencing, although not of dominating, Khomeini's political views and thus potentially is capable of persuading the Ayatollah to order release of the hostages. As a president with Khomeini's tacit endorsement, he is potentially capable of depriving the embassy militants of much of their current political influence and possibly of forcing them to accept a compromise solution to the hostage situation. His ability to fully realize this potential will be determined primarily by political developments in Iran.

c. (U) (S) Individual and factional struggles for pre-eminence apparently characterize much of the Revolutionary Council's activity and limit its overall effectiveness. However, the Council remains the highest decisionmaking body on the Iranian political scene. If convinced of the pragmatic necessity of doing so, the Council is capable of rendering significant support to Bani-Sadr in his efforts to undermine the influence of the embassy militants and to impose a compromise solution to the hostage situation. The Council also controls or supervises all of the Iranian mass media and is capable of employing this vehicle and other means to generate public support for its policies.

d. (U) (S) The mullahs provided an important medium of communication as well as an effective focus for mobilizing public sentiment and organizing public action during the anti-Shah revolution. Their political effectiveness and their ability to channel public perceptions remain intact. A decision by

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Khomeini or by the lesser ayatollahs on the Revolutionary Council to isolate or limit the influence of the embassy militants could be effectively translated into public action by the mullahs.

e. (U) (S) A lessening of the support currently provided the militants by the university and theological students would contribute meaningfully to generating perceptions of isolation among the militants. A conversion of the students' current support to even passive opposition would be a more significant contribution to perceptions of isolation by the militants.

f. (U) (S) Any lessening of the Revolutionary Guards' cooperation and support would contribute significantly to isolating the militants from external support.

g. (U) (S) The potential effectiveness of Iranian leftist groups in promoting desired objectives is minimal. Increasing opposition from rival leftists probably would have little effect. Withdrawal of support by sympathetic groups would be more significant, but probably could not be dissociated meaningfully from withdrawal of general public support.

h. (U) (S) The bazaaris and middle class, while possessing little if any ability to directly influence the militants, are capable persuading Bani-Sadr and the Revolutionary Council of the continuing urgency of solving the hostage crisis.

i. (U) (S) Although one or more radical Palestinian factions may exercise influence with some of the militants at the embassy, the extent of that influence is not known. It is quite likely, however, that whatever influence these factions possess would be exerted toward retention of the hostages and prolongation of the crisis. There is no evidence that Fatah, the comparatively moderate Palestinian organization of Yasir Arafat, exercises any direct influence with the embassy militants. Fatah does have the potential to act as an intermediary between the US government and Iranian authorities, but its effectiveness in such a role probably would be no greater than that of a "neutral" Muslim state such as Pakistan, Turkey or Algeria, or than that of an international organization such as the United Nations.

j. (U) (S) The international Islamic organizations, and their member states, can effectively convey to Iranian leaders the positive or negative reactions of the international community to events in Iran. These groups contribute to the international community's generalized ability to encourage or discourage specific policies of the Iranian government.

5. (U) Accessibility (U)

(U) All Iranian target audiences remain highly active participants in the revolution which Iran continues to experience. As a consequence, each target audience is highly sensitized to all media of political communication. Each target audience actively seeks information from all available media. No single medium by itself, however, is capable of altering or significantly influencing the perceptions of any of the target audiences. The opinions and advice of trusted leaders, and particularly of Ayatollah Khomeini, are the most credible sources of information. However, even the persuasiveness of trusted leaders is not absolute. Repetition (and implicit corroboration) through multiple sources is the only effective method for altering the perceptions and behavior of the target audiences.

6. (U) Conclusions (U)

a. (U) Most Lucrative Target Audience: No single target audience is conspicuously lucrative in isolation. The cumulative influence of all target audiences does provide the possibility of success.

b. (U) Most Productive Theme: The most productive general theme for all potentially effective target audiences is that the hostage crisis is contributing to conditions, both domestic and external, that threaten the survival of the Islamic Revolution. Individual target audiences are best galvanized through use of tailored versions of this general theme.

c. (U) Most Productive Media: No single media can produce the results desired, but a combination of all available media does have the potential to generate desired perceptions.

d. (U) Anticipated Impact: The messages have the potential to convince the Iranian regime that its continued existence is threatened by domestic and foreign conditions and that the challenge presented by these conditions can be met only by peacefully resolving the hostage crisis. If this perception achieves ascendancy, the regime will undertake necessary domestic action to isolate the militants, turn public opinion against them and eventually force them to release the hostages as part of a compromise solution.