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The Iranian Outlook and the Hostage Crisis

This paper has three major purposes:

1. To examine our strategy in the hostage crisis in light of Iranian attitudes and general characteristics to determine if our strategy is having the effects we intend.
2. To look at prospects for Iranian politics in the near future in hope of adopting a strategy to maximize the probability of the release of the hostages.
3. To ascertain if alternative strategies exist which are better attuned to Iranian realities.

The paper is based on interviews with eleven State and CIA officers who are or have been involved in Iranian affairs for significant periods of time. It also includes ideas from a paper Victor Tomseth (a hostage in the Foreign Ministry) submitted in early February.

IRANIAN ATTITUDES

General Characteristics: Iran remains fundamentally a traditional Middle Eastern society, despite Pahlavi efforts to bring the nation into the twentieth century. The society and its leaders are torn between the visible material superiority of the West and the gratification and sense of cultural superiority provided by adherence to its Persian and Shi'a past. A majority of the population is illiterate and even the literate minority is only one generation deep. The only enduring political tradition is one of authoritarian rule. Even dictatorship has been only superficially successful in bringing widespread economic development to Iran. Iranian individualism, the product of a harsh environment and a

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-2-

turbulent history, and Shi'a doctrine, which is fundamentally opposed to secular authority, and much less receptive to centralization than Sunni Islam, pose formidable obstacles to development. Iran's rugged terrain and sometimes painful historical experience have resulted in a society characterized by deep class, religious, tribal and communal differences.

Within this traditional but turbulent society, Iranian behavior places a premium on survival. The Iranian mindset is based on insecurity, suspicion and xenophobia. Iranians have a national sense of vulnerability which results in domineering behavior (particularly towards the weak), and a need to challenge others constantly to prove their own worth or to confirm their unspoken suspicion of lack of worth. Iranians tend to regard those outside their extended family or circle of close friends, and especially foreigners, as hostile. They deal with the world through dominance where possible, and through manipulative and calculated submission where necessary.

Iranians are able to change loyalties or direction through quick and painlessly rationalized shifts in response to perceptions of the moment's most expedient course. A highly developed sense of personal survival and a belief that events are subject to manipulation through personal contact somewhat overshadows the traditional Islamic fatalism, which is also present. These traits plus the fact that there are no protective secular institutions in Persian society mean that individuals seek protection and reward from strong leaders. The leaders themselves are constantly engaged in manipulation so, to the Western observer, many decisions seem to be based on momentary expediency.

An important result of the individualism, manipulation and personalization of power in Iranian society is the "partibazi" system. It is an accepted means of personal and family advancement characterized by currying favors from higher ups on the social-political-economic scale, and manipulation of those below. Partibazi is the way things get done in Iran.

A belief in manipulation by others also allows Iranians to avoid responsibility or guilt for their actions, which can ultimately be laid to God or to external forces. "Truth," in

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-3-

the Western sense, is not an objective reality; rather, it is subjective and is manipulated to advance one's personal interests. Iranians do not expect others to "tell the truth" -- instead, there is a constant search for the "real meaning" behind any given statement.

Iranians are thus great believers in conspiracy theories. For example, it is commonly believed in the Tehran bazaars that Beheshti is controlled by the Germans and the British. Many Iranians believe that the hostage crisis is a conspiracy by the British and the Germans to deprive the US of its power in Iran. Presumably, this is a response to the events of 1953 when the common belief was that we ousted the British as controllers of Iran's destiny.

Success in Iranian society requires a constant flexibility overlaying a basic personal/family/Islamic core. This produces a cultural tension which contains the potential for frequent emotional outbursts which may seem irrational in Western terms, and which is exacerbated by the attractions of Western culture. The need for flexibility leads to concentration on short term gains rather than long term benefits.

Finally, Iranians try to balance their hostility/flexibility patterns through the development of extremely close friendships with trusted individuals. Close relationships can only exist on an individual or highly restricted basis, while hostility is usually generalized.

In the present US-Iran crisis, these behavior patterns have helped to produce a hostile reaction against the United States as the powerful foreign manipulator whose hand, through its direction of its puppet, the Shah, is responsible for virtually all Iranian ills. Given the strong base of support for these anti-American perceptions in the Iranian psychology, there is virtually no chance that the Iranian people or their leadership (especially the clerics) can be convinced of our essential morality and benevolence.

Khomeini himself has an implacable hatred for the United States. He calls us "satan," one of the most pejorative terms in Farsi. This firm antipathy toward the US undergirds his reactions to what we may do in this crisis or on other issues. The Ayatollah has great patience -- he

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waited 35 years for the Shah's demise, and he believes that the hostage crisis, even if it drags out for an extended period, has given him an effective weapon against the US as well as a useful tool to further the aims of the Islamic Revolution inside and outside Iran.

Impact of the Revolution on the Iranian Outlook: The basic Iranian mindset has not been changed by the Revolution. Insecurity, suspicion and manipulation have been noted as salient features of Iranian society by many observers over the years. The revolution has, if anything, heightened these traits. The exaggerated rhetoric and annoying arrogance shared by the leadership and the revolutionary shock troops, such as the militants in our embassy, reflect a deep cultural vulnerability at the same time they attempt to mask it. Since the revolution, a great deal of attention has been focused on Shi'a Islam's impact on Iranian behavior. However, some aspects of Shi'a philosophy have been given either too much weight or have not been understood in an Iranian context.

Martyrdom is one such concept. Shi'a Islam does glorify martyrdom. Revolutionary rhetoric consistently emphasizes the martyrdom theme. Shi'a lore is replete with gory tales of the martyred faithful -- two of the most revered Shi'a figures are Hassan and Hussein, who suffered death at the hands of Muslim rivals. During Moharram Shi'as flagellate themselves (some with light-weight aluminum chains) as a demonstration of their willingness to suffer pain and even die for Islam.

On the other hand, another important Shi'a and Iranian practice is dissembling. This tactic places paramount importance on survival and allows the faithful to do or say whatever is necessary to preserve their safety and guarantee their own survival. Dissembling has allowed Iranians to adapt and retain their own national identity during the many foreign invasions they have suffered. Through centuries of use, it has become deeply ingrained in Iranian behavior.

Khomeini himself chose survival (exile to Iraq) in 1963 rather than the martyrdom which the Shah had doubtlessly offered. And Khomeini remained safe for 15 years until he perceived that the Shah had weakened. In the same way, Iranian students in this country, silent

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-5-

now for four months, have not grown weary of their cause. Rather, they perceive their own position here to be increasingly tenuous. Their compliance is a manifestation of their willingness to do what is necessary to survive (to remain in the US).

The leadership, originally exhilarated by the success of the revolution, is more insecure now that it faces the bewildering task of governing Iran. They have destroyed the old political framework with no imaginative unified or coherent policy to build a new one.

It is only when the very survival of the Islamic Revolution is threatened that the ruling revolutionaries can work together to find a solution. Khomeini himself has changed his position only a very few times and only when he saw an immediate and direct threat to the revolution. This is best illustrated by his policy toward the Kurds. Soon after the revolution, the Kurds began to talk of a compromise constitution which would allow them some regional autonomy. Khomeini responded firmly and said there would be no compromise. After the Kurds revolted, roundly defeated the demoralized regulars and proceeded to scatter the Pasdaran, Khomeini rapidly changed his position. He has recently offered the Kurds more independence than they ever have had under a central government in Iran.

The concept of political legitimacy is changed. Under the Shah there was a secular middle class ethos, but this view was bankrupted by the revolution. The new Islamic culture is substituting the concepts of religious and revolutionary unity and the important Shi'a doctrine of a leader who is a channel to God. This pattern rejects the West, but it could easily shift back as a result of some new political upheaval. Many Iranians never accepted the Western ethos, although they saw its tangible benefits. In the same way, many Iranians are unconvinced by the Islamic ethos, although they believe in its ultimate spiritual benefits.

The revolution has probably had a greater effect on urban youth than on any other group in Iran. The convinced revolutionaries probably experience a greater sense of camaraderie with their political fellows than would have been the case in pre-revolutionary Iran and many would like

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-6-

to extend their sense of accomplishment through Islam to brother Muslims. However, their sense of morality and revolutionary purity may not survive for long in a system which remains corrupt and fundamentally unable to meet the demands of governing Iran.

IRANIAN POLITICAL OUTLOOK

Developments in the Near Term: Most respondents believe that a consolidation of Bani Sadr's power would be the most favorable political evolution for resolving the hostage crisis. However, none sees this as a likely development.

There is general agreement that the near future will see the growth of the power of the clerical party with the real focus of power remaining in Khomeini (assuming he lives). The Imam will rule through manipulation and through his veneration by the mass of Iranians. So long as Khomeini lives it is unlikely that significant alternative power centers will flourish. Khomeini, like other Persian strongmen, is a master of the practice of using others to counter-balance each other to enhance the central power. The clerics are likely to dominate or at least have the largest faction in the new parliament. One officer suggests that this could lead to release of the hostages by the parliament if the Revolutionary Council agrees that it should do so. All others expect continued power struggles and factionalism, accompanied by violence, governmental incompetence, and the inability to deal with the nation's economic problems. It is thus unlikely that Parliament alone will quickly solve the hostage crisis. The best we could hope for would be that Parliament might transfer the hostages away from the control of the militants in exchange for the US' meeting some onerous demands. This situation is unlikely to change until some time after Khomeini's death.

External pressures could hasten the decline of the moderates and the consequent rise of the hardliners.

Not even the most optimistic respondent can foresee a likely political evolution in Iran in the next few months which would favor the release of the hostages. Any attempt on our part to support Bani Sadr in even the most subtle or nuanced fashion would play into the hands of his opponents.

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Khomeini's Death: Two officers believe that this would be a positive development as it would remove the ultimate support of the militants and facilitate the release of the hostages by any so-minded government after the period of turmoil likely to follow his demise. The rest believe that the "period of turmoil" would be a very dangerous one for the hostages. National grief at his death could result in impulsive anti-US behavior. During the chaos after Khomeini, the hostages would be a prize and their possession a proof of revolutionary legitimacy. No party will be able to release the hostages during this period lest they be accused of moderation towards the US.

A deathbed "will" by Khomeini setting rigid conditions for the hostages' release would reduce the flexibility of all factions even further.

A slightly better scenario might result if Khomeini's passing comes after an illness during which he first names a moderate successor or reconfirms in some way the powers of Bani Sadr as he did when last ill. This might help Bani Sadr to establish himself in power as the chosen of the Imam or, more likely, alleviate somewhat the worst effects of the post-Khomeini power struggle.

War With Iraq: The officers agreed that there would be little danger to the hostages from a conflict with Iraq unless the Iraqis scored major gains, probably near to Tehran (not likely). An Iranian defeat could weaken the hardliners by pointing out the wisdom of those who insist on maintaining ties to the West if for no other reason than to maintain the Iranian arsenal. However, it is not clear that Bani Sadr could translate such an advantage into control of the hostage situation.

The recent threats by the militants are interpreted as an attempt to get the US to use whatever influence we might have to convince Iraq to restrain its forces.

REACTIONS TO OUR POLICIES TO DATE

Our policies so far during the crisis have been a mixture of inducements and pressures, at times purposefully unbalanced. We asked the officers to give their views on

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-8-

Iranian reactions to our conciliation gestures and our sanctions policies in light of their analyses of Iranian attitudes.

Impact of a US Conciliatory Posture: Most of those interviewed feel that our efforts to obtain the release of the hostages by assuming a conciliatory posture failed because these efforts were directed at the moderates, who never had a chance of succeeding. Khomeini, according to this view, is the only Iranian leader with the power to obtain the hostages' release.

The majority feel that no conciliatory approach could or will work because Iranians regard conciliation as a sign of weakness which confirms their own perceptions of righteousness and relative strength. Conciliation is disdained in the Iranian approach to bargaining, and in any case, the concessions and arguments we offered were more relevant to the ethos accepted during the Shah's reign.

Moreover, in the current fragmented Iranian political situation, moderation by an Iranian on the hostage issue threatens revolutionary unity and is thus dangerous. Our negotiating tactics, emphasizing conciliation, compromise and trade-offs have been irrelevant in the Iranian context. They have made no impression on those decision-makers whose primary goal is to cleanse Iran of US influence. To reach accommodation would contradict revolutionary ideology. At present, our people are hostage to an anti-US consensus. Until that consensus shifts, due to changes in internal Iranian politics or to changes in the perspective of the leadership, the content of any negotiating package is largely irrelevant.

Reaction to Sanctions: Most believe that the current level of sanctions will do nothing to free the hostages but will provoke defiance and could weaken the moderates, forcing them to adopt a harder line to promote unity. There is also general agreement that US threats of force have no credibility to Iranians because we have not demonstrated our willingness to take such measures. Given this lack of credibility, it would be better to avoid such threats.

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It was pointed out frequently that a further problem with our credibility has been our consistent public posture that the lives of the 53 are of paramount importance. Khomeini and the militants are continually told of the high value we place on the hostages. This makes them even more intransigent, for the satisfaction of humiliating the US -- an important objective -- increases in direct proportion to the attention we pay to the hostages' well-being. Some feel that the US erred in not informing the Iranians at the beginning that there are some things more important to us than the lives of the hostages, thus reducing the Iranian perception of their leverage over us and increasing the credibility of any sanctions we might wish to impose.

Those who favor sanctions believe we should proceed on the basis of a long-term strategy which enjoys prior Congressional support and the active cooperation of our allies. The Iranians should be able to see what is coming and understand that the process will continue. (Some feel sanctions would be effective if simply implemented rather than announced in advance.)

Sanction proponents argue that actions which put pressure on the general population might serve to reduce support for the militants from outside the Embassy. This would increase their sense of isolation and help produce a state of siege mentality within the Embassy, more like a classic hostage situation.

Many of the respondents agree that the stoppage of visa issuance would have a beneficial effect, although some believe that it does the most harm to the middle class moderates who are essentially powerless. But others point out that it strikes at the extended family system and the practice of partibazi by Iranian leaders and that this effect would be multiplied if our allies take similar action. However, maintenance of a strict visa issuance policy for too long could be counter-productive because it would prevent large numbers of Iranians who might otherwise be well disposed towards the US from contact with the US. All are opposed to the indiscriminate expulsion of Iranians already in the US as inhumane and harmful to Iranians sympathetic to the US whose support and good will we might need in any post-Khomeini period.

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-10-

Those who oppose sanctions believe that they cannot resolve the crisis at all, and certainly not within an acceptable period. They point to the consistent failure of sanctions, by themselves, to resolve other international issues. In general, these officers favor other courses, either forceful or conciliatory, as more efficacious.

Most agree that any sanctions will initially rally the nation to the revolution and damage the position of the moderates while facilitating that of the hardliners. They agree that no sanctions can hope to be effective without the active support of our allies and they doubt that such support will be forthcoming. Indeed, if we push sanctions and the Europeans hang back, this will strengthen the perception of US weakness.

Political and economic isolation of Iran, the ultimate effect of sanctions, will first produce defiance and calls for unity. It eventually could produce pressure on Khomeini to release the hostages from those who recognize a need to deal with the world. However, it could also strengthen those who want to erase Western influence, causing Iran to turn in upon itself.

A blockade/mining might produce a similar political and economic isolation of Iran and could serve as a demonstration of our strength. However, none of the officers believes a blockade would be effective in resolving the crisis. It could lead to trial, imprisonment and hence, dispersal, of the hostages. Its costs to other US interests in the region and in terms of the global support for us in the hostage crisis and on our position on Afghanistan are seen to be enormous. It could invite a complicating confrontation with the Soviets and other countries. It could engender wide-spread and deep anti-Americanism throughout the Islamic world, divert attention from Soviet actions in Afghanistan, endanger our people in the area and detrimentally affect our general strategic and military interests in the area. It would be effective in the long-term only if it cut off nearly all food and oil income and was accompanied by breaks in other transport links. We have attached a more detailed paper on the blockade option, prepared earlier, at Tab A.

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-11-

None of the officers advocated using military force as a sanction (as opposed to a rescue attempt). All agreed that the Iranian reaction to the death of their people or the destruction of their property would be execution of some or all of the hostages. (Not so much because they hold property such as refineries or airbases in such high regard, but because an overt act of this kind would force them to act against domestic pressures.) If military force were used as a sanction, Iranians would perceive themselves as the injured party and morally justified in stiff retaliation. Other countries might rally to Iran's position.

A significant conclusion from the analysis offered above is that, with our extraordinary cultural differences, it is very easy for Iranians and Americans to talk past each other. American values -- the Protestant ethic with its assumptions about merit and morality...the give and take of rational negotiations that result in gains for both sides...the possibility of equality...respect for hard truth...the belief in our ability to control our own destiny...the protection offered by institutions enshrined in a Constitution...the security offered by a history of strength and success...our very optimism -- all are as misunderstood by Iranians as their values are misunderstood by Americans.

- When we sound reasonable to ourselves, we sound weak to them.
- When we expect credit for dealing in good faith, they look for hidden meanings.
- When we place trust in an impartial institution like the UN and the Commission, they perceive a target for manipulation to be used to one or the other, but not both, parties' advantage.
- When we take step by step approaches, they perceive a lack of resolve.
- When we make menacing statements, they look to our actions since words are not taken at face value.
- When we say we accept their revolution and wish to continue a productive relationship, they see a conspiracy in our efforts to rebuild an embassy that once dominated them.

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-12-

- When we shake an ominous fist at their refineries, ports or cities, they seek refuge in moral righteousness and defiance because of their ambivalence about the value of such Western structures.

In sum, in psychological terms, we should not approach the negotiations like a classic bargaining situation; we should not expect concessions for concessions; we should not expect graduated pressures to work with the Iranians any more than they worked with the Vietnamese. What we would do if we were in their shoes is irrelevant.

A second significant conclusion is that the future of the hostages depends primarily on the evolution of Iranian politics; the outlook points toward increasing strength by the hardliners, but a resolution of the issue by the hardliners is not excluded. Our ability to affect Iranian politics in a positive sense is limited; overt US pressures tend to undercut the moderates, whose role is already weak. There is no option which can ensure the safe release of the hostages in the foreseeable future.

A third conclusion is that their one point of vulnerability is concern for the future of their revolution.

OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

The experts' views on how best to end the hostage crisis turned primarily on their assumptions about fundamental objectives for US policy in this crisis. Those whose overriding goal is the return of the 53 unharmed conclude that a policy of trying to negotiate and keeping our patience is the most suitable. Those who believe other fundamental US interests (such as national prestige and honor, the need to deter future terrorists, our ability to concentrate on other foreign policy goals) are being seriously undermined due to the continuation of this crisis, and give relatively less weight to enhancing the chances of the eventual safe return of the hostages, favor a tougher approach which could lead to the use of military force. Two believe a policy of hardened sanctions and manipulation of Iranian attitudes eventually might produce enough pressure on Iran so that the hostages would be released with our national interest intact.

The above analysis is based upon our interviews.

Based on this analysis, we have constructed four options for action. All of these were not discussed with those interviewed. Their elements are not necessarily mutually exclusive. They are four distinct perspectives on how to proceed.

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I. The Patient Approach: Maintain what sanctions we have already imposed but leave open a channel of communication with the Iranians. Other suggestions under this general heading include:

- concentrate on maintaining a dialogue with the moderates which would enable us to work out with them a scenario for release of the hostages by the Parliament. (The idea of a parliamentary government continues to be strong among the Western-educated in Iran. Moreover, one of two strong but competing traditions of Shia Islam holds that the people, rather than a single religious leader, should be the ones to make the decisions of government. However, the parliamentary idea draws its inspiration from Western models and is essentially secular. The religious leadership can be no more comfortable with an independent parliamentary government than it was with the monarchy.)
- initiate a dialogue with Mohammed Bedjaoui of the UN Commission to: gradually reactivate the Commission; communicate our continued interest in a peaceful solution; attempt to convince Bedjaoui to reach the clerics and underscore the damage being done to the revolution by the continuation of the crisis.
- appeal to Khomeini in Islamic terms. This envisages using an Islamic figure with good revolutionary credentials as a channel of communication to convince Khomeini that keeping the hostages is preventing the Islamic revolution from succeeding in Iran or from spreading to other countries.
- negotiate directly with the militants. We would have to have something to offer them in order to generate a meaningful dialogue. We could arrange to have them invited to speak before a Congressional hearing once the hostages were released. None of those interviewed believe this would work.
- In a dramatic gesture, send Andy Young to Tehran to speak before the Majlis and admit our past wrongs, a possibility raised by one officer.

Most of those interviewed feel that our efforts to obtain the release of the hostages by assuming a generally conciliatory posture would appeal only to the moderates, who are in any case unable to prevail. In addition, most believe that the conditions which led to the misfire of our previous attempt to win the hostages' release by dealing with the Iranians in a straight-forward, understanding and perfectly rational way, still apply. They would still see us as weak; no one except the moderates has any incentive to let the hostages go; internal conditions remain chaotic and the hostages are still a unifying force for the revolution, rather than a threat to its success. Others point out that as a unifying force, the hostages are a diminishing asset. The crowds outside the Embassy are smaller; the vote in the Revolutionary Council was close. The hostages remain, however, a useful manipulative device in internal power struggles; a route to the ear of Khomeini; and a symbol Khomeini can use to rally revolutionary fervor.

II. Combination of Openings and Pressure: This approach contains a mix of increasing pressure and calculated openings to which the Iranians could respond if the tension became too strong. It advocates squeezing the Iranians in a step by step and public way until they yield. If the Iranians do not bend, the ultimate result of this strategy would be the use of military force -- possibly mining, a blockade or strikes against selected targets.

If the Iranians respond favorably to this pressure, we could offer any of the incentives listed in the previous approach to spur them toward more movement and eventually give them an out.

There still remains a range of non-military sanctions which we could impose in a graduated way against Iran. In addition, we could seek further support in the UN and from our Allies whom we would expect and pressure to join us in imposing the full range of sanctions.

The combination strategy holds some advantages, particularly in garnering domestic support for our policy. It might also convince Iran of our resolve and ultimately isolate them -- especially if our efforts to gain allied and global support for our actions were successful.

However, this combination strategy seems more attuned to Western than Iranian realities. The implied ultimate threats -- the destruction of their infrastructure, the mining or blockading of their waters -- do not overcome their self-righteousness, ambivalence about their own industrialization, and doubt about American will.

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-15-

- They have ambivalent feelings about many of the industrialization projects built under Western tutelage under the Shah's reign.
- A mining or blockade is a long-term solution, at best.
- A blockade/mining could do as much damage to us as to them. They understand this. They are a patient people who have been most ingenious throughout history in surviving and even thriving on external pressure.

III. "Playing for a Break:" An alternative strategy contains some elements of the above sanctions/inducements approach, but is better oriented toward the Iranian mindset. It would direct pressure toward threatening the revolution, the only threat which has produced any sign of flexibility in Khomeini.

"Playing for a break" attempts to place us in a position of strength to maximize the possibility of success after the early May elections when the hardliners will be building their strength and Iranian politics will be in a state of flux. It is quite likely, as our analysis of political prospects indicates, that the hardline IRP, which Beheshti heads, will have a pre-eminent or even majority position in the majlis. We should thus not focus our energies on putative alternative power centers such as Bani Sadr and Ghotbzadeh who are unable to deliver on their promises.

Presumably, even a hardliner such as Beheshti will want to succeed where others have failed -- particularly in consolidating the revolution's ethnic, political and economic aspects.

Rather than seek to persuade Iranians, and particularly those Iranians, that we can eventually be their friends, which differs fundamentally from their tightly held beliefs, we should maximize the probability of reaching Beheshti and others by playing on their fears and persuading them only that, after the hostages are released, we

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-16-

will not be their enemy. They are predisposed to believing that the "foreign hand" is all powerful and ever present; that we are both capable of and willing to subvert the revolution; that all relationships are manipulative and the US can manipulate events to its own end.

If we can convince Beheshti, Khomeini and other powerful clerics that our actions are a clear and present threat to their chances of consolidating the revolution, they will have an incentive to find a solution. Our tactics would be an unbalanced package of inducements and mostly sanctions, covert and overt. We will have to be more rash and manipulative than is our preference in order to lend credibility to our ultimate ruthlessness.

Militating against a favorable Iranian response to this approach, as to others, will be the same political pressures and developments which prevented Bani Sadr from releasing or accepting custody of the hostages. The Iranian political scene will remain chaotic and confused and the government will be unable to respond effectively to the nation's problems. In these circumstances, possession of the hostages will remain a useful tool for maintaining revolutionary unity and diverting concerns of the people from their own problems. Any attempt by Beheshti to release the hostages would offer an opening to his enemies to revive tales of his Western connections and attack him for lack of revolutionary zeal. Ultimately, it is Khomeini who must be convinced that the threats posed to the revolution by our policy exceed the advantages of holding the hostages. And Khomeini is famous for his stubbornness.

This approach moves away from a step by step strategy to which the Iranians tend to react with defiance, and which pressures us to take actions which might endanger the hostages. "Playing for a break" tries to use pressure in different ways which threaten Iranian vulnerabilities.

Under this option we would seek to position events by mid to late May, before the Majlis convenes, in a way which maximizes the uncertainty and concerns of the hard-liners who are likely to dominate the Parliament.

-- In our public posture, stop emphasizing threats (which ring hollow) and inducements (which sound

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-17-

weak or, in the case of an implicit US security mantle, sounds like a devious American way of regaining control of Iran). Instead, if possible in US domestic terms, an ominous public silence and refusal to discuss our future steps would be used.

-- We could impose additional sanctions (non-military). But we should do this without prior announcement. This could lead to some alarm in Tehran -- to surprise at new measures and to an increased uncertainty about what else was up our sleeve. Other overt pressures which we could use include:

- o getting the allies on board on economic sanctions, before they are announced. These efforts must be completely private -- every appearance of allied foot-dragging weakens our position.
- o isolating and shaming Iran further by getting the allies to impose some political sanctions, such as cutting off visas for Iranians or shutting down civil air connections. This would emphasize that Iranians are seen as undesirable and uncivilized so long as the hostages are held. It could produce pressure on the leadership through the partibazi system.
- o to the extent our other interests and the Iraqi outlook allow, make a visible but not previously announced gesture toward improving relations with Iraq.
- o use private channels, preferably an Islamic figure with good revolutionary credentials, to argue with Khomeini, Beheshti or others that keeping the hostages is preventing the revolution from succeeding in Iran and from spreading to other countries.

-- We could also consider a range of covert options. In an Iranian context, the advantage of covert options is that although the Iranians will

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-18-

assume that we are playing a subversive role -- because of their belief in the conspiracy theory -- we will not have admitted such a role and the reaction from the Islamic world would be correspondingly muted. Also, the chances of increased maltreatment of the hostages are somewhat diminished if we do not publicly affirm the disruptive role we are playing. We might:

- o disrupt their economy through covert sabotage against such installations as the Shiraz refinery, which produces for domestic needs.
- o jam or otherwise disrupt Iranian communications for one day, arbitrarily, to demonstrate our ability to manipulate events. If possible, sabotage power generating systems in major cities for discrete time periods. (These periodic blackouts/communications disruptions were a highly effective tool during the revolution -- they were perpetrated by the revolutionaries to give the impression of government weakness.)
- o covertly assist Iranian separatists and dissidents. Let it be known through radio and other means (but unattributed) that foreign assistance is being given to the dissidents.
- o in a carefully orchestrated covert media campaign, undercut Iranian self-righteousness and self-confidence by shame.
- Make known misdeeds perpetrated in the US in Khomeini's name by Iranian diplomats; emphasize continuing corruption (blackmarkets, drug smuggling, the loss of revolutionary purity) and the resulting deterioration of the revolution; and suggest that Khomeini and Beheshti are being manipulated by the militants who answer to the Soviets.

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-19-

- Suggest the Soviets and Iraq or the Soviets and the US have a secret agreement to divide Iran.

If we perceive this pressure is reaching Beheshti, Khomeini or others in a strong position to influence events, we might consider a calculated opening which they might use as a device to release the hostages. If they do not respond positively and immediately, we should withdraw our inducements.

The main attraction of the "playing for a break" scenario is that it offers a strategy directed at Iranian vulnerabilities which is less dangerous to the hostages than any military options. It would require time, while the Parliament debated -- but time we may have in terms of the current health of the hostages, if not in terms of public opinion here.

There are no cost-free options in this crisis. Since this option depends on secrecy, public silence about our strategy, and time, it will require an extraordinary act of will to resist mounting public demands for explanations of our position, and mounting impatience with a non-military and apparently static position. It would require an official public posture -- uniformly and consistently adhered to by spokespersons and officials -- that we have taken a series of strong actions and may take more, that we are waiting for them to work, that the Iranians understand this is an extremely dangerous situation, and that there will be no public statements on further measures while the Iranian Parliament debates the issue. On background, we would make it clear that for the coming weeks, we are following a policy of soft words and hard sticks. In "playing for a break" we would complicate our own domestic problems, since the very success of this strategy depends on its secrecy -- the mystery and uncertainty it produces in the Iranian leadership. And it will make more difficult any future relations with Iran -- although less than overt military moves.

If this course is not successful after two-three months, we would be back to where we are now with even greater mounting pressure within the US for military action.

A Rescue Attempt: A majority of those interviewed volunteered the idea of a rescue attempt. They believed

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that, given the chaos in Iran's internal political landscape, the inability or unwillingness of any Iranian leader to find a peaceful solution through negotiation, and the risk that the hostages will suffer serious physical and/or psychological harm, this option offered a resolution of the crisis in an acceptable time frame. These officers believe that the damage to our national interests from the continuation of the crisis is more serious than the cost of even a failed attempt. As noted above, others believe the danger to the hostages -- and the wider damage to our interests of a failed or partially failed attempt -- should be compelling.

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