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The White House

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FACT SHEET: U.S. Government Hostage Policy

Over the past decade, we have witnessed a significant shift in hostage-takings by terrorist organizations and criminal groups that has challenged the ability of the U.S. Government to secure the safe recovery of U.S. nationals taken captive. The wanton and brutal murder of several Americans held hostage over the past year lays bare the magnitude of this challenge. Other less publicized cases of Americans held hostage overseas, including several who remain in captivity, are no less tragic and have presented the U.S. Government with a similar set of difficult choices. The Government's response to hostage-takings must therefore evolve to account for this new reality. Moreover, the Government's handling of these hostage cases – and in particular its interaction and communication with families whose loved ones have been taken hostage – must improve. To that end, in December 2014 President Obama directed a comprehensive review of U.S. policy toward overseas hostage-takings.

Based on the recommendations resulting from this review, the President approved Presidential Policy Directive (PPD) 30, *U.S. Nationals Taken Hostage Abroad and Personnel Recovery Efforts* and issued an Executive Order on the recovery of U.S. hostages taken abroad, which directs key organizational changes to ensure that the U.S. Government is doing all that it can to safely recover Americans taken hostage overseas and is being responsive to the needs of their families. The key findings and recommendations set forth by the review can be found in the *Report on U.S. Hostage Policy* at the following [link](#). PPD-30 and the Executive Order can be found on WhiteHouse.gov.

Family Engagement

No one has a greater stake in the response to the taking of a hostage than the hostage and his or her family. The U.S. Government must earn each family's trust and confidence that it is doing everything possible to safely recover their loved ones. This entails shifting from a focus on providing social services to families to a new paradigm that emphasizes continual collaboration between the Government and families in the safe recovery of their loved ones. To this end, the Government will collaborate more effectively with families by proactively sharing more information, ensuring coordinated, consistent interaction by professionals with specialized training, and that any relevant background regarding the family's particular needs is always taken into consideration. Most importantly, the U.S. Government will demonstrate to families with its actions that the safe recovery of their loved ones is the Government's top priority in these cases. To complement these efforts, the Department of Justice has issued a request for proposals for a grant that would provide initial funding for non-governmental organizations seeking to provide support services specifically tailored to the needs of hostage families.

U.S. Policy

PPD-30 sets forth – in unclassified form – U.S. Government policy regarding hostage-taking abroad. PPD-30 reaffirms the U.S. Government's dedication to achieving the safe recovery of U.S. nationals taken hostage abroad. It commits the Government to working in a coordinated manner and utilizing all instruments of national power to safely recover hostages. PPD-30 also recognizes that there may be valuable sources of information outside the U.S. Government related to a hostage case and affirms that the Government may work with private entities to locate and recover Americans hostages, including entities that may assist in gathering or establishing sources of information. The policy also seeks to prevent hostage takings by ensuring that travelers have appropriate warnings and security information, pursuing financial sanctions against those connected to hostage takings, and providing preventative training to U.S. Government personnel serving abroad.

PPD-30 reaffirms our longstanding commitment to make no concessions to individuals or groups holding U.S. nationals hostage. This policy protects U.S. nationals and strengthens national security by removing a key incentive for hostage-takers to target U.S. nationals and by helping to deny terrorists and other

malicious actors the resources they need to conduct attacks against the United States, its nationals, its allies, and its interests.

PPD-30 also commits the United States Government to working closely with families of hostages, in a coordinated manner, and to proactively share as much information as possible with families. PPD-30 reaffirms the “no concessions” policy, but makes clear for the first time that “no concessions” does not mean “no communication.” The U.S. Government may itself communicate with hostage-takers, their intermediaries, interested governments, and local communities to attempt to secure the safe recovery of the hostage. The U.S. Government may also assist private efforts to communicate with hostage-takers to secure the safe recovery of a hostage, whether directly or through public or private intermediaries; these efforts will be focused on ensuring the safety and security of a family to prevent them from being defrauded or further victimized by a hostage-taker. In short, we will not abandon families in their greatest time of need.

In this context, there has been concern expressed by families of hostages about potential prosecutions of family members under the statute prohibiting the provision of material support to designated foreign terrorist organizations. Consistent with the no-concessions policy, the U.S. Government will focus on exploring all appropriate options to ensure the safe recovery of their loved ones. The United States Department of Justice does not intend to add to families’ pain in such cases by suggesting that they could face criminal prosecution.

U.S. Government Organizational Changes

Hostage situations require rapid, agile, coordinated responses from the U.S. Government to develop recovery options, make decisions, and ensure all instruments of national power are drawn upon in the recovery of hostages. In recognition of this need for coordinated action, the President directed the creation of several new government entities to improve the government’s response, coordination, and accountability.

- **Hostage Recovery Fusion Cell:** The Hostage Recovery Fusion Cell will serve as the single, permanent U.S. Government interagency body responsible for coordinating the recovery of U.S. hostages abroad. Staffed by top hostage recovery professionals from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Defense, Department of State,

Department of Justice, Department of the Treasury, and the Intelligence Community, the Hostage Recovery Fusion Cell will improve how the U.S. Government develops hostage recovery plans, tracks developments in specific cases, shares information with families, and provides information to Congress and the media.

- **Hostage Response Group:** The Hostage Response Group, a dedicated interagency policy body convened by the National Security Council and with membership comprised of senior officials from across the U.S. Government, will meet on a weekly basis, and additionally as needed, to review and provide guidance on hostage recovery strategies and ensure high-level support for all hostage recovery and family support efforts.
- **Intelligence Community Issue Manager for Hostage Affairs:** A new Intelligence Community Issue Manager for Hostage Affairs will provide improved management of hostage-related intelligence, ensure tailored intelligence support to the Hostage Recovery Fusion Cell, and enable the timely declassification of intelligence to share with the families of U.S. hostages.
- **Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs:** A new Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs will coordinate the Government's diplomatic engagements on all U.S. hostage-related matters and will personally engage at the highest levels of foreign governments to secure the safe recovery of U.S. hostages.
- **Family Engagement Team:** A Family Engagement Coordinator will be a permanent, senior position within the Hostage Recovery Fusion Cell and with a seat in the Hostage Response Group. The Family Engagement Coordinator will work closely with a dedicated Family Engagement Team, which will include local and Washington, D.C.-based representatives from the FBI Office of Victim Assistance and the State Department Bureau of Consular Affairs. The Family Engagement Team will prioritize continual collaboration with the family in the safe recovery of the hostage.

Assessing Impact and Ensuring Effective Implementation

In order to ensure accountability for the implementation of these changes, the President has directed that a status report on implementation of these reforms will be provided after 6 months, and the National Counterterrorism Center will lead a comprehensive assessment on implementation of these changes within one year of the date of the Executive Order. These assessments will be informed by consultation with stakeholders outside the government, including former hostages and the families of U.S. nationals held captive overseas.