



# REPORT ON U.S. HOSTAGE POLICY

June 2015





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*“As Commander-in-Chief, my highest responsibility is to provide for the safety and security of American citizens at home and abroad. My message to every American being held hostage and to their families is that we will spare no effort to secure the safety of our citizens. These policy and organizational changes will ensure that we are doing everything possible to safely recover Americans taken hostage overseas, while being responsive to the needs of their families. And no matter how long it takes, we will bring to justice those responsible for abducting Americans abroad.”*

Barack Obama

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# Report on U.S. Hostage Policy

Over the past decade, we have witnessed a significant shift in hostage-takings abroad by terrorist organizations and criminal groups that has challenged the ability of the U.S. Government to secure the safe recovery of American citizens taken captive. Simply put, our approach has not kept up with this changed environment.

Hostage-takers increasingly operate in ungoverned spaces and unstable environments where access to U.S. officials is denied; they increasingly deliberately target private citizens as well as government officials to garner media attention and attempt to extract political and financial concessions. The mechanisms for recovering hostages have become more complex as well, with a range of foreign governments, intelligence services, private businesses, local actors, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) providing varying levels of connections to, information about, and leverage over hostage-takers.

And terrorist groups have become increasingly willing to engage in publicized and repugnant murders of hostages if they are unable to extract concessions, or in order to intimidate their enemies and propagandize. Beyond hostage-takings by terrorist groups, criminal kidnappings abroad have also increased and, although these cases often present distinct challenges from those posed by terrorist kidnappings, a holistic approach to hostage recovery may improve prospects for recovering all hostages, whether from terrorists or from other criminals.

**Our handling of these hostage cases – and in particular our interaction and communication with families whose loved ones have been taken hostage – must improve.**

The Government's response to hostage-takings must evolve with this threat environment. Moreover, our handling of these hostage cases – and in particular our interaction and communication with families whose loved ones have been taken hostage – must improve. To that end, the President directed a comprehensive review of U.S. policy toward overseas hostage-takings.

## Background

The review was conducted by an interagency team of senior officials from across the U.S. Government and supported by the National Counterterrorism Center (the "Review Team"). The Review Team's mission was to gather and evaluate input from U.S. Government departments and agencies as well as from a wide range of stakeholders to prepare recommendations on how the Government could more effectively ensure the safe recovery of U.S. Nationals taken hostage abroad. The Review Team sought input from a variety of sources, including families of hostages and former hostages, members of Congress, think tanks and other outside experts, foreign governments, and NGOs.

The Review Team divided its research and analysis into four major focus areas: (I) U.S. Government Coordination; (II) Engagement with Families and External Stakeholders; (III) Intelligence Sharing and Collection; and (IV) U.S. Policy. Focus Area I studied the current U.S.

Government response to hostage cases and how other countries and NGOs handle hostage situations. Focus Area II reviewed engagement with the families of current and former hostages; cooperation with third-party intermediaries (non-governmental experts who provide support to families); and congressional, media, and public engagement strategies. Focus Area III evaluated intelligence sharing, analytic resources, and collection priorities as they relate to hostage cases. Focus Area IV conducted a review of U.S. policy applicable to overseas hostage cases.

As part of its efforts, the Review Team conducted an in-depth analysis of existing processes for coordinating U.S. Government activities in response to hostage-takings abroad to identify mission redundancies and coordination challenges. The Review Team also conducted a series of interviews with senior officials across the Government who have been involved in various aspects of hostage incidents. These interviews covered responsibilities, authorities, and actions undertaken to identify and recover hostages; procedures for responding to hostage incidents; mechanisms for coordination and information sharing with other departments and agencies; and case studies of hostage events in which coordination or communications challenges arose among departments and agencies.

The Review Team also conducted extensive interviews with former hostages and families of hostages taken abroad. Family members of hostages face a bewildering and terrifying array of issues and decisions at a time when their lives have been turned upside down. The courageous and generous contributions received from numerous families who shared their concerns and their experiences with the Review Team reinforced the critical importance of a comprehensive, coordinated, and coherent approach to hostage recovery efforts.

## Review Team Findings

Based on its work, the Review Team identified 24 key findings and recommendations, outlined below in Annex A, on how the U.S. Government coordinates and manages the recovery of American hostages held abroad. Specifically, the Review Team found challenges in day-to-day operational coordination among U.S. Government departments and agencies engaged in resolving a hostage event, as well as a need for a dedicated senior-level policy-making body responsible for coordinating and overseeing the pursuit of hostage recovery efforts across the Government. The Review Team also found U.S. Government communications with families of hostages, members of Congress, the media, third-party intermediaries, and other critical external stakeholders were often ad hoc and therefore suffered from a lack of coordinated, consistent, and accurate information sharing.

With regard to family engagement, as described in Annex B, the Review Team highlighted the strong views of former hostages and hostage families that the U.S. Government must move toward a new paradigm of engagement that not only focuses on providing support services to the family but also prioritizes continual collaboration with the family in the safe recovery of the hostage, since no one has a greater stake in the response than the hostage and his or her family. The Review Team concluded that the Government must help families understand the environment in which their loved ones are being held, and must provide families a clear understanding of those options available to recover their loved ones, as well as a candid assessment of limitations. Families have rightly emphasized the importance of the Government earning a family's trust and confidence that everything possible is being

done to recover their loved ones safely. The Review Team also found that this confidence would be bolstered if the Government would proactively share more information with families to enable them to be better informed and play a more active role in developing options for the safe recovery of their loved one.

Finally, the Review Team identified a need to adapt existing policy to a changed environment of hostage takings abroad and to ensure effective coordination throughout the Government, and to prioritize engagement with those outside Government, including families of hostages, as well as third parties who might have useful insights for the development of recovery strategies. The Review Team found that U.S. policy to date has engendered significant confusion over what is and is not permitted under the U.S. Government's "no concessions" policy including whether this policy precludes communicating with hostage-takers or enabling families to do so.

### New Presidential Policy Directive

Therefore, based on the recommendations proposed by the Review Team and unanimously endorsed by the President's national security team after extensive and deliberate consideration, President Obama has approved a new Presidential Policy Directive (PPD-29) for *U.S. Nationals Taken Hostage Abroad and Personnel Recovery Efforts*. PPD-29 updates previous policy directives and sets forth a renewed, more agile U.S. Government response to hostage-takings of U.S. Nationals abroad. **It commits the Government to working in a coordinated manner and utilizing all instruments of national power to recover hostages held abroad.** It establishes processes to enable consistent implementation of hostage policies, to ensure close interagency coordination in all aspects of hostage recovery activities, and to significantly enhance our engagement with families of hostages and other external stakeholders. 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-29 reaffirms our longstanding commitment to make no concessions to individuals or groups holding U.S. Nationals hostage.** It continues to be U.S. policy to deny hostage-takers the benefits of ransom, prisoner releases, policy changes, or other acts of concession. 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 money, personnel, and other resources they need to conduct attacks against the United States, its nationals, its allies, and its interests.

**PPD-29 commits the U.S. Government to work closely with hostage families, in a coordinated manner, and to proactively share as much information as possible with families while being mindful of the need to protect the safety of hostages, the integrity of any recovery efforts and any ongoing criminal investigations, as well as intelligence sources and methods.** In this context, families must understand what support the Government is able to offer consistent with this policy. For instance, the directive makes clear that U.S. policy does not prohibit engaging in communications with hostage-takers; specifically, the 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 Government may also assist private efforts to communicate with hostage-takers to secure the recovery of a loved one, whether directly or through an intermediary; 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.

**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 prosecution of families under the statute prohibiting the provision of material support to designated foreign terrorist organizations. The families who have been affected by these hostage-takings have endured extraordinary and difficult circumstances. In the face of their loved ones being held captive indefinitely by terrorist groups, families understandably want to explore every option to secure their loved ones' safe recovery. 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 U.S. Department of Justice does not intend to add to families' pain in such cases by suggesting that they could face criminal prosecution.**

### United States Government Organizational Changes In Support of Hostage Recovery

The President has also approved a new Executive Order, which directs critical structural changes to ensure that the U.S. Government is well organized to take rapid, coordinated action in response to a hostage-taking event. These changes reflect the reality of hostage-takings today, and the importance of families as participants in a whole-of-government response. These changes include:

1. Establishment of a **Hostage Recovery Fusion Cell**, a full-time, operational-level, interagency body that draws on expertise from across the federal Government to coordinate activities in response to hostage-takings; this body will be led by a Director and leadership team whose full-time focus will be on the development and execution of individualized recovery strategies for U.S. Nationals held hostage overseas;
2. Creation of a **Hostage Response Group**, a senior-level interagency body chaired by the National Security Council Staff, to provide policy guidance to the Hostage Recovery Fusion Cell and accountability to the highest levels of the U.S. Government;
3. Establishment of an **Intelligence Community Issue Manager for Hostage Affairs** in the Office of the Director of National Intelligence to ensure focused and prioritized intelligence support for hostage cases;
4. Appointment of a **Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs**, based at the Department of State, to lead and coordinate the Government's diplomatic engagements on all U.S. hostage-related matters; and

5. Establishment of a **Family Engagement Coordinator** who will work closely as part of a dedicated Family Engagement Team to provide consistent, coordinated support and information to families of hostages.

### Ensuring Coordinated Responses through Dedicated Recovery Strategies

The **Hostage Recovery Fusion Cell** will serve as the U.S. Government’s full-time operational focal point for coordination of all U.S. response activities related to the hostage-taking of U.S. Nationals abroad. A permanent interagency body with subject matter expertise from across the Government, the Hostage Recovery Fusion Cell will be located at the headquarters of the Federal Bureau of Intelligence (FBI) and will include members from across the national security structure of the federal Government. The cell’s initial Director will be a senior FBI official, and its Deputy Directors will be senior officials from the Department of Defense and the Department of State. **The Director will serve as the federal government’s primary operational coordinator for responding to overseas hostage-takings.** The responsibilities of the Hostage Recovery Fusion Cell will include:

- Identify and recommend hostage recovery options and strategies to the President through the National Security Council;
- Track all hostage-takings of U.S. Nationals abroad and provide regular reports to the President through the National Security Council on the status of such cases and any measures being taken toward hostages’ safe recovery;
- Coordinate diplomatic, intelligence, law enforcement, and military components of hostage recovery efforts;
- Coordinate efforts by departments and agencies to ensure that information regarding hostage events is appropriately shared within the U.S. Government to facilitate a coordinated response to a hostage-taking, as well as with families to facilitate their participation in the hostage recovery process; and
- Coordinate with departments and agencies regarding congressional, media, and other public inquiries pertaining to hostage events.

### Providing Policy Guidance and Ensuring Accountability

The **Hostage Response Group** will be a dedicated interagency body convened by the National Security Council that will meet on a weekly basis and more often as necessary to advance the safe recovery of U.S. Nationals held abroad. The Hostage Response Group will work closely with the Hostage Recovery Fusion Cell and ensure that its work receives consistent, high-level attention from the departments and agencies charged with ensuring the safe recovery of hostages abroad, to include ensuring that it has the resources, authorities, guidance, and necessary agility to effectively execute its mission. Moreover, **the Hostage Response Group will ensure senior-level oversight and accountability to the President for U.S. Government hostage recovery activities.** In particular, the Hostage Response Group will:



- In support of the President, Cabinet members, and their Deputies, coordinate the development and implementation of U.S. Government hostage recovery policies, strategies, and procedures;
- Receive regular updates from the Hostage Recovery Fusion Cell on the status of U.S. Nationals held hostage abroad and measures being taken to effect the hostages' safe recovery;
- Identify and recommend hostage recovery options and strategies to the President through the National Security Council; and
- Coordinate the provision of policy guidance to the Fusion Cell, ensuring oversight and accountability.

### Prioritizing Intelligence Collection and Support

As noted in PPD-29, the collection, processing, analysis, and dissemination of intelligence related to hostage-taking incidents shall be a priority for the U.S. Intelligence Community. The Director of National Intelligence is establishing a new **Intelligence Community Issue Manager for Hostage Affairs** to centrally manage hostage-related intelligence and ensure prioritized, dedicated intelligence support to all hostage recovery efforts. **A key mandate of the Issue Manager will be to systematically and proactively support the release of information for sharing with families to facilitate their participation in the hostage recovery process.** The responsibilities of the Issue Manager will include the following:

- Coordinate the U.S. Intelligence Community's collection efforts on hostage incidents and provide focused intelligence support to the Hostage Recovery Fusion Cell through the assignment of an Intelligence Advisor to the Cell;
- Identify information that should be rapidly declassified, to the extent possible and consistent with national security considerations, for dissemination to families and other external stakeholders. **This means that, whenever possible, families will receive more information, faster, on their loved ones and the efforts to recover them.**

As also recognized in PPD-29, there may be valuable sources of information outside the U.S. Government related to a hostage case. As such, the directive affirms that the Government may work with private entities to further U.S. Government interests to locate and recover Americans held hostage abroad, including entities that may assist in gathering or establishing sources of information.

### Enhancing Diplomatic Efforts

The **Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs** will be appointed by the President and report to the Secretary of State and, working in close coordination with the Hostage Recovery Fusion Cell and Hostage Response Group, will lead and coordinate the Government's diplomatic engagements on all U.S. hostage-related matters. **Empowered by the President to engage diplomatically at the highest levels of foreign government leadership**, the Special Presidential Envoy will:

- Lead diplomatic engagement on U.S. hostage policy;
- Provide senior representation from the Special Envoy's office to the Hostage Recovery Fusion Cell and the Hostage Response Group; and
- In coordination with the Hostage Recovery Fusion Cell, develop and coordinate proposals for diplomatic engagements and strategy in support of hostage recovery efforts.

### Enhancing Support to Families

**As noted above, 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 the trust and confidence of families that it is doing everything possible to safely recover their loved ones.** To this end, the United States will establish a **Family Engagement Coordinator** as 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 Coordinator will have the following roles and responsibilities:

- Ensure that all interactions with a hostage's family occur in a coordinated fashion, that the family receives consistent and accurate information from the Government, that the Government follows up on the family's questions and requests, and that any relevant background regarding the family's particular needs is always taken into consideration;
- Facilitate and coordinate direct communication with the family by the team of experts in the field managing a particular case while serving as a focal point for helping families to understand the roles of the Hostage Recovery Fusion Cell, the Hostage Response Group, and other U.S. Government officials, to include the Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs;
- Help families understand and navigate the hostage recovery process, and ensure quality and accountability regarding the information and support they receive from the Government; and
- Working with the Intelligence Advisor in the Hostage Recovery Fusion Cell, ensure relevant information is declassified and provided to the family whenever possible in a timely manner. Recognizing the importance to families of information about their loved ones, it will be the policy of the U.S. Government to share as much information as possible with the hostage's family while protecting sensitive information as necessary. **Simply assuring a family "we are doing everything we can" is not enough.**

Separately, all U.S. Government personnel whose normal duties put them in contact with families of hostages will receive training on the dynamics of hostage-taking, the impact on families, best practices for working with families, and the types of support services available to families and recovered hostages. Personnel who serve as continuing points of contact for families will complete additional training.

**Simply assuring a family “we are doing everything we can” is not enough.**

Finally, harnessing the expertise of outside organizations with unique perspectives and capabilities is an important part of improving the handling of hostage-takings abroad. Accordingly, last month the Department of Justice announced an award of up to \$200,000 to applicants whose organizations seek to identify the needs of families of overseas hostages, kidnapping victims, and returned hostages, and provide information and referrals to such individuals as they navigate the complex issues that arise in the aftermath of a hostage-taking or kidnapping. This award will help to ensure that services most effectively provided by NGOs will be available to hostages and their families in their time of need.

### Assessing Impact and Ensuring Effective Implementation

As part of the new Executive Order, the President has directed that the new organizational structures, processes, and policy announced as a result of this Review be assessed and evaluated for effectiveness. Specifically, within six months, the Hostage Response Group shall provide a status report to the President on the establishment and operations of the Hostage Recovery Fusion Cell. Within one year, the Director of the National Counterterrorism Center, in consultation with the Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, Attorney General, and Director of the FBI, will provide a status report on the overall implementation of the Executive Order. That report will be informed by consultation with outside stakeholders, including former hostages and hostages’ families who have contributed so much to the Hostage Policy Review process.

\* \* \*

Overseas hostage-takings subject American families to the most traumatic ordeal many will ever face. As we continue to face hostage-takers who value profit and propaganda over the universal value of human life, we are committed to ensuring that the Government responds in a coordinated, effective, and supportive way in the face of these terrible situations. We are committed to implementing the President’s decisions expeditiously and effectively so that our responses to overseas hostage-takings are strong, swift, and synchronized. And as noted above, we are committed to evaluating and assessing whether the steps announced today are working and adjusting course as necessary. **But, most of all, we are mindful that the true measure of our success in these efforts is the safe recovery of American hostages held abroad; and, with the benefit of this review, we rededicate ourselves to this mission with the full force of the United States Government.**

## Annex A

# Major Findings and Recommendations of the Hostage Review Team

### Focus Area I: U.S. Government Coordination

The Review Team analyzed how the U.S. Government has handled overseas hostage cases to identify the roles that have been played by different departments and agencies as well as coordination challenges that have arisen. The Team recognized significant challenges in coordinating day-to-day operational activities both during and after a hostage incident. Generally, departments and agencies individually determine courses of action based on their respective missions, authorities, and capabilities as opposed to doing so collectively. Existing policies and statutes have created conflicting “lead” roles for departments and agencies, making it unclear which entity is ultimately responsible for coordinating and directing activities at the operational level. Departments and agencies are sometimes reticent to share information with their interagency counterparts out of concern that the information will be disclosed or acted upon in a manner that might undermine ongoing operations. Additionally, current policy does not specifically assign a high-level policy body responsibility to provide policy guidance on hostage recovery strategies.

The Review Team identified the following specific findings and recommendations:

- 1. Finding:** The U.S. Government response to hostage cases requires sustained attention from a high-level interagency body that can provide policy guidance and strategic direction.

**Recommendation:** Create a Hostage Response Group (HRG), a senior Interagency Policy Committee convened by the White House National Security Council Staff that would report to Cabinet officials and the President. The HRG should be chaired by the Special Assistant to the President/Senior Director for Counterterrorism and comprised of high-level representatives from State, DOJ, FBI, DOD, ODNI, NCTC, CIA, NSA, DIA, and Treasury. The HRG should convene on a regular basis and as needed at the request of the National Security Council. The HRG should review policies, priorities, and hostage recovery strategies. This body should replace the Hostage Personnel Recovery Working Group, which was a lower-level working group that lacked the HRG’s mandate to ensure policy and strategic coordination.

- 2. Finding:** Hostage-takings abroad raise unique challenges that require the use of all appropriate tools in a synchronized effort to recover hostages. The Government needs to develop mechanisms to coordinate and deconflict department and agency activities at the operational level.

**Recommendation:** Create a Hostage Recovery Fusion Cell (HRFC) that would serve as the Government’s primary interagency body to drive and coordinate activities at the operational level for all hostage-takings of U.S. Nationals abroad. The Director of the HRFC should be accountable for managing and coordinating the response to hostage crises, and will receive policy guidance and strategic direction from the HRG. The HRFC should include representatives from State, DOJ, FBI, OSD, JS, U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM), ODNI, CIA, NSA, DIA, and Treasury.

The HRFC should coordinate, deconflict, and synchronize all diplomatic, intelligence, law enforcement, and military components of hostage recovery efforts; ensure that planning and actions are coordinated with the relevant Chiefs of Mission; and recommend hostage recovery strategies and options to the HRG. The HRFC should also be responsible for coordinating family engagement and support; coordinating intelligence and information sharing and declassification; and ensuring external communications are accurate and consistent.

When proposed department or agency activities overlap or are in conflict, the HRFC Director should be responsible for seeking resolution within the HRFC or with senior department and agency representatives when appropriate. In the event resolution cannot be reached within the HRFC or between departments and agencies, any one participating agency or department may elevate the dispute to the HRG for resolution.

**3. Finding:** Improved information sharing in hostage cases would provide a common operating picture of hostage incidents and enhance efforts to recover hostages, support families, and bring hostage-takers to justice.

**Recommendation:** The HRFC should ensure that all information regarding departments’ and agencies’ activities during hostage events—including potential recovery strategies, intelligence collection and analysis, investigative efforts, diplomatic engagements, and engagements with families, third-party intermediaries (TPIs), and others—is shared within the HRFC and with relevant departments and agencies to the greatest extent possible, to facilitate a coordinated response to a hostage crisis. An ODNI representative as well as appropriate representatives from Intelligence Community (IC) agencies should be members of the HRFC to facilitate intelligence sharing.

**4. Finding:** Multiple departments and agencies have a need for information obtained from the hostage and other witnesses as well as information obtained during and after the hostage’s recovery.

**Recommendation:** The HRFC, in coordination with the relevant Chiefs of Mission, should develop case-specific plans for post-recovery activities, including debriefing of hostages, hostage-takers, and other potential witnesses, that take into account each participating department’s or agency’s equities and information needs.

## Focus Area II: Engagement with Families and External Stakeholders

The Review Team determined that communication with those involved in hostage recovery activities is often ad hoc and uncoordinated among agencies. The Team recognized that families want to be actively involved in the effort to safely recover their loved ones and want

to feel supported during and after captivity. The Team concluded that, while families of hostages appreciate the support services they receive, they overwhelmingly want the Government to demonstrate with actions that the safe recovery of their loved ones is its main focus. Building trust and fostering better collaboration with families requires a greater level of information sharing with families, employing a larger range of creative recovery options, and requiring specialized training for all officials interacting with hostages' families.

Additionally, communication with others interested in hostage recovery activities would benefit from greater coordination among departments and agencies to ensure accuracy and consistency. Department and agency responses to inquiries require coordination to ensure that the best, most accurate information is provided.

The Review Team identified the following specific findings and recommendations:

- 5. Finding:** Families have multiple points of contact across Government, often leading to confusion among families regarding who is handling specific aspects of their case.

**Recommendation:** A small, consistent Family Engagement Team should work with families from the beginning until the end of their case. A Family Engagement Coordinator should be a permanent, senior position within the HRFC and lead the team. This position should be filled by a U.S. Government employee with specialized qualifications whose primary responsibility would be to ensure that the family's interests are considered fairly. The role of the Coordinator should not replace direct communication by the officials managing a given case, rather the Coordinator would ensure all those who communicate with a family coordinate and share information with one another. As proposed, the Coordinator would report to leadership of the HRFC and be a member of the Hostage Response Group.

- 6. Finding:** Families of hostages feel better prepared when they understand what to expect, how to respond, and how to interact with the Government.

**Recommendation:** As soon as practical after notification of a hostage-taking event, the family should be offered an in-depth briefing by U.S. Government experts and the Family Engagement Coordinator on the following: the circumstances of the hostage-taking; the environment in which the hostage is being held, if known; the roles and responsibilities of agencies and points of contact in those agencies; how agencies work together; information about relevant laws and policy; and, how the family and the Government can work together. The Family Engagement Coordinator should ensure that families receive a written guide that reflects the information delivered in the briefing for future reference. The Government should clearly explain to families at the outset and throughout captivity the parameters for information that can be shared with them and the general reasons why the Government may need to withhold information.

- 7. Finding:** Families want to have confidence in the Government's commitment to the recovery of their loved ones.

**Recommendation:** Officials should clearly and accurately articulate to families what efforts the U.S. Government is undertaking to locate and recover their loved ones. Many families' concerns can be effectively addressed by ensuring information sharing, communication, and support to families are key components and a priority of the HRFC. Families should know

that employees from many departments and agencies are working side-by-side on a daily basis to develop strategies for safe recovery, share and maximize all available information, and coordinate critical actions.

**8. Finding:** U.S. Government employees often lack specific training to address the unique needs of families who are dealing with hostage-takings abroad.

**Recommendation:** All personnel whose normal duties put them in contact with families of hostages should receive training on the dynamics of hostage-taking, the impact on families, best practices for working with families, and the types of support services available to families and recovered hostages. In addition, briefings should be developed for other officials who are in contact with families on an as-needed basis.

**9. Finding:** Engagement with hostages' families by officials, including senior officials, needs to be consistent and coordinated.

**Recommendation:** All communication should be routed through the HRFC Family Engagement Team, who can engage senior officials as needed, and all families should be treated equitably and consistently. Representatives at all levels within the Government have a responsibility to deliver the most accurate information and preserve families' trust. U.S. Government representatives should ensure they are fully informed about a case and that their actions are consistent with ongoing recovery efforts.

**10. Finding:** Families want to feel that they have received complete and accurate information from the Government.

**Recommendation:** The goal of the U.S. Government should be to share as much information in as timely a manner as possible with a hostage's family while protecting sensitive information, sources, and methods. The HRFC should work with the IC to ensure that intelligence is routinely reviewed for proactive declassification using established procedures. The Government should treat requests from families for information as a high priority and should consider the impact that delivery of such information will have on families, especially with regard to information that may become available through the media.

**11. Finding:** Families and recovered hostages want to feel supported during a hostage event and post-captivity.

**Recommendation:** The Family Engagement Team should open a dialogue with a family about their needs and preferences and establish a mutually agreed upon Communication and Support Plan. The Plan should consist of two components: (1) how the family wants to receive information and notification; and (2) support services that would be helpful but are not readily available through their personal support network. These services can help family members cope with the physical, emotional, and financial impact of a hostage-taking event. Families should also be referred to NGOs that can provide additional services as appropriate. The Communication and Support Plan should be documented in writing and given to the family for future reference, but should be adjusted as the situation evolves. Relevant information from the Plan should be shared with officials who will be in direct communication with the family, as appropriate.

Returned hostages and families of deceased hostages should also receive support. The HRFC should establish a protocol for transitioning a family and a returned hostage to post-captivity support.

**12. Finding:** Though the Government provides a wide array of support services to families, it is limited in its ability to make referrals to private entities that provide specialized assistance to families during a hostage-taking.

**Recommendation:** The Government should issue a grant to fund a victim assistance organization with national scope to identify the needs of families of hostages taken abroad and recovered victims and to provide information and referrals to services, such as mental health, medical, and legal assistance.

**13. Finding:** To ensure accountability, families should have a mechanism that allows them to provide feedback on their engagement with the Government.

**Recommendation:** The Family Engagement Coordinator should provide a feedback channel for families during and after a hostage event. This feedback would not only serve as an outlet for families, but benefit the Coordinator who would be able to use this information to identify best practices, trends, and possible areas for change or improvement.

**14. Finding:** U.S. Government departments and agencies need to closely coordinate to fully and accurately answer congressional inquiries.

**Recommendation:** All interactions with Congress on hostage cases should be handled by, or coordinated with, the congressional affairs section of the HRFC. The congressional affairs section, in consultation with other members of the HRFC, should develop consolidated guidance for interactions with Congress and should develop a process for sharing information from these engagements to ensure all relevant agencies have a common understanding and message.

**15. Finding:** U.S. Government departments and agencies need to closely coordinate to appropriately answer media inquiries.

**Recommendation:** The public affairs section of the HRFC should ensure that responses to media inquiries on specific hostage cases are accurate and consistent. An interagency media response group, consisting of public affairs officials from each of the HRFC member agencies, should be established and convened as required by the HRFC public affairs section. The group should formulate consolidated guidance for routine or common media inquiries and procedures for handling individual inquiries.

**16. Finding:** The U.S. Government does not have a consistent plan for working with TPIs.

**Recommendation:** A hostage's family may designate or request TPI representation on their behalf to assist in the recovery of their loved one. TPIs could include the hostage's employer and other non-government organizations, or members of Congress, officials, media representatives, foreign government entities, or others in their community who the family believes can be of assistance in the recovery of their loved one. The Government should ensure whenever possible that all engagements with TPIs are consistent across agencies and



synchronized with ongoing diplomatic, intelligence, law enforcement, and military objectives.

### Focus Area III: Intelligence Sharing and Collection

The Review Team found an impressive breadth and scope of effort on overseas hostage cases by the IC, but no single point of contact to leverage the IC's capabilities or provide information. The Team also recognized a perception that the U.S. Government is not providing all of the relevant information to family members on the status of their loved ones held hostage, which can erode trust. Requests for declassified information have not been addressed systematically, and the IC has not proactively declassified information to enable it to be shared with families.

The Review Team identified the following specific findings and recommendations:

**17. Finding** Without centralized management of hostage-related intelligence within the IC, it is difficult to effectively leverage the important work going on across the Community in response to time-sensitive hostage incidents.

**Recommendation:** The Director of National Intelligence should centrally manage hostage-related intelligence to coordinate the IC's efforts and to provide synchronized intelligence support to the HRFC.

**18. Finding:** Families of hostages held abroad perceive that they are not receiving all relevant information from the U.S. Government on the location and status of their loved one.

**Recommendation:** Families should be provided as much information on the status of their family members as possible while protecting sensitive sources and methods and maintaining operational security for any potential recovery options. Early in the process, hostages' families should be given an overview of the work being done on their loved one's case, including by the IC, and a clear explanation should be provided about why certain information may not be shared.

**19. Finding:** The U.S. Government needs a centralized clearinghouse to handle requests for information releasable to external audiences, including hostages' families, in a timely and coordinated matter.

**Recommendation:** The IC, as appropriate, should make proactive efforts to declassify relevant and reliable information or provide unclassified summaries for use with external audiences, including hostages' families. The Director of National Intelligence should ensure that the HRFC is appropriately empowered to request and obtain declassification in a timely fashion.

### Focus Area IV: U.S. Policy

The Review Team found that existing U.S. Government policy on overseas hostage matters required updating in light of evolving circumstances and dynamics in such cases. A new

Presidential Policy Directive (PPD) should incorporate previous guidance where still relevant and new provisions where necessary. Making public this PPD to the greatest extent possible would allow families of hostages, as well as international partners, to have a clear statement of U.S. policy regarding hostage-takings abroad to inform and guide their interactions with the U.S. Government.

The Review Team identified the following specific findings and recommendations:

**20. Finding:** The previous policy documents do not adequately address the way the problem of hostage-takings abroad is conceived of today.

**Recommendation:** Previous policy documents should be revised and updated and revised policy should be issued in a new PPD that provides a clearer and more comprehensive statement of U.S. hostage and personnel recovery policy.

A new PPD should also provide a comprehensive picture of U.S. policy. It should cover what the Government can do to prevent and prepare for hostage-takings abroad, principles for engaging with hostages and their families, and the Government's commitment to the prosecution of hostage-takers. The PPD should establish how to organize the U.S. response to hostage-taking, including interagency coordination, recovery options, and intelligence support.

**21. Finding:** Previous policy guidance focused on delegating tasks but created no mechanism to coordinate a whole-of-government approach to recover hostages. A dedicated, coordinated and agile interagency effort is required to meet the threat posed by hostage-takers' use of increasingly sophisticated tactics and methods.

**Recommendation:** A new PPD should replace the previous directives to particular departments and agencies with mechanisms for coordinating the use of those departments' and agencies' existing authorities and expertise to achieve the safe recovery of U.S. hostages. A new PPD should set up a more collaborative framework by naming and empowering a policy-level HRG and an operational-level HRFC as the primary interagency bodies for coordinating the U.S. Government response to hostage-takings abroad.

Additionally, an HRFC should be formally established in a separate Executive Order, providing clear Presidential direction requiring relevant departments and agencies to coordinate the use of their complementary authorities and capabilities in hostage cases.

**22. Finding:** Previous policy guidance did not address engagement with a hostage's family and a recovered hostage in great detail.

**Recommendation:** A new PPD should address the importance of family and hostage support and set forth the key principles of that engagement. It should also reflect the core elements of the HRFC's new family and hostage engagement infrastructure: (1) ensuring coordination through the HRFC among Government officials, departments, and agencies that interact with families; (2) emphasizing that interactions with families should be conducted with professionalism, empathy, and sensitivity; (3) requiring that hostages and their families be provided with appropriate assistance and services, whether by the Government itself or through referrals to NGOs; and (4) encouraging the sharing of as much information as

possible with families, including through a proactive effort to declassify information where appropriate.

**23. Finding:** There has been a shift in both the environment in which hostage-takers operate and the tactics they employ. Previous policy documents reflected certain understandings about how hostage-takings occur that are no longer fully accurate, given the current threat environment.

**Recommendation:** A new PPD should provide additional guidance regarding the factors to be considered in developing and evaluating options to achieve the safe recovery of a hostage. It should clearly articulate a general framework for evaluating such options, making clear that each hostage event should be addressed on its own facts and circumstances, consistent with overarching U.S. policy. It should further specify that the U.S. Government's response should focus on recovery options that are most likely to secure the hostage's safe release, deter future hostage-takings of U.S. Nationals, combat the financing of terrorist and other criminal enterprises, and protect other U.S. national security interests.

**24. Finding:** Hostages' families have expressed confusion about what is and what is not permitted under the U.S. Government's "no concessions" policy.

**Recommendation:** A new PPD should reiterate that the U.S. Government remains committed to its policy of making "no concessions" to hostage-takers. Moreover, the Review Team recommends that this policy statement be expanded to clarify that the policy does not preclude engaging in communications with hostage-takers.

## Annex B

# A New Paradigm: Effective Collaboration with Families for Safe Recovery of Hostages

Families and former hostages have helped the U.S. Government to appreciate the importance of shifting from a focus on providing social services to families of overseas hostages to a paradigm that emphasizes continual collaboration between the Government and families in the safe recovery of their loved ones. This Annex briefly summarizes that new paradigm, which will inform the Government's handling of such cases going forward. In brief, the Government will collaborate more effectively with families by sharing more information with them, employing a larger range of creative options for engagement and recovery, and requiring specialized training for all U.S. Government officials interacting with hostages' families. Most importantly, the U.S. Government should demonstrate to families with its actions that safe recovery of their loved ones is the Government's top priority in these cases.

\* \* \*

Family members of U.S. Nationals taken hostage in foreign countries face a bewildering and terrifying array of immediate and ongoing issues and decisions at a time when their lives have been turned upside down. No one has a greater stake in the response to the taking of a hostage than the hostage and his or her family.

Going forward, U.S. Government personnel should be trained to understand that families generally are motivated by several urgent needs: (1) to understand the environment in which the hostage is being held; (2) to believe they and the U.S. Government are doing everything they can to recover safely a loved one; (3) to believe they have asked all of the right questions and received reasonable answers; and (4) to have a clear understanding of which options are on the table and which ones are not. Addressing these needs will assist families in understanding the U.S. Government's commitment to them.

An effective relationship between hostages' families and the U.S. Government will be built on enhanced communication and trust. Developing trust will start with the very first interaction families have with the Government. During this period, families are seeking information and guidance to help them determine what actions are being taken to recover their loved ones. Hostages' families are relying on the Government to provide informational updates that are timely, honest, ongoing, and coordinated. Meeting those expectations builds trust with families because they are expecting the Government to demonstrate competency, reliability, integrity, and consistent communication throughout this highly emotional ordeal. Maintaining trust and credibility is critical because the relationship with families is fragile due to the fluid and dynamic nature of the crisis and the potential risk to their loved ones.

All members of the Government who have contact with families should be trained to understand how their individual actions can affect families' perception of U.S. Government

efforts. Even the most well intentioned gestures can create credibility challenges if the actions are not coordinated or the messages are inconsistent with previous discussions.

Representatives at all levels within the Government should fulfill their responsibility to preserve the families' trust by ensuring that their words and actions are in alignment. Developing a thorough understanding of U.S. Government recovery strategies, previous messaging, family dynamics, case sensitivities, and ongoing issues/challenges prior to meeting with the family will serve as a critical first step towards ensuring positive engagement.

Officials interacting with families should be empathetic, patient, and able to handle the expression of intense emotions. These officials should be flexible and as accommodating as possible regarding the way each family wishes to be treated. They should be able to deliver difficult news with clarity and honesty.

### **Training for U.S. Government Officials**

All U.S. Government personnel whose normal and routine duties put them in contact with families of hostages will receive specialized training on the dynamics of hostage-taking, its impact on families, best practices for working with families, and the types of support services available to families and recovered hostages. Personnel who serve as continuing points of contact for families will complete more rigorous training.

### **Family Engagement Coordinator**

The role of the new Family Engagement Coordinator, a senior employee of the Hostage Recovery Fusion Cell, will be twofold, external and internal. The internal role of the Coordinator will be to serve as a focal point for ensuring that key Government officials are made aware of, and take into consideration, family information and interests. The Coordinator will represent the family's perspective day-to-day within the Fusion Cell. He or she will be regularly in touch with the team managing the case to ensure optimal synchronization of all U.S. Government efforts (including with the Intelligence Community); support to the family; and, ensure information is declassified and provided to the family whenever possible in a timely manner.

The external role of the Coordinator will be to help families understand and navigate the U.S. Government hostage recovery process; ensure families receive timely and accurate information; and ensure quality and accountability regarding the information and support they receive from the Government. The Coordinator will harmonize U.S. Government communication and collaboration with families. Support services will still be provided by the FBI Office for Victim Assistance, through the Headquarters-based case manager and the local Victim Specialist closest to the family's location, as well as by the State Department Bureau of Consular Affairs as necessary. Additionally, the Coordinator will provide a channel for family feedback.

## Initial Notification to the Family

A family may learn of a hostage-taking through several means, though going forward, all notifications by the U.S. Government should be coordinated by the Hostage Recovery Fusion Cell. As soon as possible after the initial notification, a team consisting of a FBI Victim Specialist and Agent/Crisis Negotiator will meet in person with the family to provide immediate support, assistance, and information. The family will be introduced, in person or telephonically if necessary, to the Family Engagement Coordinator. The purpose of this initial engagement and others is to ensure that all relevant agencies and authorities are working in a coordinated fashion on developing strategies for the safe recovery of the family's loved one.

## Informational Briefing

As soon as practical after notification, the family will be offered an in-depth briefing on the circumstances of the hostage-taking; the environment in which the hostage is being held if known; the roles and responsibilities of agencies and points of contact in those agencies; how agencies work together to maximize capabilities and options for locating and recovering hostages; information sharing limitations; relevant laws and policies; and how the family and the Government can best work together. The Government should clearly explain to families at the outset and throughout the captivity the parameters for information that can be shared with them and the general reasons that the Government may, in certain circumstances, need to withhold some information.

## Information Sharing

The goal of the U.S. Government will be to share as much information as possible with the hostage's family while protecting sensitive information, sources, and methods. Going forward, relevant information will be routinely reviewed for proactive declassification wherever possible. The U.S. Government will handle requests for information from the family as a high priority.

A recovered hostage and his or her family, as well as the family of a deceased hostage, is entitled to information that will assist them with understanding and accepting what has occurred. The Government's work will continue regardless of the outcome of a particular hostage case in order to obtain and share this critical information. This means declassifying specific information and, when that is not possible, providing one-time access to sensitive information.

## Consultation

At the informational briefing, or very soon thereafter, officials will elicit the family's views about potential actions the Government may consider to safely recover their loved one. The consultation will also include a discussion regarding the family's desired role and participation in the effort.

Additionally, officials will work with the family to assist in developing an effective Communication and Support Plan. The plan consists of two components: understanding how the family wants to receive information; and describing support services that may not be

readily available through the family’s personal support network. The plan will be provided in writing to the family for future reference along with contact information for someone they can reach day or night.

### **Working with Third Party Intermediaries**

Families sometimes designate TPI representation on their behalf from members of Congress, officials, media representatives, and foreign government entities. The U.S. Government will offer guidance to help ensure, whenever possible, that communications with TPIs are consistent, coordinated, and synchronized with ongoing diplomatic, intelligence, law enforcement, and military objectives.

### **Assistance in Responding to Captors**

The Government will maximize opportunities for release or recovery of the hostage by supporting the family in responding to contact from the captors as appropriate. FBI Crisis Negotiators will serve as resources for families by offering guidance on how to respond to contact and demands from the captors. Crisis Negotiators also will, as requested, assist the family by working with its TPI.

### **Assistance in Dealing with the Media and Other Individuals**

Going forward, the family will be offered information and guidance to help make informed choices about interacting with the media. Guidance will address the dynamics of different forms of engagement with the media; the potential impact of media exposure on privacy; and methods families can use to protect their privacy. FBI Crisis Negotiators and media affairs specialists will offer assistance if requested in developing public statements. The FBI Field Office closest to the family’s location will engage local law enforcement in controlling unwelcome attention at the family’s home, when needed, and immediately address any threats or harassment directed at the family.

### **Major Developments**

When significant developments occur in a particular hostage-taking, the Government will, to the maximum extent possible, inform the family in a timely manner and prior to release to the media, Congress, or others. The method of notification will be shaped by the wishes of the family as stated in the jointly developed Communication and Support Plan. Officials providing notification of such a development will ensure that a Victim Specialist is present with the family or immediately available following the notification.

\* \* \*

Through this new paradigm, the Government will work with families toward the safe recovery of their loved ones while supporting those families and showing the Government’s dedication and commitment to them.