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NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20506

SYSTEM II
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6/22

June 22, 1988

INFORMATION

MEMORANDUM FOR JOHN D. NEGROPONTE

Deputy Natl Sec Advisor
has seen

FROM: ROBERT B. OAKLEY *RB*

SUBJECT: Planning for Khomeini's Passing

RB:
you, Bill and I
would sit down
to discuss this
I find the
statement a bit
flawed. Always
at if the passing
of Khomeini
is itself

Following the June 16 Policy Review Group discussion, it would be useful to begin more detailed contingency planning for Khomeini's death -- whenever that should occur. I will meet with a small, informal interagency group later this month to outline the main elements of a sensible U.S. response. In the meantime, following are a few preliminary thoughts:

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Khomeini's Passing and Succession Politics

Rumors of the Ayatollah's imminent demise have circulated frequently -- and erroneously -- over the past decade. Although he appeared frail but alert on Iranian television last weekend, it nevertheless appears unlikely that Khomeini will be able to carry the burden of serious heart disease, kidney disease, cancer of the prostate, and possible organic brain disease much longer.

in our relations I would have thought we would want to come down on them a bit hard

FOIA(b) (1)



Whatever the prognosis for Khomeini, the Iranian leadership has been acting for several months as if it expected him to pass away shortly. Infighting and jockeying for position has been very intense, during and after the recent Majlis election. Nervousness about the succession has been compounded by military setbacks on the ground and in the Gulf, popular war weariness, and worsening economic troubles.

are the Gulf war freedom of navigation etc.

These problems have caused Iran to reach out widely to Western governments (France, UK, and Canada, among others) in hopes of relieving external political and economic pressures. But there do not yet appear to have been any major shifts in basic regime attitudes toward the U.S. or the war with Iraq. Debate between rival Iranian factions has thus far focused primarily on internal and economic issues, although further setbacks on the battlefield could eventually make the war a central source of contention.

Let's talk about it. John

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While it is impossible to predict with any certainty how the succession will unfold, the odds are probably better than even at this point that the initial transition will be relatively smooth, with Khomeini's designated successor, Ayatollah Montazeri, emerging as the titular head of the regime, and Rafsanjani attempting to consolidate his position as the power behind the throne.

FOIA(b) (1)

At some point after Khomeini dies -- perhaps a matter of months -- the cement holding the regime together will begin to weaken. Assuming that military, economic, and political pressures against Iran's aggressive policies continue, real splits may then emerge within the regime over the war and foreign policy.

Elements of a U.S. Response

In the wake of Khomeini's passing, U.S. policy will need to be clear, consistent, and agile. There will be enormous speculation about possible diplomatic openings, for us, for hostage releases, for the Soviets, and for efforts to end the war. In the midst of this, it will be essential for the Administration to speak publicly and privately with one voice, stressing familiar themes: we value our historic friendship with the Iranian people; we accept the Iranian revolution and whatever form of government the Iranian people choose for themselves; we are prepared for a more normal relationship with the Islamic Republic; but that can be possible only if Iran moderates its aggressive behavior. We should emphasize the continuity of our interests and our policy, while remaining alert to opportunities for dialogue with authoritative Iranian government officials -- and to the dangers of being manipulated by factional rivals. The more we stick to a steady, consistent line, the greater will be our chances of exploiting genuine diplomatic openings if and when they develop. Judging what constitutes a serious opening will be very difficult, and we will need to ensure advance agreement that probes will be assessed and responses approved on a careful interagency basis, under the guidance of the PRG.

Following are a few of the immediate actions that the PRG will need to consider and coordinate after Khomeini's death:

- o Public Statement: Attached at Tab I is draft contingency guidance that highlights several of the themes noted above.
- o Brief Congressional Leadership: Fairly solid bipartisan support for Persian Gulf policy has been painstakingly developed over the last eighteen months; we should continue to nurture it. (Depending on the timing, we will also want to consider early, thorough briefings for the Presidential candidates or President-elect.)

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- o Message to Iran: The [REDACTED] channel to the Iranian Foreign Ministry offers a good means of reiterating that the door is open to more normal relations -- if Iranian behavior changes.
- o Message to Iraq: We should hammer again at the value of Iraqi diplomatic flexibility, particularly in the wake of Khomeini's passing.
- o Messages to Saudi Arabia and GCC governments: These should stress the reassuring theme of continuity of U.S. policy.
- o Messages to Allies: We will want to share information on Iranian internal developments with the Allies -- some of whom are reestablishing a presence in Tehran -- as the succession unfolds.
- o Messages to Egypt, Jordan, Algeria, Pakistan, Turkey, PRC.
- o Message to Soviets: We may want to lay down an early marker to help limit the potential for US-Soviet tension over post-Khomeini Iran. We should also push the Soviets to engage in a revived effort to implement UNSC 598.
- o Message to UNSYG: We will want to stay closely engaged on UNSC diplomacy.

Prepared by: William J. Burns

Attachment
Tab I Q&A

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