

Tehran Paper Calls for Unconditional Release of Hostages

By Sharif Inam-Jomeh
Special to The Washington Post

TEHRAN, Feb. 22—The English-language Tehran Times, which usually voices the opinions of President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, called today for the unconditional release of all foreign hostages being held in Lebanon, saying that Iran can continue its "rightful struggle against the West" in other ways.

Diplomats and analysts here and abroad said it was unclear what would be the effect of the call, which appeared in no other Iranian news media. In Damascus, however,

Peggy Say, sister of Terry Anderson, the longest-held American hostage, wept at the report and called it "the most encouraging news that I have heard," Reuters news service reported.

The Tehran Times said all the factions in Lebanon "should regard the hostages as victims of imperialist policies of the West and make attempts to get them all freed." It complained that the continued captivity of the hostages has benefited Western propaganda against Iran, and said, "Maybe 1990 will be the year for the release of all the hostages." The editorial reflected many of

the points made by Rafsanjani in a speech to parliament Tuesday, in which he said he saw the political upheaval in the Soviet bloc posing threats to countries such as Iran.

"The world is getting unipolar," Rafsanjani said. "Lots of chances of independent countries to exploit the conflicts between superpowers are fading. Conflicts are turning into understandings that mainly benefit those who are hostile to us."

Iran has pressed for Moslem unity as a response to the changed world situation, and the editorial suggested that release of the hostages could further that goal.

Lebanese militants, most of them pro-Iranian and believed to be under Tehran's influence, hold 17 Western hostages, including eight Americans.

Say was in Damascus today as part of a campaign seeking the release of her brother, Middle East correspondent for the Associated Press, who was abducted March 16, 1985.

"I have been hoping very much for this kind of statement," she told Reuters. "All we can do now is to wait and see how those people in Lebanon would react. I do not personally consider Tehran the problem. I consider it part of the solution."

880 8-8

Washington Post
23 Feb 90