Irregular Warfare
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"Dear America: The IRGC's Message Kit for Dividing the Home Front"

By Dr. Douglas S. Wilbur

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Dr. Douglas S. Wilbur holds a PhD in Strategic Communications from University of Missouri. He is a retired U.S. Army Information Operations officer. His research specialty is in information warfare.

On September 29, 2026, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), a designated terrorist organization, asked American voters to change their government. It released a 26-page open letter to the American people five weeks before the midterm elections and seven months into a war that Iran cannot win by conventional means. The letter tells Americans that their leaders lie to them, that their military has already lost, and that the ballot box is their way out. "Americans need to wake up," it declares. This is irregular warfare aimed at the American home front, and the weapon is a message kit built to be taken apart and spread, with short passages written for specific audiences that can be lifted out and shared on their own. For practitioners, the key questions are how far those passages travel and how the letter fits into Iran's wider influence campaign.

Iranian leaders have written to Americans before. President Masoud Pezeshkian published a short open letter in April 2026, and Ali Khamenei wrote to American college students in 2024. This specific IRGC letter differs in both scale and design. It speaks to nine American audiences, attempting to unite their grievances around a single villain, a corrupt elite that in the letter's telling, serves Israel and "Zionist" interests. It closes with concrete actions for Americans to take. Foreign governments have long tried to shape how U.S. news media portray them, a process communication scholars call agenda building. The IRGC letter works the same way. Within a day of its release, outlets across the political spectrum were reporting it, quoting it, and arguing about it. Its greatest danger lies in the fragments. These are short, self-contained passages that make sense without the rest of the letter, and they can be passed around without attribution. This article argues that the letter is a segmented influence operation aimed at separating the American public from its government. So far, the evidence shows that the letter was widely amplified. It does not yet show that it persuaded anyone. Few Americans will ever read the letter. The open question is how many will meet its arguments without knowing where they came from.

Why This Is Irregular Warfare

On the surface, one could label this message as public diplomacy or international public relations. However, this letter fits well within the boundaries of irregular warfare, defined as, a form of warfare where actors campaign to assure or coerce a population through indirect, non-attributable, or asymmetric activities, operating across both competition and conflict. The letter is indirect and asymmetric because it bypasses the battlefield. It targets the public will that sustains the war by urging Americans to vote out their elected officials. Although the IRGC signed the letter, its passages are built to be clipped and reposted by domestic voices.

Audience Segmentation

Adversaries have divided the American public into target audiences before. Russia's Internet Research Agency built separate online personas aimed at

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African Americans, conservatives, Christians, and veterans. The Senate Intelligence Committee found that these personas were designed to exploit each group's existing grievances. Iran has run similar covert campaigns, though they have drawn little real engagement. Open letters from Iranian leaders have received far less scrutiny from the information warfare community. Few have asked whether a signed, public letter can segment an audience the way a covert troll network does. This article asks two questions. Which American audiences does the letter target, and how does it frame its message for each of them?

RQ1: Which American audiences does the IRGC letter target?

RQ2: How does the letter frame its message for each of those audiences?

Method

The study used Robert Entman's framing model, which explains how one text can package an argument for many readers. A frame performs four functions: it defines a problem, names a cause, passes moral judgment, and proposes a remedy. The problem a passage describes shows which audience it targets, since each grievance belongs to a specific group. The other three functions show how the message is shaped for that group. The model also captures calls to action, which simpler propaganda typologies often miss.

The model was applied through directed qualitative content analysis, in which coding categories come from existing theory. Each of the letter's 153 paragraphs was coded for the four functions and for the audience it addressed. A group counted as a target only when a paragraph named it and attached a specific grievance to it. A second reading added subcategories, such as the type of villain blamed, and a sample was recoded one week later to check consistency. The analysis covers the English text only and does not measure effects on readers.

Findings

The part of the letter aimed at specific Americans is small, but it is built to travel. Only 18 paragraphs (11.8%) speak to a particular American group. These passages are short and self-contained, so each can be lifted out and shared without the rest of the letter. Much of the remaining text does other work. More than a third of it, 55 paragraphs (35.9%), concerns Iran itself, including victory claims, religious history, and clerical rule. That material appears to speak more to Iranian and Muslim readers than to Americans. The letter also builds a long case before it asks for anything. Most paragraphs assign blame or pass judgment, while only 19 (12.4%) call for action, and 16 of those appear in the final four pages. For practitioners, the short audience passages are the part to watch.

Who the Letter Targets

The letter gives each audience its own grievance. Its appeals to service members are the most pointed. The letter cites high suicide and drug-abuse rates among veterans as evidence of disillusionment. It then asks why "underprivileged American men and women" should "risk their lives for opaque objectives that seem to mean nothing to anyone except the ruling elite." Yet elsewhere, the same letter ridicules American troops as cowardly and morally empty. Taxpayers receive a blunter charge: "The genocide in Palestine and Lebanon and the endless wars in other parts of the world are carried out with your tax dollars." Academics are told to "refrain from participating" in research that may contribute to "the murder of innocent men, women, and children."

In total, the letter targets nine American audiences. Three are named in the salutation: scholars, students, and journalists. Six more are named in the body and tied to a specific grievance. Taxpayers were the most frequent target, appearing in 10 of the 18 audience paragraphs. Service members and veterans followed with 7, and poor Americans with 5. Students, scholars, protesters, African Americans and Native Americans, and regretful voters appeared once or twice each, and journalists appeared only in the salutation. Some paragraphs addressed more than one group. Each grievance sits in a short passage that can travel without the rest of the letter.

How the Letter Frames Its Message

The letter changes the problem for each audience but keeps the villain the same. Veterans face suicide and addiction, taxpayers fund foreign wars, poor Americans face poverty, and academics risk complicity in killing. Yet 17 of the 18 audience paragraphs blame the same actors: the U.S. government, its leaders, or Israel. Most add the same moral judgment, that these leaders sacrifice ordinary Americans for their own interests. Thus, nine grievances lead back to one villain.

In the letter's telling, that villain is a ruling elite that serves Israel. At its sharpest, the letter claims American leaders serve the "Zionist masters of global finance." This shared villain lets the letter join grievances from both political camps. Seven audience paragraphs pair left-leaning complaints, such as Gaza and police shootings, with right-leaning ones, such as national debt and immigration. The letter even recasts its most hostile slogan to fit this frame: "'Death to America' is a prayer for the eradication of the diabolical ruling elite whose seat of power is the White House." Religious passages seek shared ground with Christian readers. The letter closes with the line "Mahdi and Christ will stand with the oppressed seekers of justice and against the oppressors." In Twelver Shia Islam, Iran's official faith, the Mahdi is a hidden imam who will return to establish justice, with Jesus at his side. Thus, the letter recasts Christ's return as part of Iran's struggle.

The remedies follow the same pattern. Most calls to action come in the letter's closing pages and are addressed to all Americans. Almost all are civic or electoral: vote out corrupt politicians, pressure the government, refuse military research, and end aid to Israel. The letter places the burden on voters directly: "You are the ones who empower, with your votes, the government and allow it to do what it does." Its final demand is three words long: "Take back control." For practitioners, the lesson is that the letter recruits mostly through familiar domestic language, so a reader can accept its arguments without any sympathy for Iran.

Discussion

Practitioners should not treat this letter as routine diplomatic communication or public diplomacy. It is an operation aimed at the American public, which is now contested terrain in this war. Irregular warfare treats the population as decisive, and the IRGC has acted on that logic. The letter cost Tehran almost nothing to produce, which lowers the bar for what counts as a return. The more important question is what happened to the letter after its release.

How Far Did the Letter Travel?

There is no evidence yet that the letter changed American opinions or votes. No poll has measured exposure to it, and one open-source assessment rated the possibility of covert amplification at low confidence. However, the letter did not need covert help to reach Americans, because American outlets carried it. Within a day, TIME and Al Jazeera had summarized its demands. A Breitbart headline repeated its claim that "Death to America" targets leaders and not the people. According to one critic, the Daily Caller carried its line that U.S. leaders serve "Zionist capitalists," and the press as a whole "handed it a megaphone."

Three weeks later, a domestic actor put the letter to work. A Freedom Foundation column used its demands, such as ending aid to Israel and closing overseas bases, to attack teachers' unions that had passed anti-war resolutions. The column opposed Iran, yet it kept the IRGC's demands in circulation and tied them to an American political fight. This is the more realistic form of laundering. Fragments rarely lose their label entirely. Instead, domestic actors absorb them into existing arguments, and the debate shifts from the IRGC's credibility to which Americans agree with it. Thus, the evidence shows that the letter was widely amplified. It does not show that the letter persuaded anyone, and no evidence yet shows unattributed passages circulating online.

Part of a Wider Campaign

The letter should be read alongside Iran's other wartime influence activity. Graphika tracked Iranian state media, IRGC-linked hacktivist personas, and identical posts across dozens of accounts during the war's first months, with Russian and Chinese networks resharing Iranian narratives. In 2024, the Justice Department charged three IRGC employees with a hack-and-leak operation aimed at a presidential campaign. The letter is the overt layer of this activity. It states the narrative in Tehran's own name, and covert personas can then repeat its themes while hiding their origin. Practitioners should look for three signs of this pattern. The first is the letter's distinctive phrases, such as "factory of lies" or "Zionist masters of global finance," appearing in accounts with no stated Iranian link. The second is Iranian state outlets and allied networks promoting the same passages. The third is a rise in these themes near elections or deployments. Analysts should also ask whether persona networks or AI-generated content have repackaged the letter, since open sources have not yet answered that question.

What Practitioners Should Do

Three targets deserve protection. The first is military morale. The letter cites veteran suicide as evidence of a broken military, then chooses to "applaud the act of self-immolation" by an American airman. Paired together, these messages could erode the will

to serve and trust between the force and its leaders. The second is social cohesion. The "Zionist" elite frame gives both political extremes a shared scapegoat in wartime. If it spreads, it could feed harassment of Jewish Americans. The third is the electoral process, since a designated terrorist organization told voters to "take back control" weeks before the polls.

Rebutting the letter point by point is unlikely to be effective and only amplifies its narrative. A stronger approach is prebunking, which exposes the adversary's tactics before audiences encounter its messages. Field experiments show that brief prebunking videos improve people's ability to recognize manipulation techniques on social media. Audiences resist persuasion once they recognize an attempt to target them, so public messaging should show how the IRGC built a separate grievance for veterans, taxpayers, and students. Commanders should treat the letter as part of the operational environment and brief force protection and military mental health staff on its appeals to service members. Intelligence analysts should treat unattributed passages in veteran forums and activist spaces as indicators and warnings of a wider influence campaign, using the three signs described above. Yet no single agency now owns this mission. The State Department closed its office for countering foreign disinformation in April 2025. Until someone owns the domestic front of the information environment, the IRGC and others will keep probing it below the threshold of armed conflict.

Conclusion

The IRGC letter has not been shown to change minds on its own. Its value lies in the pieces it hands to others: a grievance for every audience, one villain behind them all, and a demand to act. Within weeks, American outlets and at least one domestic advocacy group had carried those pieces to new readers. That is amplification, and whether it becomes persuasion is still unknown. In irregular warfare, the side that shapes how a population understands a war can outlast the side that wins its battles. Tehran has now put its version of this war in writing and addressed it to the American people by name. Practitioners should watch where its fragments go next. Will those arguments fade once no one remembers where they came from?