

Bush administration sabotages attempt to save British hostage in Iraq

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If British contractor Kenneth Bigley has been murdered by his kidnapers in Iraq, then the Bush administration bears direct responsibility. Washington has blocked the Iraqi interim government from releasing a prisoner—an action that might have secured Bigley’s freedom—and Blair has publicly backed the US decision.

Bigley, a 62-year-old civil engineer, was kidnapped from a Baghdad house on September 16, along with two Americans, Jack Hensley and Eugene Armstrong. All three worked for the company Gulf Supplies and Commercial Services on engineering projects inside Iraq.

The kidnapers, who claim to be led by Al Qaeda-aligned Jordanian terrorist Abu Musaab al-Zarqawi, brutally killed Hensley on Monday and Armstrong on Tuesday. Following Hensley’s killing, the murderers videotaped threats to behead Bigley as well, unless Blair organised for all Muslim women to be released from Iraqi prisons within 24 hours.

Amid efforts by Bigley’s family to prevent his murder, a prospect for his release emerged on Wednesday morning. Iraqi Justice Ministry officials announced that a high-profile female Iraqi detainee, scientist Rihab Taha, would be released. Taha is one of only two females the US military admits to still detaining—in defiance of international law. According to the Justice Ministry, an Iraqi judge had ruled there was no evidence of criminality to justify her continued detention. The officials also announced that the ministry was considering releasing the other imprisoned woman, Huda Salih Mahdi Ammash.

Totally indifferent as to whether Bigley lives or dies, the Bush administration moved immediately to block the releases. Within hours of the Iraqi Justice Ministry announcement, a US embassy spokesman told the

press: “The two women are in the legal and physical custody of the multi-national forces in Iraq and neither will be released imminently.”

The focus of the Republican campaign in the US presidential elections is that the Bush White House is successfully fighting a life-and-death struggle against terrorism. For the US-installed Iraqi interim government to appear to be negotiating with the kidnapers is deemed unacceptable.

The British government rapidly fell into line with the Bush administration’s position. Foreign Secretary Jack Straw told the press: “We cannot get into a situation, and I believe the family understands this, where we start bargaining with terrorists and kidnapers.” Writing off Bigley’s life, Straw declared it would be “idle to pretend that there’s a great deal of hope” and his conversations with the man’s family had left them “preparing themselves for the worst”.

Bigley’s family has responded bitterly to the US actions. Ken Jones, Bigley’s cousin, told the British media that the family “had their hopes built up a bit with the news the scientists would possibly be released, but the death warrant has been more or less signed, sealed and delivered today”. Over the past day, Bigley’s wife and mother have made passionate pleas to his kidnapers for his life to be spared.

Paul Bigley, Kenneth’s brother, denounced the Bush administration in an interview Wednesday with the BBC: “A judge has made a legal decision to release three people, one female and two males. The minister of justice has endorsed this and published this on international news. Now this has been sabotaged. I mean ... is this a puppet government, or are the Americans moving the goalposts to suit their own means again? What’s going on here?”

The US overturn of the prisoner releases once again

underscores the fraudulent character of the so-called transfer of sovereignty in June. The interim government is nothing more than a puppet, with all real power exercised by the US ambassador and the US military occupation forces. The head of the puppet regime, Iraqi interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, was wheeled out in New York to echo the US stance and repudiate the decisions of his own justice ministry. He told journalists: “We have not been negotiating and we will not negotiate with terrorists on the release of hostages. No release takes place unless I authorise it.”

Above all, the actions of the Bush administration highlight its complete contempt for human life and its criminal ruthlessness in pursuing the geo-political interests of the American ruling class. Just as it is willing to see Bigley die, the White House has been prepared to sacrifice the lives of hundreds of American troops and thousands of Iraqis to ensure US control of Iraq and its oil reserves.

To be blunt, the White House believes it would be quite beneficial, both at home and internationally, if Bigley is murdered. Washington finds the reactionary killing of innocent civilians by al-Zarqawi’s organisation extremely useful in justifying the murderous repression by the US military in Fallujah, Sadr City and across Iraq, in its increasingly desperate efforts to crush the resistance of the Iraqi people. Amid all the lies about weapons of mass destruction and links with Al Qaeda, the only “justification” the Bush administration can still try to use to legitimise its illegal occupation of Iraq is the further lie that the country constitutes the “frontline” of the “war on terrorism”.



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