

Right-wing campaign intensifies against family of American POW Bergdahl

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9 June 2014

The right-wing campaign against released Afghanistan POW Bowe Bergdahl is intensifying, with death threats to his family and vitriolic denunciations of the freed soldier in the media and on Capitol Hill.

Bergdahl's hometown of Hailey, Idaho cancelled a rally that was to be a welcome-home celebration after threats of counter-protests by right-wing elements denouncing him as a deserter and traitor.

Meanwhile, press reports from Germany, where Bergdahl is receiving medical and psychological treatment at the US military facility in Landstuhl, indicate that the former POW was tortured and confined to a cage for some period of his captivity after he attempted to escape from the Taliban-linked group that was holding him.

The death threats to Bob Bergdahl, the soldier's father, came in the form of at least four email messages, according to the police chief of Hailey, Jeff Gunter. The Federal Bureau of Investigation, which would be involved in any case of a threat to an active-duty soldier, issued a statement that it "continues to monitor the situation in Hailey, Idaho." The FBI statement continued, "We are working jointly with our state and local partners and taking each threat seriously."

Organizers of the welcome-home celebration in Hailey announced its cancellation June 4, citing security concerns and a deluge of hostile and threatening messages, as well as cancellations of hotel reservations.

Bob Bergdahl, who grew a beard in solidarity with his imprisoned son, has been a thorn in the side of the Obama administration for years, pressing the demand that the US government take steps to obtain Bowe's release. He has also called for the closure of the Guantanamo Bay concentration camp and release of its prisoners.

A report by McClatchy News Service noted that "Military-related blogs, Twitter accounts and Facebook pages were filled with screeds from commenters accusing Bowe Bergdahl of being a 'traitor' or a Taliban 'collaborator'" because of claims by some fellow soldiers that he had voiced opposition to the war and left his base camp voluntarily on the night of June 30, 2009, when he was captured by insurgents. *Time* magazine put Bowe Bergdahl on its cover, under the headline, "Was He Worth It?" The *Daily Beast*, an online publication formerly merged with *Newsweek*, published a lengthy account by a former Army officer who claimed Bergdahl "was a deserter, and soldiers from his own unit died trying to track him down."

Neoconservative columnist Charles Krauthammer suggested in the *Washington Post* that if Bergdahl had been a defector who joined the Taliban, "he deserves killing, the way we kill other enemies in the field, the way we killed Anwar al-Awlaki, an American who had openly joined al-Qaeda. A US passport does not entitle a traitor to any special protection."

As usual, the most rabid attack came from Fox News, whose Bill O'Reilly declared that Bowe's father Bob Bergdahl "looked like a Muslim," presumably because of his long beard.

On Saturday, Fox News published a thoroughly scurrilous "exclusive" claiming that Bowe Bergdahl had joined the Taliban. Headlined "Bergdahl declared jihad in 2010, secret documents show," the article cited documents from a completely dubious source.

The Fox report conceded that Bergdahl had been "treated very much like a hostage" during much of his imprisonment, including a period of confinement "in a metal cage, like an animal." It also quoted top US military officers, by name, who denied that there was any evidence of collaboration with the Taliban.

Nonetheless, the bulk of the report promoted the charge of collaboration, citing as its authority intelligence information developed by Eclipse Group, a private company run by Duane R. (“Dewey”) Clarridge, a former top CIA officer who was pardoned by the first President Bush while on trial on felony perjury charges stemming from the Iran-Contra affair.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has previously commented on Clarridge’s secret operations in Afghanistan, which came to light in May 2010 after the rescue of a *New York Times* reporter taken prisoner by the Taliban. (See: US military created private spy and murder squad in Afghanistan). Suffice it say that no “evidence” associated with this long-time imperialist cutthroat has the slightest credibility.

The actual circumstances under which Bowe Bergdahl was captured remain in dispute. A lengthy front-page article in Sunday’s *New York Times*, based on interviews with numerous fellow soldiers, reported: “They say they do not remember his leaving behind any note or explanation. They said they were unaware that he had previously wandered off the base, as the internal Army review reported.”

Two news reports Saturday gave a glimpse into the Obama administration’s reasons for pushing to a conclusion the talks over exchanging Taliban prisoners at Guantanamo Bay for Bergdahl.

The *Washington Post* headlined its account “Swap shows that deals can be made with Taliban,” indicating that the administration used the Bergdahl talks to test out Taliban officials for a future political agreement over the fate of Afghanistan. The *Post* wrote that the deal shows “the United States has a channel for negotiation that the next Afghan president might be able to use, said current and former US officials and people familiar with a classified briefing to Congress on the Bergdahl swap.”

The *New York Times* detailed the previous talks with the Taliban, in 2011 and 2012, initially led by the late Richard Holbrooke, Obama’s special envoy to the region. Its report said that Holbrooke told aides the US would use the prisoners in Guantanamo “as leverage to try to advance its priority of getting the Taliban to enter talks to reconcile with the Afghan government to coincide with an eventual US troop withdrawal and end of the war.”

One commentary, in the magazine *Foreign Policy*,

gave a glimpse into the reasons for the hysterical right-wing attack on the Bergdahl release, as well as the cringing response of the White House to its critics on the issue. An analysis posted June 5 on the magazine’s web site pointed to numerous antiwar comments made by both Bergdahls, father and son.

Bowe Bergdahl might come to his first press conference with a statement of thanks for those who rescued him, the magazine commented, but “there’s good reason for the White House to fret that Bergdahl might wind up saying something else entirely—sympathize with the Taliban or even mildly criticize the war—and that his comments, which would attract enormous media attention, would make it even harder for the administration to justify the prisoner swap. The administration has good reason to fear that its current political problems could grow even worse once Bergdahl himself starts talking.”

In that context, a statement by the top Pentagon spokesman, Col. Steven H. Warren, takes on a sinister overtone. He told NBC News that Sergeant Bergdahl was being helped by psychologists to “regain control of his emotions.” This suggests that Bergdahl’s long stay in a military hospital in Germany, during which he has reportedly not communicated with his family even once, may be an exercise in damage control and intimidation by the US military and the Obama administration.



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