

# ISIS kills Japanese hostage

Ben McGrath  
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A video purportedly showing the death of one of the two Japanese hostages held by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) was released late Saturday night. The other hostage is still being held by the group, which has reduced its ransom demand from \$100 million per person to a prisoner exchange involving a woman held in Jordan over a 2005 terror bombing.

The newest video is a still picture with audio showing one of the hostages, reporter Kenji Goto, holding a picture of the other hostage, Haruna Yukawa, beheaded.

The accompanying audio is Goto speaking in English and issuing ISIS's new demand for the release of Sajida al-Rishawi. "It is simple. You give them Sajida and I will be released," he says.

Al-Rishawi is connected to the bombings of hotels in Jordan in 2005 that left 57 people dead. Her husband and two others carried out the attack, but apparently the bomb she was carrying failed to detonate. Jordanian authorities sentenced her to death for her role. The attack was supposedly organized by Al Qaeda in Iraq, one of the organizations from which ISIS itself emerged.

Questions were raised about the authenticity of the video. Rita Katz, head of the SITE Intelligence Group, a company with ties to the US government, said, "The video was made in a different style than the other beheading videos, seemingly rushed and even lacking the usual attribution to al-Furqan Media Foundation, a primary media arm of the group." Katz confirmed the video was real, however.

Yukawa was captured last year in August in Syria. He had hoped to become a military contractor, but was unprepared for work in the region, according to Goto, who met Yukawa and helped him enter Iraq last spring. When news of Yukawa's capture reached Goto, who had gone back to Japan, he felt compelled to return to Syria to help Yukawa last October.

The families and friends of the two men expressed their anguish on Sunday. Yukawa's father, Shoichi Yukawa said, "All I can do is remain calm. I hope that the photograph (held by Goto) is not my son's."

Junko Ishido, Goto's mother, appealed for the Japanese government to meet the ransom demand. "I can only pray as a mother for his release," Ishido added. "If I could offer my life I would plead that my son be released. It would be a small sacrifice on my part."

As officials worked to confirm the video's authenticity, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and US President Barack Obama denounced the killing. Both leaders are intent on exploiting the hostage crisis and Yukawa's murder to escalate US and Japanese imperialist interventions in the Middle East and around the world.

Speaking to the Japanese NHK public broadcaster on Sunday, Abe said: "We will never give in to terrorism, and we will actively contribute to the peace and stability of the world together with the international community. We are not wavering at all on this policy."

Obama stated, "The United States strongly condemns the brutal murder of Japanese citizen Haruna Yukawa by the terrorist group."

The Japanese government is intent on using the hostage crisis to escalate its rehabilitation and legitimization of Japanese militarism, even at the expense of the hostages' lives. Tokyo broke up efforts to negotiate the release of the two hostages, seizing the passports of Ko Nakata and Kosuke Tsuneoka, whom ISIS had contacted and asked to come to the Middle East as mediators on Yukawa's and Goto's behalf. Both men have continued to offer to help negotiate a settlement, but the Japanese government has refused.

The United States has been pushing Japan to expand its role in the Middle East in support of the US war drive. Just one day before the release of the first ISIS

video demanding a ransom, Japan's Defense Ministry announced that it would increase its operations at Japan's single overseas base, in Djibouti.

The ministry said, "From the perspectives of cooperation with the U.S. military and NATO forces and sharing terrorism-related information with these forces, it will be to Japan's benefit to increase functions of the base." Japanese imperialism is also searching for a stronger foothold in the region, from which Japan gets 83 percent of its oil imports.

Abe's push to remilitarize Japan is widely opposed by the Japanese people, and this hostage crisis provides the government with the perfect pretext to continue its militarist drive.

The Obama administration has encouraged Abe to pass new laws that help Tokyo bypass Article 9 of its own constitution, which bans Japan from engaging in overseas wars. These laws, set to be presented to the Japanese Diet in April, correspond to new military guidelines drawn by Washington and Tokyo last October to lay down the two countries' joint roles.

The new guidelines call for Japan to play a larger role in assisting the United States militarily throughout the world. Abe has regularly stated that Japan could take part in minesweeping operations in the Strait of Hormuz in the Middle East as just one example of aid Tokyo could render to US imperialism's war efforts.

Abe and his cabinet will doubtless seize on Yukawa's death to pass these new military laws. Despite initially claiming he would not do so, Abe utilized the 2013 hostage crisis at the In Amenas gas plant in Algeria, in which 10 Japanese were killed, to pass a law allowing the Japanese military to enter a conflict zone if the pretext of a rescue mission exists.

Last summer, Abe's cabinet also approved a reinterpretation of Japan's constitution to allow the government to send Japanese forces overseas. Dubbed "collective self-defense," the reinterpretation marked a major turning point for Japanese imperialism, removing constraints on the military that had existed since the end of World War II.

Small protests against Abe have also occurred with many people blaming the prime minister for Yukawa's death. About 100 people gathered on Sunday outside Abe's residence demanding that he rescue Goto.

Kenji Kunitomi, one of the protesters, denounced Abe, saying, "This happened when Prime Minister Abe

was visiting Israel. I think there's a side to this, where they may have taken it as a form of provocation, possibly a big one."



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