

Negotiating with Terrorists

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The Obama administration ignores a longstanding — and life-saving — policy.

Andrew C. McCarthy

As the Iranian government's murderous repression of the Iranian people continues, critics right and left agitate over the deafening silence of an American president who, as a candidate, derided the Bush administration's ambitious democracy promotion as too timid. They speculate as to why Barack Obama won't speak out: Why won't he condemn the mullahs? Is he daft enough to believe he can charm the regime into abandoning its nuclear ambitions? Does the self-described realist so prize stability that he thinks it's worth abandoning the cause of freedom — and the best chance in 30 years of dislodging an implacable American enemy?

In truth, it's worse than that. Even as the mullahs are terrorizing the Iranian people, the Obama administration is negotiating with an Iranian-backed terrorist organization and abandoning the American proscription against exchanging terrorist prisoners for hostages kidnapped by terrorists. Worse still, Obama has already released a terrorist responsible for the brutal murders of five American soldiers in exchange for the remains of two deceased British hostages.

Prepare to be infuriated.

On Jan. 20, 2007, five American soldiers were killed and three seriously wounded in Iraq. As Bill Roggio relates at the Long War Journal, it was a daring operation: a twelve-man terrorist team disguised as U.S. servicemen attacked our troops as they held a previously arranged meeting with local officials in Karbala. Four of the soldiers were alive when they were abducted from the scene. They were handcuffed and murdered in a remote location when the coalition forces attempting to rescue them closed in.

Given the sophistication of the raid and the intelligence required to pull it off, it was a virtual certainty that the mullahs' special forces, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, were behind it. More than a decade earlier, in concert with Hezbollah (Iran's forward terrorist militia), the IRGC had bombed the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia, killing 19 members of the United States Air Force. In Karbala, the IRGC had relied on what Michael Ledeen of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies aptly calls its "most lethal element," the Quds (Jerusalem) Force, in combination with a burgeoning, Hezbollah-like network of local Shiite terrorists.

This was confirmed two months later when U.S. forces captured Ali Mussa Daqduq, a high-ranking veteran of Hezbollah, in Basrah. As Roggio explains, Daqduq had been tasked by Iran to organize a network of terror cells to strike coalition forces in Iraq. The network would operate under the direction of Qais Qazali. Qazali and his

brother, Laith Qazali, were captured along with Daquduq.

Unquestionably, Iran, acting through the Qazali network — which is better known as Asaib al-Haq, or the League of the Righteous — was responsible for the murder of our troops in Karbala. As Ledeen documents in his book *The Iranian Time Bomb* (reviewed here), Gen. David Petraeus made that clear at an April 2007 press conference. Petraeus detailed that the Qazali brothers were among “the key members” of a network of “extremist secret cells.” These groups, he said,

we were provided substantial funding, training on Iranian soil, advanced explosive munitions and technologies as well as run-of-the-mill arms and ammunition, in some cases advice and in some cases even a degree of direction. When we captured these individuals . . . we discovered . . . a 22-page memorandum on a computer that detailed the planning, preparation, approval process, and conduct of the operation that resulted in five of our soldiers being killed in Karbala There are numerous documents which detailed a number of different attacks on coalition forces, and our sense is that these records were kept so that they could be handed in to whoever it is that is financing them. And there’s no question, again, that Iranian financing is taking place through the Quds Force of the Iranian Republican [sic] Guards Corps.

About two weeks ago, the Obama administration released Laith Qazali after extensive negotiations with the Asaib al-Haq terror network. That network has long been in negotiations with the fledgling Iraqi government, dangling the possibility of laying down its arms, renouncing violence, and integrating into Iraqi society, provided that its top members — particularly Qais and Laith Qazali, as well as Ali Mussa Daquduq — be released. Realizing, however, that these terrorists were responsible for kidnapping and killing American soldiers in gross violation of the laws of war, the Bush administration had declined to release them.

The Obama administration has not only released Laith Qazali, it has been in negotiations to release his brother, Qais Qazali, as well. The negotiations and release were carried out in flagrant disregard of the longstanding policy against exchanging prisoners for the release of hostages. Undermining that policy endangers all American troops and civilian personnel — as well as the troops and civilian personnel of our allies — by encouraging terrorists to kidnap them to use as bargaining chips.

The story of this deal with the devil traces back to May 31, 2007. At the Iraqi finance ministry in Baghdad that day, the Asaib al-Haq network kidnapped five British civilians: an information-technology expert named Peter Moore and his four contract bodyguards. The civilians pleaded for the British government to engineer their safe return. British, American, and Iraqi forces were unsuccessful in numerous rescue attempts.

Asaib al-Haq operatives told Iraqi-government officials that they would release the

Brits in exchange for the Qazali brothers and Daqduq. The Bush administration refused. The Times of London has reported that the Americans gave the British request respectful consideration but declined to approve it absent an Iraqi commitment to prosecute the terrorists. The Iraqis refused. Mohammad al-Sa'ady, an adviser to Iraqi prime minister Nouri al-Maliki, rationalized the decision to take no action against the murderers of Americans who died fighting for Iraqis this way: "We pointed out that Qais Qazali has a problem with the Americans. He doesn't have a problem with us. He is not wanted for crimes against Iraqis."

By contrast, President Obama was persuaded to free Laith Qazali outright, just as Obama previously had authorized the outright release to Britain of the al-Qaeda terrorist Binyam Mohammed, who had plotted with "dirty bomber" José Padilla to commit post-9/11 mass-murder attacks in American cities. And although the administration has attempted to pass off Laith Qazali's release as a necessary compromise of American national interests for the purportedly greater good of Iraqi reconciliation, the camouflage is thin indeed. Transparently, the terrorist has been freed as a quid pro quo for the release of British hostages. According to the New York Times, Sami al-Askari, another Maliki mouthpiece, told an interviewer:

This is a very sensitive topic because you know the position that the Iraqi government, the U.S. and British governments, and all the governments do not accept the idea of exchanging hostages for prisoners. . . . So we put it in another format, and we told them that if they want to participate in the political process they cannot do so while they are holding hostages. And we mentioned to the American side that they cannot join in the political process and release their hostages while their leaders are behind bars or imprisoned.

That President Obama has exchanged a terrorist for hostages is now obvious, as should be the disastrous consequences.

In the wake of Laith Qazali's release, the Asaib al-Haq network was unsatisfied; it continued to demand the release of its leader, Qais Qazali, and that of Daqduq. The terrorists did, however, release two of their British hostages, or, to be precise, their corpses: Jason Creswell of Glasgow and Jason Swindlehurst of Lancashire had been dead for weeks, perhaps longer, when their remains were turned over to the British embassy in Iraq. As the U.K.'s Independent recounted, the bodies had been "taken from an Iraqi government building in the centre of the Iraqi capital by men in police uniform, past army checkpoints and a second security screen into Sadr City, the base of Shia militias, all signs, say the men's families, of official collusion."

Back in May 2008, in a speech before the Israeli Knesset, President Bush derided the "foolish delusion" of unidentified, naïve politicians who "seem to believe we should negotiate with terrorists and radicals, as if some ingenious argument will persuade them they have been wrong all along." Exhibiting a thin-skinned consciousness of guilt, Sen. Barack Obama assumed Bush had been referring to him, and lashed out: "George Bush knows that I have never supported engagement

with terrorists.”

President Obama is now way beyond mere support of such engagement. Under his leadership, and even as the mullahs who have been at war with the United States for 30 years are engaged in a Tiananmen-style crackdown, Obama is neck-deep in terrorist-for-hostages negotiations with Iran-backed killers who have American blood on their hands.

To what end? Other than emboldening terrorists everywhere with the message that the way to gain American concessions is to kidnap Americans and American allies, all we have achieved by freeing a murderer of American soldiers is the retrieval of two British murder victims when we'd been led to believe that all five hostages still were alive. And still there is the implied threat that, if Qais Qazali and Ali Mussa Daqduq are not released soon, the other three British hostages — assuming they are still alive — will be murdered.

The media have had precious little to say about this astounding performance. But I daresay the American people will be outraged if and when the details become known. The Justice Department's effort to release prisoner-abuse photos that were tailor-made for jihadist propaganda was bad enough. But now the Obama administration is both engaging the worst operatives of the most execrable enemy regime and encouraging all terrorists to take more hostages — and even to kill them, since killing hostages plainly doesn't disqualify terrorist organizations from winning valuable concessions.

Finally, one more matter must be considered. Laith Qazali was released on or about June 8. Only days later, four Uighur detainees — who are affiliated with an officially designated terrorist organization and received jihadist training in camps connected to al-Qaeda — were released from Guantanamo Bay and flown to Bermuda. The transfer was effected after secret negotiations between the Obama administration and Bermudian premier Ewart Brown. The deal, as both sides obviously know, appears to be a violation of Bermuda's constitution and an affront to the United Kingdom, which is responsible for Bermuda's security and international relations.

Neither Premier Brown's cabinet nor the people of Bermuda were consulted about the relocation of jihadists to their island. The British government, moreover, has publicly indicated that it was not privy to the transfer, and that it was saddled, instead, with a *fait accompli*. Is this true? While the British foreign office and its governor in Bermuda have assumed a posture of anger, they have also indicated they are resigned to the transfer and will refrain from any action to reverse it.

One theory, inevitably speculative, is that Britain's acceptance of the Uighur transfer is the price the Obama administration exacted for trading an American-killing terrorist for what turned out to be the bodies of two British hostages. If this were the case — and, again, it's just a theory — that would mean that life-saving policies against negotiating with terrorists, or bartering captive

terrorists for hostages, have been abandoned in the service of Obama's reckless commitment to close the Guantanamo Bay detention camp by January.

Where is Congress?

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