THE STRANGE KIDNAPPING OF MARGARET HASSAN

By Matt Bojanovic
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Margaret Hassan was born Margaret Fitzsimmons in Dublin. While a student in London, she met an Iraqi student, Taheen Ali Hassan. They say she was 17, and he was 26. They fell in love, married, and went to live in Iraq in 1972. She took Iraqi citizenship, converted to Islam and learned Arabic, which they say she spoke perfectly, with an Iraqi accent, as if she had been born there.

After the Gulf War of 1991, she became director of Care International in Baghdad. She organized the building of hospitals and undertook the restoration of Iraq's drinking water system, which had been attacked by NATO bombers. It was an impossible task, because of the Western embargo on spare parts and supplies.

Justin Huggler writes in The Independent of November 17:

'When they heard that she had been kidnapped, they came on to the streets of Baghdad in their wheelchairs to demand her release. Children from a school for the deaf came out holding placards demanding the release of "Mama Margaret." "If it wasn't for her, we would probably have died," Ahmed Jubair, a small boy in a wheelchair, said that day. "She built us a hospital and took care of us. She made us feel happy again." There can be few greater epitaphs.'

Charity was not enough to Margaret Hassan; it was not enough to help a few thousands--or even a few millions--of poor unfortunates. She knew whose cluster bombs were putting children in wheelchairs. She knew who had caused the destruction of the infrastructure in Iraq and said it openly, without fear of offending important people in Washington and London. Being a saint was not enough for her, she demanded a bit of justice, real change, in this world, not in the next.

Robert Fisk, after speaking to Margaret Hassan and her assistant, Judy Morgan, wrote in The Independent of November 2, 1998:

'Put very bluntly, the two CARE workers are convinced that they are providing the proverbial useless drop in the ocean, helping to salve consciences - Western consciences - while Iraqis die because of our United Nations sanctions... Ms Hassan suspects that Westerners have somehow humanly divorced themselves from ordinary Iraqis. "I don't think we see them as people," she says. "If you see someone suffering - if you have a grain of humanity in you - you have to respond to that. Sanctions are inhuman and what we are doing cannot redress that inhumanity." '
In January 2003 Margaret Hassan went to New York and to London warning of even worse catastrophes for the Iraqi people. If war came, the country's infrastructure, already severely stressed by the embargo, would have collapsed. At a House of Commons briefing she said: "The Iraqi people are already living through a terrible emergency. They do not have the resources to withstand an additional crisis brought about by military action."

A KIDNAPPING OR AN ARREST?

Margaret Hassan was seized on her way to work on October 19, 2004. Out of the various odd kidnappings of opponents to the war, which had already taken place in Iraq, this was the oddest. From The Independent of October 21 and November 17 we gather that the road was blocked by two cars and that two men in Iraqi police uniforms asked her to come out and talk to them. When she complied, other gunmen appeared, grabbed her, and dragged her driver and her unarmed guard from their seats. They began beating the two men with their guns. "Stop beating them," Mrs. Hassan told them, "I will come with you."

Anyone who has ever observed a robbery and a police raid, may have noticed that cops and robbers do behave a little differently. Cops don't really mind getting noticed. They like to hang out together, and they may linger on and chat, afterwards. Robbers, somehow, just don't like to show off on the job too much.

Robbers and rebels appear to agree that key to success are speed and not attracting attention. On the other hand, in a death squad, in a squad of policemen out of uniform ordered to disappear dissidents, everyone wants to be active, to look busy, to do something useful. There is no resistance, so they start to beat up bystanders a bit. Since you are there, they slam you against the wall a couple of times: it's a little thing, but it's satisfying.

These strange kidnappers did not mind making a scene on the street. They were not in a big rush, and could indulge a favorite pastime, beating people up.

Insurgents sometimes organize the killing of regime collaborators in full view of everyone, in a calm and leisurely fashion. The idea is to cast fear in the hearts of all who consider collaborating with the occupation, and their families. In an execution carried out on a crowded street, the killers want to make it clear that they control the neighborhood and are omnipresent, while the police are fearful and absent.

An execution can be carried out as a theatrical performance, as a human sacrifice, because the script is very simple and the performance takes only seconds. The killers can walk away and disappear into the crowd, or they can drive a couple of blocks, park the car, and split up. Police roadblocks do not present serious danger to an execution squad.
A kidnapping instead must be a very quiet job, to avoid the chance of passers-by or neighbors calling the police with the description of the vehicles involved. A fast getaway is essential, before roadblocks are organized. Every second counts.

The Hassan kidnappers did something worse than waste time at the jobsite beating up people. They did something that one would not expect from people preparing for a very dangerous drive through ordinary police checkpoints, on Baghdad streets patrolled by American forces: they began to shoot in the air.

Iraqi cops are notorious for their propensity to start firing into the air when stuck in a traffic jam. They also shoot in the air just to announce their presence, or to ask bystanders to keep away or move along. In situations where you would expect New York cops to tap the ground with their nightstick or to flick on red light and siren, Baghdad cops just fire off a few shots in the air.

As a retired police officer tells us at http://www.behindthebadge.net/truelife/tl6.html, "when I first started in law enforcement one of the things I enjoyed, was turning on my blue light and siren and then driving fast. There was a sense of power and excitement every time an emergency call came in."

Later he learned that it was dangerous to run very fast with his light on, because civilians might act unpredictably. But as a young cop he loved to put on a light and sound show. That's why Iraqi cops can't resist the impulse of firing in the air, in any confrontation. It gives them a comforting feeling, a semblance of power and control, over a very scary environment.

GETTING TOUGH ON THE BRITS

The kidnappers of Margaret Hassan behaved in a manner remarkably similar to the standard behavior of the Allawi police, as reported in the British press. In The Telegraph of August 16, we read:

'The police chief delivered a blunt warning: journalists had two hours to leave Najaf or face arrest... official explanation for the decision was that police guarding the hotel had found 550 lb of dynamite in a car nearby. That seems unlikely... A deputation of journalists was denied an audience with Najaf's governor, Adnan al-Zurufi. The policeman outside his office was brusque. "If you do not leave by the deadline we will shoot you," he said. That was enough for all but a handful of British and American journalists who hunkered down in the hotel as the deadline expired. As night fell, shots were fired at the roof of the hotel, from where reporters file their stories.'

The British daily The Independent of August 17 2004 reports from Najaf:
'A police lieutenant arrived at the hotel at 6.30pm ...As journalists protested, the lieutenant said above the hubbub: "We are going to open fire on this hotel. We are going to smash it up. I will kill you all. You did this all to yourselves." ...He said four snipers would be positioned on the roof of the police station to fire at any journalists who left the hotel....The police then drove off, stopping 300 meters down the road and fired warning shots in the direction of the hotel.'

On August 26 we seem to still have the same police problem. Reuters reports as follows: "Journalists were just eating dinner and suddenly the police appeared in the lobby and started firing in the air...when the police fired, one just missed a western cameraman. The brick pieces from the wall came flying at us after the bullet hit."

*The Guardian* reports:

'Police moved into the lobby of the Sea of Najaf hotel at 9.15pm last night... they fired shots into the air... Journalists from Arab and other international media, including the entire BBC team, as well as *The Guardian, The Independent, Times* and *Daily Telegraph*, were pushed into a truck, which was driven off to Najaf's police station where the local chief of police, Ghalib al-Jazae'ri, said he was incensed by media reports [on the situation in Najaf]... The police officer who burst into the *Guardian*'s room, wearing a balaclava and pointing a Kalashnikov, said in Arabic: "We're going to fuck the lot of you." '

Clearly, the Allawi regime finds it very difficult to tolerate the presence of neutral observers. Iraqi officials seem to dislike Westerners in general. They seem barely able to control their rage, even towards reporters from outfits generally recognized to be pro-war, like *The Times* and *The Telegraph*.

**PSYCHOPATHS IN BAGHDAD**

In a report published in *The Oregonian* of August 7, we read that on June 29, 2004, a soldier of the Oregon National Guard, surveying the area from a tall building, spotted a bit of torture going on in a courtyard near the Interior Ministry. The battalion commander, Lt.-Col. Daniel Hendrickson, led the guardsmen in. They found many prisoners who said they had been deprived of food and water for three days. Many of these prisoners had bruises and cuts and belt or hose marks all over. At least one had a gunshot wound to the knee.

Officers and men of that outfit were decent people. They were under the impression that torture was no longer the cool thing to do in democratic Iraq, after the Abu Ghraib photo brouhaha. Somehow, they believed that the "shock and dismay" felt in Washington was over the realization that there was torture in Iraq, not over the embarrassment of photos
falling in the wrong hands.

The soldiers took the handcuffs off the prisoners, moved them into the shade, and gave them water. These were 150 men who had been rounded up in one neighborhood, in an "anti-crime raid" which netted "a collection of immigrants and poor Iraqis." The guards said that "these prisoners were all dangerous criminals and most were thieves, users of marijuana and other types of bad people."

Captain Southall said 'one prisoner claimed the Iraqi police arrested him at a market and confiscated his passport even though he had "paid a tremendous bribe" to the arresting officer. Others, many of whom appeared to be non-Arab shopkeepers and workers, said they had been detained for lack of proper identification.'

Lt.-Col. Daniel Hendrickson called for instructions. As the soldiers waited, Southall said, the Iraqi policemen began to get "defiant and hostile" toward the Americans. After a while, headquarters ordered the soldiers to leave.

Earlier, Hendrickson had demanded to speak to the man in charge. A "well-dressed ... man" came forward and said "there was no prisoner abuse and that everything was under control and they were trying to conduct about 150 investigations as soon as possible."

The rulers in Baghdad are worried. They are seen with contempt by their subjects. They are ex-Baathists. The policemen they hired are former Saddam Hussein cops. The officers are former Saddam Hussein officers. They all have contempt for their Iraqi subjects and hatred for their foreign masters.

We can safely assume that the policemen mentioned by The Oregonian would have been delighted with the opportunity to capture and brutalize a foreigner. Those cops would have seen Margaret Hassan as someone on whom to vent their feelings of humiliation about having had to take orders from foreigners, sometimes.

HOSTAGE DRESS CODE: HANDCUFFS OPTIONAL

To tie prisoners in a painful position is a normal Coalition practice, officially approved. It is not torture. It is not torture because we do not do torture.

Rebels in Iraq seem quite assured of the support of the population. They believe that their prisoners would not get far if they tried to escape. One of those who captured the four Italian "contractors" explains in the Sunday Times of June 27 that the prisoners were not tied up or even locked up in their room.

The three freed "contractors" and the Polish engineer Jerzy Kos did have complaints, but those were over food, not over being painfully tied up or mistreated.
In *The Telegraph* of August 14, 2004 the British reporter James Brandon, taken from his hotel in Basra, explains that the kidnapping had been very unpleasant, but that "once they learned I was a journalist I was treated very well."

That was the experience of dozens of reporters detained by initially very threatening and aggressive insurgents. They were held for periods varying from minutes for documents check, to eight days for the American Micah Garen and his interpreter, Amir Doshe, released August 22 in Nasiryah.

The French reporter Georges Malbrunot, held for four months, reports that his colleague Christian Chesnot got slapped by his interrogator when, shown a photo of General Kimmitt, he denied that he knew who the general was. They had just taken off his blindfold and did not know that without his glasses Mr. Chesnot couldn't see a thing; they thought he was trying to get smart with them.

The Salafists who took two Italian aid workers, Simona Pari and Simona Torretta tied them only during their trip from Baghdad to their jail, and untied them upon arrival. When the blindfolded prisoners were moved, the guards would lead them by the tunic's arm, never touching them. After the interrogations were over, in a couple of days, blindfolds were also removed.

On October 28 The Salafist Brigades of Abu Baker Siddiq kidnapped Teresa Borcz Khalifa, a Polish woman who had married an Iraqi and had lived in Iraq for 30 years. She appeared in front of the flag of the group, while one of her captors read a statement. She was not tied up. She was freed and appeared at a press conference in Warsaw on November 21. She said: "They treated me decently... I was held in a small, very clean room, newly painted. I was well fed, and I was given plenty of water and toiletries... the abduction was very quick -- it was very well organized."

The guerrillas seem to have a very relaxed attitude about restraining prisoners, even when the prisoners appear to be paramilitaries, such as Scott Taylor or the four Italian "contractors." It seems that they mostly tie up prisoners during transfers and before execution.

Ken Bigley appeared chained and behind bars only in his last video. There was no such escalation in the treatment of Margaret Hassan, who appeared distressed and in a state of "painful positioning" from the first day.

A video released on November 12 showed Margaret Hassan passing out on camera. A bucket of water was then thrown over her. She was filmed lying wet and helpless on the ground before getting up and crying. The video was received but was deemed to be too horrifying to be aired on Al-Jazeera.
The rebels insist that they kill prisoners only when the Coalition rejects a prisoner exchange. They had never brutalized prisoners in their videos simply because it was not in their interest. The clear threat to kill their prisoners was sufficient to put pressure on government and public opinion of the occupying countries; humiliating prisoners would have been counterproductive to the image of the rebels.

The bucket of water is what you would expect at the police station, when you pass out during interrogation. Would a non-professional interrogator for the rebels think of the bucket of water as a tool for crushing the spirit of a prisoner? Perhaps, but in the Iraqi context it seemed strange, the rebels had never done it before. More important, why would Islamic guerrillas have wanted to crush the spirit of a Muslim convert who for years had raised her voice against the rulers in Washington and London?

Could this desire to crush and humiliate have been just the normal reflex behavior that kicks in when Iraqi policemen have a prisoner in their hands? With the added pleasure that here they had the opportunity to crush and humiliate a Westerner?

HOW DO REAL REBELS TREAT THEIR PRISONERS?

Would real rebels have used "painful positioning" and the bucket of water treatment in the course interrogating Margaret Hassan?

Mohammed al-Joundi, the driver/fixer of the French reporters was accused by enraged rebels of being an American spy, hired to spy on the French reporters. They actually had a reason for believing that. He had in his car a photomontage--there is some stupid joke--that placed his own son next to U.S. Army General Kimmitt. He was kept for three months. When Fallujah was surrounded on November 10, his jailers suggested that they all swim across the Euphrates. He explained he could not swim, so they left him behind. He said he was not mistreated.

The worst treated hostages ever released, who a couple of times came very close to being executed, were two reporters, Canadian Scott Taylor and Turkish Zeynep Tugrul. They entered northern Iraq from Turkey on September 7 and were detained in Tal Afar, a Turkmen city. They arrived just hours before an expected American attack. The rebels thought they were spies on a reconnaissance mission.

Scott Taylor tells us at http://www.espritdecorps.ca/new_page_243.htm:

'Two men were questionnig me. In what seemed like a bad Hollywood comedy, someone started up a generator outside...the lights came back on and the two interrogators clumsily tried to pull their ski masks back on before I could recognize their faces.
With the tension broken, the one who had identified himself as "Emir" [commander]... actually started to laugh and left his mask off. This man had been among the group that had taken us at the police checkpoint. "Sleep now and I will check your story. If you are telling the truth, we will release you - if not, you die," he said.

...[The next day, at first] they had been very strict in enforcing the rules. I was to sit on a broken chair in the middle of my cell. However, as the temperature rose to a 45° Celsius [112F] and my sun-baked room turned into an oven, they had compassionately allowed me to venture outside. By nightfall everyone was so relaxed that Zeynep and I sat eating dinner and talking to our guards. The young boy [a fifteen-year-old] stated that his only ambition in life was to "die a martyr." Shortly past dark, the Emir returned and informed that he had confirmed that we were not spies. He gave a "Muslim promise" to set us free in the morning.'

The Emir was killed in battle that night, and left a power vacuum. As each group of fighters went into battle, the two reporters were transferred from one band to another. Various groups of fighters tried to get the reporters to confess by mistreating and beating them.

IN THE HANDS OF THE AXIS OF EVIL

One group that held them was composed of Iraqi Arabs, not Turkmen, and belonged to Ansar al-Islam, accused of being the famous missing link in the Saddam-Bin Laden Axis of Evil. Neither Taylor nor Tugrul understood Arabic. The reporters' position was now weaker, since all their documentation had been destroyed when a house had collapsed under American fire.

The international press had already discussed the presence of Mossad in northern Iraq. The new interrogators were less intelligent and worldly than the Emir. They were convinced to have in their hands "a Mossad agent from America." It was difficult to disprove that, since Taylor had to admit to being from the North American continent and to having been in the military.

Scott Taylor is the editor of the Canadian military journal Esprit de Corps. It's true that he had written against Canada's participation in the war on Iraq, but this was Tal Afar, an ancient city of mud houses, a place of medieval appearance. For your average jihadi warrior in Tal Afar, Scott Taylor had all the traits of an American spy.

The greatest danger came from the presence of combatants who intended to seek martyrdom that very evening, fighting against American airpower. They had no chance, but here was the opportunity to take along, into the next world, at least one of their enemies.
Released after five days of captivity, Scott Taylor (ST) tells us in an interview with Chris Deliso (CD) at http://www.antiwar.com/deliso/?articleid=3606:

'ST: Perhaps the strangest thing of all was the juxtaposition of brutal terrorist tactics with this sweet Middle Eastern hospitality. In between the beatings they would treat us very well. They never denied me water, and as the guests, we would be served dinner before them. And good dinners too, I might add.

CD: That must have been very disconcerting.

ST: Indeed. I remember on Thursday night, there was a cool breeze coming in from the window, and I was lying on my side, pretending to sleep. I noticed the terrorist who had been assigned to guard me get up and walk over toward me... I was afraid it was time for more beatings.

But you know what the guy does? He reaches around and pulls the blanket up on me, as you would for a kid; apparently, he thought I might be cold from the window. So this kind of diametrically opposed behavior was really confusing. Even though they were bloodthirsty militants, they did have a human side to them.

I mean, even when they're threatening, "You're going to die, this is your last supper," they're beaming because they've given you the best part of the chicken!

Of course, for them dying is a wonderful thing. So the mindset is like, "I'm giving you the best part of the chicken and I'm going to kill you - what the hell else do you want?"

A STRANGE, SUDDEN CHANGE

So how do the most deadly rebels in Iraq behave with their prisoners? In a barbarous, generous, violent, nice, brutal, and gentle manner....even in the midst of battle.

What do they want from prisoners? They suspect them to be American spies and want confessions. Until now, it seems that the most brutal rebel interrogators have not tried to humiliate and crush the spirit of prisoners. Except in the case of Margaret Hassan.

When one of the Italian "contractors" was murdered, he was not a tortured, crushed man. We have a pretty good idea of what went on in the kidnappers' jail from the words of his freed companions, from the murder video, and from one of his jailers, Abu Yussuf, as told to Hala Jaber on The Sunday Times of June 27 2004.

We are asked to believe that suddenly the rebels lost all their inhibitions and turned sadistic. - as sadistic as Saddam Hussein policemen. Not towards the captured foreign mercenaries, no, towards one of the strongest voices raised in defense of Iraq, towards the
one who had gone to New York and had spoken at the United Nations against the bellicose plans of Bush and Blair.

We are asked to believe that the Islamists have suddenly turned on converts to Islam, an unheard of attitude. We are asked to believe that they have abandoned all their traditions, just to humiliate a distinguished lady who had spoken for Iraq at the House of Commons, in a desperate attempt to block Allawi's game plan to go back to Baghdad in an American tank.

ADVERTISING THE "SECRET SPECIAL SECTION"

All groups that take hostages seek publicity, especially on Arabic TV networks. The publicity obtained when they take Western prisoners is the easiest way for Iraqi insurgent groups to make their name known in the Arab world, as well as in the West. Being known brings new recruits and financial contributions. Remaining unknown has no advantage.

Every previous hostage video indicated the name or symbol of the group involved, but the kidnappers of Margaret Hassan decided to remain unknown and unnamed. They were a "Secret Special Section," so secretive and so special that they behaved unlike any known Iraqi insurgent group.

Videos released by rebel groups usually include nationalist or religious slogans. Usually masked armed men read a manifesto, detailing their motivations and objectives. A flag or symbol of the group is usually in evidence.

Tawhid wal Jihad shows its black flag on its videos and hangs it on destroyed American tanks. When the destroyed tank appears on television, children and young men become familiar with the flag as a symbol of competence and success. During battles in Baghdad, their black flag flew from palm trees. The flag is a tool for recruiting sympathizers, contributors, couriers, and fighters.

The kidnappers of Margaret Hassan felt no need for a flag, a symbol, a motto, or a slogan. They wanted to remain indefinable.

CHANTS AND GOOD ARGUMENTS TO KILL YOUR OWN

Execution videos are usually accompanied by religious invocations or the chanting of Koranic verses. Not in the case of Margaret Hassan. Killing is a difficult task, especially for untrained non-professionals. Abu Yussuf, who filmed the execution of the Italian "contractor" Fabrizio Quattrocchi, had been opposed to killing him, but had to follow orders.
Hala Jaber, as she tells in The Sunday Times, asked Abu Yussuf how he could bear to watch a defenseless man being killed. "I have never done this before," he said. "But then I too started to call 'Allahu akbar' and my Islamic beliefs reminded me of my mission."

In the final video announcing her execution, no explanation was offered as to why Margaret Hassan was thought to be in the enemy camp. There had been an outpouring of love for Margaret Hassan in Baghdad; a group aspiring to recruit for jihad would have tried to explain the reasons for killing a known enemy of the embargo, the war, and the occupation.

At least they would have shown themselves stupidly certain of their perceived paranoiac reality, like the primitives of the Islamic Army, who declare themselves proud of having executed the "Italian agent" Enzo Baldoni. They would have stated that they had proof she was a spy for London, that she was a Christian just pretending to be a Muslim.

Especially when they have access to mass media, believers never miss the opportunity to make themselves heard. Believers always explain, always try to justify their most absurd ideas, their most barbarous acts.

No, these were not believers. Recruiting for Jihad was not their aim. They had no plan, no proposal, and no propaganda message. They did not even deny that Margaret Hassan was one of their own, an Iraqi Muslim. They acted as if they had just wanted to offend Iraqis and Muslims everywhere. If that was their intention, it worked out fine, since the most common reaction in the Arab world was to call the killing "un-Islamic."

HELLO, AL-Z, WE HAVE A LITTLE PRESENT FOR YOU

Black psy-ops are operations whose intent is to deceive or influence the enemy. The target can be the enemy armed forces or population. The target is also public opinion, local, worldwide or even in one's own country. Historically, such operations are common. During the Indochina war, government forces would occasionally dress up in guerrilla outfits and terrorize an area, hoping to turn the population against the rebels.

According to a BBC report dated November 2, 2004, "gunmen holding hostage Margaret Hassan said they would hand her to militant Abu Musab al-Zarqawi if British troops do not leave Iraq within 48 hours. The warning was made by a hooded figure on a video broadcast on the Arabic TV station Al-Jazeera."

That was an unusual threat, since in the Arab world al-Zarqawi is believed to be dead. His death in action was announced on March 4, 2004, in a letter signed by a dozen rebel groups.

This was the second time in the course of a month that an "al-Zarqawi" presence had
been felt at a kidnapping of pacifists in Iraq. According to "voices" heard at a séance organized by Coalition intelligence for The Sunday Times, al-Zarqawi had proposed to purchase two young Italian anti-war aid workers for "much more" than 4 million dollars. http://www.traprockpeace.org/targeting_pacifists_iraq.htm

When they say "al-Zarqawi," we must recall that the Bad Guys say he is dead, while none of the Good Guys have spotted him in years. When they summon the useful ghost of al-Zarqawi, we know they are talking of Abu Rashid, the emir who ordered the death of Nick Berg.

Abu Rashid is tough, but he is a woossie in comparison to the "Secret Special Section" boys. Abu Rashid had told Sara Daniel in Le Nouvel Observateur of August 4: "We ... kidnap... to put pressure on the countries that help ... the Americans.. It's not a good thing to behead, but it's a method that works... I tried to negotiate an exchange of prisoners for Nick Berg, but the Americans turned me down."

Abu Rashid does not like to cut off heads. Worse, Abu Rashid attacks only the occupiers and those who help them. Indeed, he says he released Angelo de la Cruz, the Filipino truck driver, when his government pulled its soldiers out of Iraq. He released Angelo even though the Filipino government is still fighting against Islamic rebels back home.

Ireland is not helping the Coalition, so there is no doubt that Abu Rashid would have released Margaret Hassan. A strange threat indeed, turning her over to "al-Zarqawi."

Even mentioning "al-Zarqawi" as friend of theirs, to whom they want to give Margaret Hassan as a present, is odd. Why would they want to give publicity to a group they are in competition with, and no publicity at all, not even a name or a flag, to their own "Secret Special Section"?

Which rebel group has ever respectfully mentioned a competing rebel group in their own communiqué? Which rebels have ever pointed out another group as more dedicated, more combative, fiercer, and deadlier than themselves?

THE REAL JIHADIS ARE NOT AMUSED

According to The Independent of October 25, commanders of five separate guerrilla groups in Fallujah said they were not holding Margaret Hassan. The emir, or commander, of one group of Iraqi insurgents in Fallujah told Reuters reporters: "This woman works for a humanitarian organization. She should not have been kidnapped. She had been living in Iraq for 30 years and she was a humanitarian. The resistance did not kidnap her because this would have left a bad impression of the resistance in the world."
Tawhid wal Jihad recently changed its name to "al-Qaeda Group in the Land of Two Rivers" as the land of Iraq is known. On November 7 they published a statement saying:

"We call on those responsible for her captivity to release her unless she is proven to be a collaborator. If this is proven, they should show it clearly to people lest our religion is accused of things that are not true... [If delivered to us] we will release her immediately unless she is proven to have conspired against Muslims... These people who are using this prisoner as a playing card didn't know our religion very well...We only kill those who fight us and kill our people. In true Islam, they don't kill women and young children."

DID BLAIR WANT HER DEAD?

Deirdre Fitzsimmons, sister of Margaret, issued a plea to her kidnappers. "We are the Irish family of Margaret and we are pleading with you to set her free. We have listened to your demands and begged Tony Blair and the British government to release the women prisoners," she said. "But we are Irish and we have no influence on the British government."

Prime Minister Tony Blair wasted no time to present himself as sponsor and protector of Margaret Hassan. He said: "I think it shows you the type of people we are up against that they were prepared to kidnap somebody like this." At the House of Commons Blair said, "We are doing what we can to secure her release." He praised Margaret Hassan, he praised her work.

The Foreign Office spokesman chose to advertise the fact that besides being an Irish and Iraqi citizen, Margaret Hassan also holds British citizenship. He was quoted in The Independent of October 25 as saying: "We are working closely with the Iraqi authorities to secure Margaret's release."

Everything possible was said to impress upon the rebels the idea that Margaret Hassan was British and dear to the British government, going as far as calling her by her first name, as if she had been one of them... as if she had not spoken with contempt about their policies and their murderous behavior towards Iraq.

Here is the response of friends and co-workers in Baghdad, as reported by The Independent of October 21: "There is a lot of unhappiness here among people in Care about what is being said in London. We feel that all this talk about the British Government getting involved will send bad signals to the people holding her. This makes the whole thing political... This is not helpful and it could hurt her."

Assuming that her kidnappers were ignorant Iraqi rebels, Tony Blair did his level best to convince them to kill her.
PUNISH FRANCE, IGNORE GERMANY, FORGIVE RUSSIA

That lapidary phrase was proclaimed by National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, to control incipient rebellion among her restive European business partners.

The leaders of most European countries did want to join the American "cakewalk" into Iraq. The leaders knew that, win or lose, war could not fail to make them rich. They wanted this war even though their subjects were opposed, and by overwhelming majorities.

The problem was that NATO was controlled by a council, and that members had veto power. It had in recent years agreed to adventures into Yugoslavia and Afghanistan. This time, however, a couple of elder council members, lacking the proper understanding of the principles of managed democracy, seemed impervious to pressure, threats, and bribes. Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld justly referred to them as "Old Europe", and compared them less than favorably to a daring and prosperous "New Europe"--Latvia, Estonia, Slovakia, etc.

The Old Europeans insisted on following the old-fashioned rules of George Washington that "a wise govt. will never, in a free country go to War against the feelings of the People--but it will often refuse to go to war to indulge the heat of the public mind."

It was proposed that the Europeans could be sucked into the war by degrees. The idea was that when Yanks and Brits attacked Iraq, the Iraqis might shoot back at the invaders and hit Turkey. The missiles of course would have been Iraqi even if they came from the sea--no problem, we can fix such minor details. If NATO aircraft and missiles were there already, then NATO forces would have been "under attack." In this way NATO was to be dragged into the war and the occupation, and all in self-defense against Iraqi aggression.

Secretary of State Colin Powell sounded hurt and saddened as he insisted that "NATO has an obligation under its charter to aid a member nation that feels threatened." Three NATO allies had objected. As www.newsmax.com reported on February 10, 2003, "NATO was plunged into its deepest crisis for decades Monday after France, Germany and Belgium vetoed a U.S. request to provide military assistance to Turkey in the event of an attack by neighboring Iraq."

PUNISH BELGIUM...

On October 27 a new video appeared on Al Jazeera with Margaret Hassan pleading for Great Britain to withdraw troops and for Care International to stop operations in Iraq. Care, which is based in Belgium, obeyed immediately.

They want us to believe that the Islamists were displeased with an organization that had
helped deliver clean drinking water to millions of Iraqis. An organization based in the small NATO country that dared to challenge Allawi and Washington, an organization run by an Irishwoman, one who had converted to Islam. One who had defended Iraq at the United Nations and at the Chamber of Commons. An Irishwoman who had access to the Western press, and who would have certainly spoken without fear again... a dangerous woman, but not to the Islamists.

Patriotic suspension of disbelief is getting ever more difficult.

The Islamists had no issues with Care International, and certainly no issues with Belgium, a country that had never colonized a Muslim country. Prime Minister Allawi did have issues with Belgium, the only small European country that had dared to join the Paris-Berlin "Axis of Weasels."

Prime Minister Allawi had shown himself to be very emotional about countries that refuse to support his plans. He had already challenged France, in a rather truculent manner. His predictions that there would be terrorist attacks "in Paris, in Cannes, in Nice" had caused the cancellation of a visit to France by the Iraqi president. When a reputed car bomb expert like Allawi has visions of terrorist attacks, people get nervous.

Expelling Care from Iraq may have been an afterthought, a petty gesture of revenge, of the kind that would have given satisfaction to a statesman of the rank of Caligula or Caracalla. Temporary insanity is not unusual in the high spheres of power.

To quote from the announcement of the first political society in Philadelphia in 1793, "there is a disposition in the human mind to tyrannize when clothed with power."

Richard Barnet observed that the Founding Fathers believed that "wielding unchecked power is an unhinging experience for ordinary mortals."

It appears that Prime Minister Allawi may have come unhinged. To history he will leave the aphorism "Punish Belgium, ignore Monaco, forgive the Vatican."

THREE CHOICES

Here is the theory behind the kidnappings: the rebels capture some poor guy, one of the Willing, and demand that his government withdraw its soldiers or accept a prisoner exchange. The prisoners whose government refuses to deal, get killed.

The calculation is that, sooner or later, families will turn against the war out of fear of seeing their son or husband in a cage, pleading for his life. As a result, the ranks of the Coalition of the Willing are being thinned out.

A nasty but sensible plan with a minor difficulty, in the Hassan case: how do you get the
It's possible that illiterate villagers somewhere in the desert may believe that if you speak English properly you are English, it's possible they may not know the difference between England and Ireland. However, Margaret Hassan had been accepted in her adoptive country as an Iraqi and as a Muslim--Muslims are as pleased to convert you as any Christian missionary. She spoke Arabic, she could have explained herself. At that point real rebels would have understood they made a mistake and would have made a call to Baghdad. They could have offered to release her to a high envoy of the Red Cross, thus creating excellent publicity for themselves.

Alternatively, they could have asked for ransom, which would certainly have been paid, by Europeans or by Iraqis, not by London. Premier Berlusconi paid millions for his prisoners, out of his own pocket, and Delta Force had to stage a fake raid to fool the world into believing that "we do not negotiate with terrorists."

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The third alternative, killing a hostage from the wrong country, would have guaranteed the enmity of the other factions of the resistance. The "Secret Special Section" boys who took Margaret Hassan were running the risk of being pursued like mad dogs by the other factions of the resistance, as soon as they were found out.

This entire story simply does not fit with realities on the ground.
THE PUZZLE IS SOLVED

If we propose that the rebels of the "Secret Special Section" are policemen, every odd detail of the event, every piece of the puzzle falls into place.

The killers described themselves as "an armed Islamic group." The idea was to pin on the rebels in general an act abhorred by all Iraqis. They chose no name for themselves in order to tarnish the image of all groups.

They proposed turning her over to "al-Zarqawi" because Tawhid wal Jihad, the group that claims to be inspired by al-Zarqawi, is the most successful insurgent group so far. Mentioning is a form of endorsement: the idea was to associate the murder to all groups, but to Tawhid wal Jihad in particular.

This was also a ploy to make Westerners see the war as a necessary crusade against evil, and to create a bad image for the rebellion, even in Iraq. Margaret Hassan was one of the few Westerners whose killing could have made Iraqis hate the killers.
The rebels had never killed a woman hostage; to remedy the rebels' inaction, the Prime Minister picked one of his enemies as sacrificial victim. The Prime Minister knows how important it is to instill fear in all possible opponents. Margaret Hassan had tried to block his rise to power with all her loose talk at the United Nations and at the Chamber of Commons; she had to be punished.

This was a win-win situation: Iraqis who believed the official story of the Hassan murder would react with contempt for the rebels, Iraqis who disbelieved it would have come to fear Allawi even more.

The assault on Fallujah was expected to involve a high level of unpleasantness, as indeed it did. It would have been real cool to be able to deflect the attention of Western public opinion from the horrors that one would expect in an attack on a city that has become a "free fire zone." The official expression in the current war is "no go zone."

Prime Minister Allawi foresaw the need and ordered the operation, which came to coincide with the bloodiest battle of the war, in which much of Fallujah was razed to the ground.

A FRESH BLOOD TRAIL TAKES US TO A MAD BOMBER

This was not the first black psy-op for the Prime Minister. There is reason to believe that the Allawi regime created a fake American document, which was passed to the rebels. All four people who had organized aid convoys to Fallujah and Najaf, when they were under siege by the Coalition, were kidnapped, over the course of a few weeks.

Maurizio Scelli, chief of the Italian Red Cross, negotiated the release of Simona Pari and Simona Torretta, Italian aid workers who had delivered drinking water to Fallujah and Najaf. Scelli explained that they "were considered spies since their names appeared on a list that it seems originated from the offices of American secret services and identified them, according to the Iraqis, as espionage elements.... the two young women were tied to Baldoni and to Ghareeb."

Ghareeb was a Palestinian who organized aid convoys to Fallujah and Najaf, when they were under siege. Enzo Baldoni, a very committed anti-war Italian reporter, had been an essential intermediary in the organization of aid convoys to Najaf.

According to the Italian Red Cross chief, Ghareeb "was indicated as a Palestinian spy who in some way was working also for the Israelis. His death seems an execution." Enzo Baldoni, was also executed.

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How dare we suggest that the Prime Minister of Iraq may be involved in removing his critics? He is clearly unstable and unable to take criticism. He was unable to keep himself from reacting to French aloofness in a truculent manner. His pattern of thinking has not changed since the good old days when he was an agent of the Mukhabarat of Saddam Hussein.

Consideration of his criminal record shows him clearly capable of killing the innocent, at random, just to show off to Washington his criminal ability and competence. As reported by *The New York Times*, he led a bombing campaign against soft targets in Baghdad in 1994 and 1995.

Bombs against a school bus, in a mosque, in a movie house, a car bomb in front of the offices of a newspaper, about 100 victims, is that sufficient to award Allawi the distinction of being a man without problems of conscience? The only problem mentioned in the article is that headquarters in London had promised the bomb technicians $2000 per bomb, but had sent them only $1000.

From the original story, on which the *New York Times* story is based, we learn that on one occasion the bomber in Baghdad complained about being paid with forged dollar bills. It seems that the Allawi Gang in London had pocketed the real greenbacks and had sent some homemade ones to Iraq. Certainly no one would dare to suggest that Bill Clinton might have sent forged American currency to his boys in London.

The Prime Minister is much admired by his police officers. They know him as a man capable of taking the initiative and to give a good example, as when he killed six or seven prisoners in Baghdad, all by himself. He is a capable man, capable of anything.

The Prime Minister was the person most likely to profit from the killing of Margaret Hassan. We have motive, means, and opportunity. We have evidence of bodies buried in his basement. No live witnesses in this latest case, but a fresh blood trail leads to his doorsteps. Will that be sufficient to impanel a grand jury?