

Prisoner abuse colors world reaction to beheading

Some critics of America believe Nicholas Berg's beheading is a justified response to U.S. abuses

By Tom Hundley
Chicago Tribune (KRT)

LONDON — The abuse of Iraqi prisoners is causing staunch U.S. allies to re-examine their relationship with the Bush administration and is providing fresh and dramatic evidence for America's critics.

The scandal has even muted the worldwide response to the beheading of an American citizen in Iraq, with some people saying that the killing of businessman Nicholas Berg was an understandable retaliation for U.S. actions in Iraq.

German and French officials and citizens express vindication for their decision to stay out of the Iraq war, and they are beginning to question their overall security relationship with the United States, analysts said. In Poland, the abuse scandal has deepened the unease about their military participation in the occupation.

Young Chinese nationalists have

seized on the events to heap abuse on the United States.

"This is the real America ruled by Bush," wrote a participant in one of China's largest Internet chat rooms. "This ugly behavior exposes the reality of so-called democracy and freedom."

The abuse scandal colored reaction Wednesday to the decapitation of Berg, whose slaying by masked militants was broadcast on the Internet.

The Mexico City newspaper Reforma ran a front-page photo of Berg and his executioners with the headline: "Between the law ... and the law of retaliation."

The implication, that Berg's killing was eye for an eye, was in keeping with the dominant view in Mexico that the U.S. has brought its troubles upon itself.

Arab newspapers conspicuously played down the killing.

"In normal circumstances, I could condemn the slaughtering of the American, but we are living in abnormal circumstances. I cannot condemn it now," said Egyptian columnist Nour al-Huda Zaki of Al-Arabi, who told The Associated Press that most Arab newspapers would avoid any coverage that implicitly condemned the beheading.

"We know such actions won't help the Iraqis. It won't liberate them."

Hamed Abdulkareem
Gaza City resident

A notable exception was in Kuwait, where several newspapers covered the Berg slaying on the front page.

The three major Palestinian newspapers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip ran wire stories on the beheading on their front pages but added no comment and published no photos.

"We know such actions won't help the Iraqis. It won't liberate them," said Hamed Abdulkareem, 36, of Gaza City. "The Iraqis will show themselves to be like Abu Sayyaf," he said, referring to the radical Muslim group of the Philippines, "and no one will sympathize them."

But Sawzan Al-Masri, a 24-year-old Gaza mother of one, smiled when asked about the beheading.

"He deserved it," she said of Berg. "Do you think what the Americans did to the detainees was less ugly?" Some Arabs deplored the Berg killing

mainly because it diverted attention from the abuse at Abu Ghraib prison, AP reported.

"Such revenge is rejected," said Mustafa Bakri, editor of Al-Osboa weekly newspaper in Egypt. "The American administration will make use of such crimes just to cover their real crimes against Iraqis."

The charge of America hypocrisy has been leveled as well in Turkey, where the government has supported the U.S. but most Turks have opposed the war. Some parliamentarians have been particularly harsh toward of Bush.

"Ordinary Turks were appalled at the abuse of the Iraqi prisoners and later by the murder of the American businessman," said Omer Madra, founder of Open Radio, an Istanbul station. "But they are not surprised. The Turkish population is aware of a certain double standard ... that while the U.S. preaches democracy and human rights, it does not always practice them."

The worldwide outrage over the abuse complicates the Bush administration's efforts to get other countries more involved.

U.S. diplomats express fear that member nations of Bush's "coalition of the willing" will find Iraq to be more

trouble than it is worth. Hopes of getting NATO involved this summer have all but expired.

Members of Britain's Parliament are demanding that Prime Minister Tony Blair withdraw British troops. And fresh opinion polls indicate that only 28 percent of Britons think their troops should remain in Iraq.

Government officials or opposition politicians in Portugal, Hungary and the Netherlands have raised doubts about their continued participation.

Portuguese Prime Minister Jose Durao Barroso, whose country's contribution to the occupation consists of 128 police officers, said: "You cannot, in the name of the struggle against terrorism and for the sake of freedom, contravene the very values and principles on which that struggle is based."

(Chicago Tribune correspondents Tom Hundley in London, Michael A. Lev in Beijing, Hugh Dellios in Mexico City, Laurie Goering in Johannesburg, Gary Marx in Havana, Michael McGuire in Rome, Catherine Collins in Istanbul and Mohammed al Waheidi in Gaza City contributed to this report.) (c) 2004, Chicago Tribune. Distributed by Knight Ridder/Tribune Information Services.

PIERCY

continued from page 1

addressing that, too, and I'm more than willing to continue to work with student organizations on that," she said.

She said students are an important part of Eugene.

"I just think we owe our students a lot of respect, attention to their issues and inviting them to the table for all the discussions that affect them in our community," she said.

Piercy said she is also a proponent for education.

"I taught school for 20 years, so certainly I draw on my understanding of how important education is for kids and how to meet the needs of families in our community," she said.

Jennifer DeMuth, Lane County field organizer for the Oregon League of Conservation Voters, said her organization supports Piercy because of her proven record on environmental issues.

"We interviewed both candidates

and we feel confident that Kitty Piercy will be a strong leader for Eugene's water, air and open spaces," she said.

Scott Landfield, co-owner of Tsunami Books in Eugene, said Piercy's progressive stance appeals to him.

"It's time for a fresh vision here in town," he said. "Her emphasis on recruiting environmentally friendly businesses ... is day and night with the present regime."

Bart Lewis, a University employee and member of the Service Employees International Union Local 503, said

Piercy has always been a friend of education and has worked to secure a living wage for Oregon workers.

"For those of us here on campus, she's always been someone we admire for all the work she's done and how she's helped us," he said.

Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757 Executive Board Officer Carol Allred said her organization also supports Piercy because of her experience as a legislator and her work for a sufficient minimum wage.

"We've got to get people a living

wage in this area and I believe she's the gal who will help us do that," she said.

Piercy said she is ready to take on the mayoral role with her vision for Eugene.

"We've spent a lot of time saying we're not a good community to do business in or we're combative," she said. "We are full of creative, forward thinking creative people. We have a lot to be proud of."

Contact the city/state politics reporter at parkerhowell@dailyemerald.com.

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