

Giuliana Sgrena Shooting: ‘Trigger-Happy’ Troops or Attempted Assassination?

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They knew an Italian car was coming”, said senior Il Manifesto editor Roberto Zanini, speaking to me from the Rome headquarters of recently released hostage Giuliana Sgrena’s paper. But nevertheless, a fateful barrage fired by US forces at Baghdad airport hit the vehicle carrying the Italian journalist to her flight home. And much of the globe is asking, ‘why?’

On March 5, the day following the shooting, in interviews with a Rome prosecutor both Sgrena and an Italian Secret Service agent confirmed each other’s stories that their car was travelling at regular speed, that no ‘warning shots’ were fired by US forces, said Zanini. That directly contradicts the Pentagon’s version of events.

Zanini also said that America differs in its approach to hostages from Europe, that while Europeans prefer to talk and negotiate, the US prefers hostage-taker identification and elimination. And media reports indicate Sgrena has publicly speculated upon US ‘intervention’ because of this difference.

On 7 March, the large Italian paper ‘La Stampa’ ran a story that Sgrena was ransomed for somewhere between \$7-8 million US, quoting anonymous and unconfirmed sources. But what happened after Sgrena’s release from captivity is the question, a wounded Sgrena and a heroically dead Italian Secret Service agent further punctuating the issue.

The internet is awash in speculation, including that the shooting may have been pursued to preclude the future payment of ransoms, money that Iraqi insurgents would use to further their efforts. The 13 March UK Sunday Times also reported that Italy will no longer pay ransoms.

Is Sgrena’s theory of deliberate ‘intervention’ off the mark and pretty far-fetched, maybe, but like John Pilger I too have been published in Il Manifesto. Also, for those who may wonder, I am not a communist. But Il Manifesto is widely respected in Southern Europe for its investigative reporting, and investigative reports are what I usually write.

In the past, I have spoken with Sgrena on several occasions, and found her tough, smart, and level-headed. I did not find her an ideologue, and my experience with her is that she calls things as she sees them; so, dismissing her ideas by saying the paper is communist might be ‘avoiding the issues’.

The ‘Blogosphere’ is indeed rife with conjecture, including that Sgrena may have also been targeted because of what she knew and had written regarding Fallujah. And she’s been

quoted by the Associated Press (AP) as emphasizing that her Iraqi captors had warned that the US "might intervene".

Both domestic US police forces and the US military have previously attacked journalists, sometimes fatally. Paris based NGO 'Reporters sans frontieres' is calling for a UN investigation into the circumstances surrounding Sgrená's shooting, the group recalling 2003 US fire upon Baghdad's Palestine Hotel, the two journalists it killed. But the 'Seattle Post-Intelligencer' ran a far more telling article this February 17th, "News about Iraq goes through filters"

"Recently at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Eason Jordan, a CNN executive, told a panel that the U.S. military deliberately targeted journalists in Iraq. He said he 'knew of about 12 journalists who had not only been killed by American troops, but had been targeted as a matter of policy,' said Rep. Barney Frank, a Democrat from Massachusetts who was on the panel with Jordan.", a portion of the 'Post-Intelligencer' piece read. And the paper is one of America's top fifty.

Domestically, a 2000 lawsuit was filed by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) regarding the actions of the Los Angeles police department (LAPD), alleging LAPD "deliberately targeted members of the media, clubbing and shooting them", according to an ACLU spokesperson. And I, myself, was the victim of life-threatening assaults by US police while publicizing and pursuing police accountability legislation in the US.

It is a matter of record that I was: shot at, had the steering purposefully unscrewed on my car, had my home and offices destroyed, and was attacked repeatedly and often with 'non-lethal' chemical weapons, ie, pepper spray. In other words, while sometimes 'accidents happen', sometimes things aren't 'accidental'.

A lot of the world believes President George W. Bush is a 'quick-draw cowboy', and far from America's only one. But that's also a big and legitimate part of the current question.

Zanini told me that while tough questions need answering, many believe that 'trigger-happy' troops were the problem, and he felt they could well be right, and they indeed could. Casual violence and shootings have become standard fare for a great many of those Americans carrying weapons in the line of duty.

In all fairness, fear is a real part of this equation for some; for others, anger and contempt decidedly appear the emotions in play. The idea of respect for human lives, setting aside the question of human rights, has been too often reduced to little more than a bad joke endlessly told by 'official spokespeople'.

Whether the current 'incident' was a matter of 'shoot em all' or 'shoot Sgrená', an absolute certainty is that it's long-past time that 'shooters' be held accountable. 'Quick-draw cowboys' need to be finally relegated to the old westerns, because that's the only place where they legitimately belong.

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