Paying Ransoms, Europe Bankrolls Qaeda Terror

Nations Are Said to Pay Tens of Millions to Free Hostages in Quiet Exchanges

BY BUSINESS DEPARTMENTS

RAMADAN, Mike — The cash or, at the total, in around $100 million over the same period. These payments were made in 2003, 2004, and 2005, and they were also reported by U.S. officials. The payments were made to various organizations, such as the Islamic Relief Organization, which has been accused of funding terrorism.

A humanitarian aid worker who was interviewed for this story said that the payments were made in order to secure the release of hostages. The worker said that the payments were made to organizations that were known to be linked to the Taliban or al-Qaeda, and that the money was used to pay ransoms or to provide humanitarian aid to the hostages.

U.S. officials have been unable to provide detailed information about the payments, and they have been reluctant to discuss the matter publicly. However, U.S. officials have said that the payments were made to secure the release of hostages and to provide humanitarian aid to the victims of the conflict in Afghanistan.

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Paying Ransoms, Europe Bankrolls Al Qaeda’s Terror

By ROBERT F. WORTH and ERIC SCHMITT

The New York Times

The recent attempt to negotiate a ransom for the release of an Italian journalist held by Al Qaeda’s North African arm has raised anew the issue of paying ransoms and the impact of those payments on terrorist and extremist networks.

The case of Ayman al-Masri, a 47-year-old German citizen who was kidnapped in 2003 while vacationing in Algeria, is emblematic of how ransom payments can influence extremist groups.

Ayman al-Masri was held by a group of Islamist fighters who sought to profit from his extended stay in Algeria. After months of negotiations, the Italian government agreed to pay a ransom of €30 million for his release.

The decision to pay ransom for Ayman al-Masri was controversial, with some in the European Union pressing for a ban on paying ransom to terrorists.

The case of Ayman al-Masri highlights the ongoing debate in Europe and other parts of the world over the role of ransom payments in supporting extremist groups.

The story of Ayman al-Masri is just one example of how ransom payments can influence terrorist and extremist networks. Other cases have shown that paying ransom can provide financial support to these groups, making it more likely that they will continue to engage in violent acts.

The European Union has faced criticism for paying ransom to terrorist organizations, with some arguing that such payments only encourage more violent acts.

Despite these concerns, many European countries continue to pay ransom in some cases, arguing that it is necessary to prevent violent acts.

The debate over paying ransom continues, with many calling for a more coordinated approach to combating terrorism and extremism.

The case of Ayman al-Masri is a reminder of the complex nature of the issue and the challenges faced by governments in trying to balance the need to protect citizens and prevent violence with the potential for ransom payments to support extremist networks.
Paying Ransoms, Europe Bankrolls Qaeda Terror

Nations Are Said to Pay Tens of Millions to Free Hostages in Quiet Exchanges

By RUKMINI CALLIMACHI

BAMAKO, Mali

The cash filled three suitcases: 5 million euros.

The German official charged with delivering this cargo arrived here aboard a nearly empty military plane and was whisked away to a secret meeting with the president of Mali, who had offered Europe a face-saving solution to a vexing problem.

The suitcases were loaded onto pickup trucks and driven hundreds of miles north into the Sahara, where the bearded fighters, who would soon become an official arm of Al Qaeda, counted the money on a blanket thrown on the sand. The 2003 episode was a learning experience for both sides. Eleven years later, the handoff in Bamako has become a well-rehearsed ritual, one of dozens of such transactions repeated all over the world.

Kidnapping Europeans for ransom has become a global business for Al Qaeda, bankrolling its operations across the globe.

While European governments deny paying ransoms, an investigation by The New York Times found that Al Qaeda and its direct affiliates have taken in at least $125 million in revenue from kidnappings since 2008, of which $66 million was paid just last year.

In news releases and statements, the United States Treasury Department has cited ransom amounts that, taken together, put the total at around $165 million over the same period.

These payments were made almost exclusively by European governments, who funneled the money through a network of proxies, sometimes masking it as development aid, according to interviews conducted for this article with former hostages, negotiators, diplomats and government officials in 10 countries in Europe, Africa and the Middle East. The inner workings of the kidnapping business were also revealed in thousands of pages of internal Qaeda documents found by this reporter while on assignment for The Associated Press in northern Mali last year.

In its early years, Al Qaeda received most of its money from deep-pocketed donors, but counterterrorism officials now believe the group finances the bulk of its recruitment, training and arms purchases from ransoms paid to free Europeans.

Put more bluntly, Europe has become an inadvertent underwriter of Al Qaeda.
Mariasandra Mariani, an Italian tourist who was kidnapped in Algeria in 2011, at her family home in San Casciano in Val di Pesa, surrounded by photos from earlier trips to the Sahara. Ms. Mariani wrote in five notebooks, below, during her 14-month ordeal in captivity.

The foreign ministries of Austria, France, Germany, Italy and Switzerland denied in emails or telephone interviews that they had paid the terrorists. “The French authorities have repeatedly stated that France does not pay ransoms,” said Vincent Floreani, deputy director of communication for France’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Several senior diplomats involved in past negotiations have described the decision to pay ransom for their countries’ citizens as an agonizing calculation: Accede to the terrorists’ demand, or allow innocent people to be killed, often in a gruesome, public way?

Yet the fact that Europe and its intermediaries continue to pay has set off a vicious cycle. “Kidnapping for ransom has become today’s most significant source of terrorist financing,” said David S. Cohen, the Treasury Department’s under secretary for terrorism and financial intelligence, in a 2012 speech. “Each transaction encourages another transaction.”

And business is booming: While in 2003 the kidnappers received around $200,000 per hostage, now they are netting up to $10 million, money that the second in command of Al Qaeda’s central leadership recently described as accounting for as much as half of his operating revenue.

“Kidnapping hostages is an easy spoil,” wrote Nasser al-Wuhayshi, the leader of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, “which I may describe as a profitable trade and a precious treasure.”

The stream of income generated is so significant that internal documents show that as long as five years ago, Al Qaeda’s central command in Pakistan was overseeing negotiations for hostages grabbed as far afield as Africa.
Moreover, the accounts of survivors held thousands of miles apart show that the three main affiliates of the terrorist group — Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, in northern Africa; Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, in Yemen; and the Shabab, in Somalia — are coordinating their efforts and abiding by a common kidnapping protocol.

To minimize the risk to their fighters, the terror affiliates have outsourced the seizing of hostages to criminal groups who work on commission. Negotiators take a reported 10 percent of the ransom, creating an incentive on both sides of the Mediterranean to increase the overall payout, according to former hostages and senior counterterrorism officials.

Their business plan includes a step-by-step process for negotiating, starting with long periods of silence aimed at creating panic back home. Hostages are then shown on videos begging their government to negotiate.

Although the kidnappers threaten to kill their victims, a review of the known cases revealed that only a small percentage of hostages held by Qaeda affiliates have been executed in the past five years, a marked turnaround from a decade ago, when videos showing beheadings of foreigners held by the group’s franchise in Iraq would regularly turn up online. Now the group has realized it can advance the cause of jihad by keeping hostages alive and trading them for prisoners and suitcases of cash.

**At least $125 million in ransom money** has been paid to Al Qaeda and its direct affiliates since 2008 for kidnappings that have been reported.

**$91.5 million** has been paid to Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Amount in 2014 Dollars</th>
<th>Paid By</th>
<th>Hostages</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010-13</td>
<td>$40.4 million</td>
<td>A state-controlled</td>
<td>4 French nationals</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>French company</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>$17.7 million</td>
<td>A state-controlled</td>
<td>1 French national, 1</td>
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<td></td>
<td>French company</td>
<td>from Togo and 1 from Madagascar</td>
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<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>$12.4 million</td>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>2 Swiss nationals and 1 German</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>$10.8 million</td>
<td>Could not be determined</td>
<td>1 Italian and 2 Spaniards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>$5.9 million</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>3 Spaniards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>$3.2 million</td>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>2 Austrians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-9</td>
<td>$1.1 million</td>
<td>Could not be determined</td>
<td>2 Canadians</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**$5.1 million** has been paid to the Shabab.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Amount in 2014 Dollars</th>
<th>Paid By</th>
<th>Hostages</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011-13</td>
<td>5.1 million</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>2 Spaniards</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**$29.9 million** has been paid to Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Amount in 2014 Dollars</th>
<th>Paid By</th>
<th>Hostages</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012-13</td>
<td>$20.4 million</td>
<td>Qatar and Oman</td>
<td>2 Finnish nationals, 1 Austrian and 1 Swiss national</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>$9.5 million</td>
<td>Could not be determined</td>
<td>3 French nationals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Ransom amounts have been converted into U.S. dollars using the currency exchange rate from the year of the payment in cases where the payment was made in euros. The ransom amounts were then adjusted for inflation so that they are in 2014 dollars.

Sources: Ransom amounts were determined through interviews with former hostages, negotiators, diplomats and government officials in 10 countries in Europe, Africa and the Middle East. The amount paid in the 2009-10 kidnapping was reported in El Mundo, one of Spain’s largest newspapers.
Only a handful of countries have resisted paying, led by the United States and Britain. Although both these countries have negotiated with extremist groups — evidenced most recently by the United States’ trade of Taliban prisoners for Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl — they have drawn the line when it comes to ransoms.

It is a decision that has had dire consequences. While dozens of Europeans have been released unharmed, few American or British nationals have gotten out alive. A lucky few ran away or were rescued by special forces. The rest were executed or are being held indefinitely.

“The Europeans have a lot to answer for,” said Vicki Huddleston, the former United States deputy assistant secretary of defense for African affairs, who was the ambassador to Mali in 2003 when Germany paid the first ransom. “It’s a completely two-faced policy. They pay ransoms and then deny any was paid.” She added, “The danger of this is not just that it grows the terrorist movement, but it makes all of our citizens vulnerable.”

A Letter Under a Rock

On Feb. 23, 2003, a group of four Swiss tourists, including two 19-year-old women, woke up in their sleeping bags in southern Algeria to the shouts of armed men. The men told the young women to cover their hair with towels, then commandeered their camper van and took off with them.

Over the coming weeks, another seven tour groups traveling in the same corner of the desert vanished. European governments scrambled to find their missing citizens.

Weeks passed before a German reconnaissance plane sent to scan the desert floor returned with images of their abandoned vehicles. More weeks passed before a scout sent on foot spotted something white through his binoculars.

It was a letter left under a rock.

In messy handwriting, it laid out the demands of a little-known jihadist group calling itself the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat.

Armed with a few hunting rifles and old AK-47s, the kidnappers succeeded in sweeping up dozens of tourists over several consecutive weeks, mostly from Germany, but also from Austria, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland. Though they planned the first few ambushes, they appear to have grabbed others by chance, like a pair of hapless 26-year-olds from Innsbruck, Austria, who were spotted because of the campfire they had lit to cook spaghetti.

Beyond the initial grab, the kidnappers did not seem to have a plan. The only food they had was the canned goods the tourists had brought with them. The only fuel was what was in each gas tank. They abandoned the cars one by one as they ran out of fuel, forcing their hostages to continue on foot.

A 47-year-old Swedish hostage, Harald Ickler, remembers being so hungry that when he found a few leftover Danish butter cookie crumbs, he carefully scooped them into the palm of his hand and then let them melt in his mouth.

“Once they had us, they didn’t seem to know what to do with us,” said Reto Walther of Untersiggenthal, Switzerland, who was in one of the first groups to be grabbed. “They were improvising.”

Despite the operation’s amateur nature, the jihadists had hit a soft spot. Almost none of the hostages had resisted, simply putting up their hands when they saw the gunmen. And although the Europeans outnumbered their captors, the hostages never tried to run away during what turned into a six-month captivity for some of them, and described the foreboding desert surrounding them as an “open-air prison.”

Crucially, although the European nations had firepower superior to that of the scrappy mujahedeen, they deemed a rescue mission too dangerous.

The jihadists asked for weapons. Then for impossible-to-meet political demands, like the removal of the Algerian government. When a 45-year-old German woman died of dehydration, panicked European officials began considering a ransom concealed as an aid payment as the least-bad option.

“The Americans told us over and over not to pay a ransom. And we said to them: ‘We don’t want to pay. But we can’t lose our people,’” said a European ambassador posted in Algeria at the time, who was one of six senior Western officials with direct knowledge of the 2003 kidnapping who confirmed details for this article. All spoke on the condition of anonymity because the information remains classified.

“It was a very difficult situation,” he said, “but in the end we are talking about human life.”
Symbols of Time in Captivity

The burqa that Leila Kaleva was forced to wear while she was held in Yemen. She was also given Arabic books. The shirt was given to her husband. A group of abducted tourists passed around this book, “The Beach,” about a vacation gone wrong. Nicolas Hénin, a French journalist held for 10 months in Syria, made a pillow out of clothes, and said he was fed canned meat. His captors gave him a toothbrush after cutting off the handle so it could not be used as a weapon.
‘Not Just Normal Criminals’

The exploits of the band of fighters in the Sahara did not go unnoticed.

A year later, in 2004, a Qaeda operative, Abdelaziz al-Muqrin, published a how-to guide to kidnapping, in which he highlighted the successful ransom negotiation of “our brothers in Algeria.” Yet at the same time, he also praised the execution of the Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl, who was grabbed in Pakistan in 2002 and beheaded nine days later by Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, a senior Qaeda member believed to be one of the architects of the Sept. 11 attacks.

Within a few years, there was a split within Al Qaeda, with the group’s affiliate in Iraq grabbing foreigners specifically to kill them.

In Algeria, the kidnappers of the European tourists followed a different path.

They used the €5 million as the seed money for their movement, recruiting and training fighters who staged a series of devastating attacks. They grew into a regional force and were accepted as an official branch of the Qaeda network, which baptized them Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. As kidnapping revenue became their main lifeline, they honed and perfected the process.

By Feb. 2, 2011, when their lookouts in southern Algeria spotted a 53-year-old Italian tourist, Mariasandra Mariani, admiring the rolling dunes through a pair of binoculars, they were running a sleek operation.

Her tour guide was the first to spot them, and screamed at her to run. As their cars sped toward her, she sprinted to her nearby desert bungalow and locked herself inside. She could do nothing but sit frozen on the mattress as they broke down the door. They threw her in a waiting car, handcuffing her to the dashboard. Before they sped off, they made sure to place a rolled-up blanket next to her, so that the jihadist sitting next to her would not accidentally make contact with a woman.

“What are you?” she asked them. “We are Al Qaeda,” they replied. If previous kidnapping missions did not seem to have a thought-out plan, the gunmen who seized Ms. Mariani drove for days on what appeared to be a clearly delineated route. Whenever they were low on fuel, they would make their way to a spot that to her looked no different in the otherwise identical lunar landscape.

Under a thorn bush, they would find a drum full of gasoline. Or a stack of tires to replace a punctured one. They never ran out of food.

Ms. Mariani would later learn they had an infrastructure of supplies buried in the sand and marked with GPS coordinates.

One afternoon they stopped just above the lip of a dune. The fighters got down and unfastened a shovel. Then she heard the sound of a car engine. Suddenly a pickup truck roared out. They had buried an entire vehicle in the mountain of sand.

“It was then that I realized, these aren’t just normal criminals,” Ms. Mariani said.

The Sounds of Silence

Weeks passed before Ms. Mariani’s captors announced that they were going to allow her to make a phone call. They drove for hours until they reached a plateau, a flat white pan of dirt.

Years earlier, their strategy for broadcasting their demands had been to leave a letter under a rock. Now they had satellite phones and a list of numbers. They handed her a script and dialed the number for Al Jazeera.

“My name is Mariasandra Mariani. I am the Italian who was kidnapped,” she said. “I am still being detained by Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.”

The Italian government scrambled to create a crisis unit, including a 24-hour hotline for the kidnappers.

During her 14-month captivity, whenever the kidnappers felt that attention had flagged, they erected a tent in the desert and forced Ms. Mariani to record a video message, showing her surrounded by her armed captors.

A total of 11 former hostages grabbed by Qaeda units in Algeria, Mali, Niger, Syria and Yemen who agreed to be interviewed for this article reported a similar set of steps in the negotiations, beginning with an imposed period of silence. Video messages and telephone calls were infrequent, often months apart. The silence appeared purposeful, intended to terrorize the families of the captives, who in turn pressured their respective governments.

In the Italian village of San Casciano in Val di Pesa, Ms. Mariani’s 80-year-old mother stopped sleeping in her bedroom, moving permanently to the couch in front of the television. Her aging father would burst into tears for no
reason. In France, the frantic brother of a hostage held for a year in Syria developed an ulcer.

All over Europe, families rallied, pressuring governments to pay. Ms. Mariani was ultimately released, along with two Spanish hostages, for a ransom that a negotiator involved in her case said was close to €8 million.

**Qaeda Supervision**

The bulk of the kidnappings-for-ransom carried out in Al Qaeda’s name have occurred in Africa, and more recently in Syria and Yemen. These regions are thousands of miles from the terror network’s central command in Pakistan.

Yet audio messages released by the group, as well as confidential letters between commanders, indicate the organization’s senior leaders are directly involved in the negotiations.

As early as 2008, a commander holding two Canadian diplomats angered his leaders by negotiating a ransom on his own.

In a letter discovered by this reporter in buildings abandoned by the jihadists in Mali last year, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb blamed the commander, Mokhtar Belmokhtar, for securing only the “meager sum” of €700,000 — around $1 million — saying the low amount was a result of his unwillingness to follow the instructions of the group’s leadership in Pakistan.

In his last broadcast before his death in 2011, Osama bin Laden spoke at length about the case of four French citizens held by Al Qaeda in Mali, making clear that he was keeping close tabs on individual kidnappings. Hostages held as recently as last year in Yemen say it was clear the negotiations were being handled by a distant leadership.
Atte and Leila Kaleva, a Finnish couple held for five months by Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in 2013, deduced this from the voluminous correspondence they saw being delivered to their captors.

“There were lots of letters back and forth,” Mr. Kaleva said. “It was clear that they had a hierarchy, and they were consulting their leaders about what to do with us.”

A Valuable Commodity

In the dozens of kidnappings that Al Qaeda has carried out, the threat of execution has hung over each hostage, reinforced in videos showing the victim next to armed and menacing jihadist guards.

In fact, only a minority of hostages — 15 percent, according to an analysis by The Times — have been executed or have died since 2008, several of them in botched rescue operations.

The potential income hostages represent has made them too valuable to the movement. In a 2012 letter to his fellow hostages in Africa, the man who was once Bin Laden’s personal secretary, and who is now the second in command of Al Qaeda, wrote that at least half of his budget in Yemen was funded by ransoms.

“Thanks to Allah, most of the battle costs, if not all, were paid from through the spoils,” wrote Nasser al-Wuhayshi, the leader of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. “Almost half the spoils came from hostages.”

Mr. Kaleva realized his captors did not intend to kill him when he became ill with what he feared was a giardia infection, and his worried kidnappers immediately brought him medicine.

When Ms. Mariani fell ill from violent dysentery in the burning sands of the Malian desert, a jihadist doctor hooked her up to an IV, nursing her back to health.

Elsewhere in the Sahara, the jihadists trucked in specialized medication for a 62-year-old Frenchwoman who had breast cancer.

“It was clear to us,” Mr. Kaleva said, “that we are more valuable to them alive than dead.”

But hostages from countries that do not pay ransoms face a harsh fate.

In 2009, four tourists were returning to Niger from a music festival in Mali when kidnappers overtook their cars, shooting out their tires. The hostages included a German woman, a Swiss couple and a British man, Edwin Dyer, 61.

From the start of the negotiations, the British government made clear it would not pay for Mr. Dyer’s release. Al Qaeda’s North African branch issued a deadline, then a 15-day extension.

“The British wanted me to send a message saying one last time that they wouldn’t pay,” said a negotiator in Burkina Faso, who acted as the go-between. “I warned them, ‘Don’t do this.’ They sent the message anyway.”

Sometime after, the public information office of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb published a communiqué: “On Sunday, May 31, 2009, at half past seven p.m. local time, the British captive, Edwin Dyer, was killed,” it said. “It seems Britain gives little importance to its citizens.”

The Swiss and German nationals held alongside Mr. Dyer were released after a reported ransom of €8 million was paid, according to one
of the Swiss negotiators who helped win their release. The same year, lawmakers in Bern, the Swiss capital, voted on a national budget that “suddenly had an extra line for humanitarian aid for Mali,” the official said.

Mr. Dyer was a British citizen, but he had spent the last four decades of his life in Austria, a country that pays ransoms. In his early 20s, he settled in the mountain village of Attnang-Puchheim, a one-hour drive from the home of an Austrian couple who were released in Mali a few months before Mr. Dyer was killed. Austria paid €2 million to the couple’s Qaeda captors, according to Ibrahim Ag Assaleh, a Malian parliamentarian who negotiated their release.

In England, Mr. Dyer’s grieving brother, Hans, said his brother’s citizenship had cost him his life. “A U.K. passport is essentially a death certificate,” he said.

**Europe’s Outsize Role**

Negotiators believe that the Qaeda branches have now determined which governments pay.

Of the 53 hostages known to have been taken by Qaeda’s official branches in the past five years, a third were French. And small nations like Austria, Spain and Switzerland, which do not have large expatriate communities in the countries where the kidnappings occur, account for over 20 percent of the victims.

By contrast, only three Americans are known to have been kidnapped by Al Qaeda or its direct affiliates, representing just 5 percent of the total.

“For me, it’s obvious that Al Qaeda is targeting them by nationality,” said Jean-Paul Rouiller, the director of the Geneva Center for Training and Analysis of Terrorism, who helped set up Switzerland’s counterterrorism program. “Hostages are an investment, and you are not going to invest unless you are pretty sure of a payout.”

Mr. Cohen, the United States under secretary for terrorism and financial intelligence, said information gathered by the Treasury Department suggested that Al Qaeda may no longer want to kidnap Americans, a tectonic shift from a decade ago.

“We know that hostage takers looking for ransoms distinguish between those governments that pay ransoms and those that do not, and make a point of not taking hostages from those countries that do not pay,” he said in a 2012 speech to the Chatham House think tank in London. “And recent kidnapping-for-ransom trends appear to indicate that hostage takers prefer not to take U.S. or U.K. hostages, almost certainly because they understand that they will not receive ransoms.”

Western countries have signed numerous agreements calling for an end to ransom paying, including as recently as last year at a G8 summit, where some of the biggest ransom payers in Europe signed a declaration agreeing to stamp out the practice. Yet according to hostages released this year and veteran negotiators, governments in Europe — especially France, Spain and Switzerland — continue to be responsible for some of the largest payments, including a ransom of €30 million — about $40 million — paid last fall to free four Frenchmen held in Mali.

A presidential adviser in Burkina Faso who has helped secure the release of several of the Westerners held in the Sahara said he routinely dealt with aggressive Western diplomats who demanded the release of Qaeda fighters held in local prisons in an effort to win the release of their hostages, often one of the additional demands kidnappers make.

“You would not believe the pressure that the West brings to bear on African countries,” he said. “It’s you, the West, who is their lifeblood,” he said. “It’s you who finances them.”

The suitcases of cash are now no longer dropped off in the capital of the respective country, he said.

The official, who spoke on the condition of anonym-
ity for security reasons, went on to describe how the money was transferred. European governments send an escort, he said, who travels with the money several hundred miles into the desert until the last safe outpost, usually leaving from Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso, or Niamey in Niger. The negotiator and his driver then continue driving all day, and sometimes all night, traversing a roller coaster of undulating dunes.

Once the negotiator arrives at the meeting point, he waits until his satellite phone beeps with a text message. In the message is a pair of GPS coordinates.

He drives another five to six hours until he reaches the new address in the sand and waits for the next text, containing another set of coordinates. The process is repeated a minimum of three times before the jihadists finally show themselves.

The money is counted on a blanket on which the fighters sit cross-legged, their guns at their sides, the official said. The millions are then divided into stashes, wrapped in plastic and buried in holes hundreds of miles apart, a detail he was able to glean after repeated meetings with the terrorist cell. They mark the location on their GPS, keeping track of it just as they track their buried cars and fuel drums.

The money is written off by European governments as an aid payment, or else delivered through intermediaries, like the French nuclear giant Areva, a state-controlled company that a senior negotiator said paid €12.5 million in 2011 and €30 million in 2013 to free five French citizens. (A spokesman for Areva denied in an email that a ransom had been paid.)

In Yemen, the intermediaries are Oman and Qatar, which pay the ransoms on behalf of European governments, including more than $20 million for two groups of hostages released in the past year, according to European and Yemeni officials.

Almost a year into her captivity in 2012, Mariasandra Mariani thought she could not take it anymore. Her captors were holding her in a landscape of black granite in northern Mali, which amplified the suffocating heat. When the wind blew, it felt as if someone were holding a blow dryer inches from her skin. She spent all day next to a bucket of water, sponging herself to try to keep cool.

She told her guard that her modest family, which grows olives in the hills above Florence, did not have the money, and that her government refused to pay ransoms. Her captor reassured her.

“Your governments always say they don’t pay,” he told Ms. Mariani. “When you go back, I want you to tell your people that your government does pay. They always pay.”

A Liberian soldier in the Ebola Task Force tried on Wednesday to avert a quarantine by confronting a woman in Monrovia.

Anger, Hurt and Moments of Hope in Ferguson

By NORIMITSU ONISHI

A police officer in Ferguson, Mo.

The city is a test case for questions over how to conduct a grand jury investigation in a community divided by race and politics, as the nation scrutinizes its system of justice.

The fate of the commander of Hamas’s military wing was expected to be decided Thursday.

The officials — speaking a day after a room was set on fire in the same Lafayette house — would not say whether they believed the room was used as a live-fire range.

Warning in the city of a secret “demon” depends on your stance

Along with the three senators, the group also backed demands against British, which like the United States has declined to pay more, to which American pressure is coming as it seeks to spread its influence in the Islamic world.

Inquiries into Lender’s Reports

Group, Which Claimed U.S. Airstrikes as Motive, Threatens More Executions

ISIS Pressed for Ransom

By MARK DELECTER

At least 17 people were killed in a shooting that left two officers and two civilians injured.

Arrests in Black Lives Matter Protests

By ADAM GOLDSTEIN

The New York Times

August 21, 2014

Volume CLXIII, No. 56, 000

New York, Thursday, August 21, 2014

$2.50
From Missouri to Syria, Journalists in Troubled Areas Are Becoming Targets

ByくてNICK Bezuks and ANDREAS Mohr

In Iraq, Islamic extremist groups have become adept at targeting journalists, who are now often perceived as strategic assets. The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has issued a manual that promotes the tactic of kidnapping journalists. The group’s tactics have been refined in recent years, and reporters have become the main source of revenue for the group. The United States has expelled foreign policy analysts who have advised against releasing American journalists. The group has also used its own journalists to propagate its ideology and against its enemies. The United States has responded with economic sanctions and diplomatic pressure. The United States has also offered rewards for information leading to the release of American journalists. The United States has also offered rewards for information leading to the release of American journalists.

The changing nature of war and a new breed of reporter.

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ISIS Pressed for Ransom Before Killing Journalist

Group, Which Claimed U.S. Airstrikes as Motive, Threatens More Executions

By RUKMINI CALLIMACHI

KNELING in the dirt in a desert somewhere in the Middle East, James Foley lost his life this week at the hands of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. Before pulling out the knife used to decapitate him, his masked executioner explained that he was killing the 40-year-old American journalist in retaliation for the recent United States’ airstrikes against the terrorist group in Iraq.

In fact, until recently, ISIS had a very different list of demands for Mr. Foley: The group pressed the United States to provide a multi-million-dollar ransom for his release, according to a representative of his family and a former hostage held alongside him. The United States — unlike several European countries that have funneled millions to the terror group to spare the lives of their citizens — refused to pay.

The issue of how to deal with ISIS, which like many terror groups now routinely trades captives for large cash payments, is acute for the Obama administration because Mr. Foley was not the lone American in its custody. ISIS is threatening to kill at least three others it holds if its demands remain unmet, The New York Times has confirmed through interviews with recently released prisoners, family members of the victims and mediators attempting to win their freedom.

Sensitive to growing criticism that it had not done enough, the White House on Wednesday revealed that a United States Special Operations team tried and failed to rescue Mr. Foley — a New Hampshire native who disappeared in Syria on Nov. 22, 2012 — as well as the other American hostages during a secret mission this summer. Mr. Obama said the United States would not retreat until it had eliminated the “cancer” of ISIS from the Middle East.

ISIS also appears determined to increase the pressure on Washington. It has now threatened to kill a second hostage, Steven J. Sotloff, a freelance journalist for Time magazine who is being held alongside Mr. Foley.

In a video of the execution of Mr. Foley that was uploaded to YouTube on Tuesday, the screen goes dark after he is decapitated. Then the ISIS fighter who killed him is seen holding Mr. Sotloff, wearing an orange jumpsuit and with his hands cuffed behind his back, in the same landscape of barren dunes. “The life of this American citizen, Obama, depends on your next decision.”

Along with the three Americans, ISIS is holding citizens of Britain, which like the United States has declined to pay ransoms, former hostages confirmed. The terror group has sent a laundry list of demands for the release of the foreigners, starting with money but also prisoner swaps, including the liberation of Aafia Siddiqui, an M.I.T.-trained Pakistani neuroscientist with ties to Al Qaeda currently incarcerated in Texas. The policy of not making concessions to terrorists and not paying ransoms has put the United States and Britain at odds with other European allies, which have routinely paid significant sums to win the release of their citizens — including four French and three Spanish hos-
tages who were released this year after money was delivered through an intermediary, according to two of the victims and their colleagues.

Kidnapping Europeans has become the main source of revenue for Al Qaeda and its affiliates, which have earned at least $125 million in ransom payments in the past five years alone, according to an investigation by The Times. Although ISIS was recently expelled from Al Qaeda and abides by different rules, recently freed prisoners said that their captors were well aware of what ransoms had been paid on behalf of European citizens held by Qaeda affiliates as far afield as Africa, indicating that they were hoping to abide by the same business plan.

While government and counterterrorism officials insist that paying ransoms only perpetuates the problem, the policy has meant...
that captured Americans have little chance of being released. A handful succeeded in running away, and even fewer were rescued in special operations. The rest are either held indefinitely — or else killed.

In an opinion article for Reuters, David Rohde, a columnist for the news service and a former foreign correspondent for The Times who was kidnapped by the Taliban, said that the uneven approach to ransoms may have cost Mr. Foley his life.

“The payment of ransoms and abduction of foreigners must emerge from the shadows. It must be publicly debated,” wrote Mr. Rohde, who escaped his seven-month detention by the Taliban only when he climbed out a window and freed himself. “American and European policy makers should be forced to answer for their actions.”

Mr. Foley, a freelance videographer and reporter for GlobalPost and Agence France-Presse, went missing 21 months ago in a town 25 miles south of the Turkish border. According to Nicole Tung, a close friend and fellow photojournalist, who gave an account of Mr. Foley’s activities before his capture, he had spent weeks in Syria documenting the country’s spiral into civil war, narrowly avoiding a falling tank shell. The normally calm reporter — who had come under fire in Afghanistan and had been kidnapped a year earlier in Libya — was rattled.

As the Thanksgiving holiday approached in 2012, he contacted Ms. Tung, and they made plans to meet for a few days across the border in Turkey. When Mr. Foley did not show up at the hotel at 5 p.m. as planned, Ms. Tung began calling his cellphone, finally reaching his translator.

The man explained that Mr. Foley had stopped at an Internet cafe to file his last images in Binesh, Syria. Soon after, armed men sped up behind his car and forced Mr. Foley out at gunpoint.

“I was sitting on the bed, in this depressing, dark hotel; the fact that the fixer answered the phone — when Jim was not answering his — was the cue that something had gone terribly wrong,” said Ms. Tung, who immediately contacted Mr. Foley’s family and editors.

Across the ocean at his home in Cambridge, Mass., the chief executive of GlobalPost Mr. Balboni, reached for his Blackberry and had a terrible sense of foreboding: The email informing him of Mr. Foley’s abduction was almost an exact replay of the horror his staff had endured a year earlier, when Mr. Foley was kidnapped with three others by Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi’s forces in Libya.

“We had joked that we needed to take away his passport,” Mr. Balboni said Wednesday. “I don’t want to say it was déjà vu, but in a way, it was,” he added. “It just turns your life upside down — in one way, I knew what was coming, but I did not know the fullness of it.”

When he was executed this week, Mr. Foley became the second Western reporter to be killed by Islamic extremists since 2002, when Daniel Pearl, a Wall Street Journal reporter, was beheaded by a top Qaeda operative. Mr. Pearl’s murder was praised by a leading ideologue in a how-to manual that promoted the tactic of kidnapping foreigners. Since then, the terror network has turned to abducting Westerners to finance itself — seizing more than 50 foreigners in the past five years, almost all of whom were released after their governments paid sizable ransoms, according to a review of the known cases by The Times.

However, in Iraq, where ISIS was founded, commanders grabbed foreigners for the sole purpose of killing them. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of Al Qaeda in Iraq, became known as the “Sheik of the Slaughterers” because he personally decapitated his foreign captives.

He created his own execution style, forcing his victims to don orange jumpsuits — a mocking reference to prisoners held at the United States’ detention center in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. So brutal, frequent and graphic were the killings that the then-No. 2 of Al Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahri, wrote to Mr. Zarqawi advising him to quit the graphic executions and just shoot the prisoners instead.

Mr. Zarqawi’s Iraq-based fighters regrouped in Syria in 2011, where they eventually rebranded themselves as ISIS. Their tactics proved so brutal that Al Qaeda formally expelled them from the terror network this year.

However, in regard to kidnapping, ISIS’s tactics initially appeared to be in line with that of other Qaeda branches.

Before Mr. Foley was killed, his ISIS captors asked for a 100 million euro ransom, approximately $132 million, according to Philip Balboni, the chief executive and co-founder of GlobalPost,
the publication where the journalist worked. (The Foley family has not responded to requests for comment.)

Once the United States authorized air-strikes in Iraq this month, it appears that ISIS took a leaf out of the book of its founding father: They forced Mr. Foley to wear the tell-tale orange jumpsuit, and beheaded him on camera — a horrifying ode to the “Sheikh of the Slaughterers,” who himself was killed by United States forces in Iraq in 2006.

The eldest of five children from Rochester, N.H., Mr. Foley graduated from Marquette University in 1996 with a history degree. He joined Teach for America that year, working at an elementary school in Phoenix, officials with the organization said. In 2008, he earned a master’s degree from the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University.

“He was so clear on what he wanted to do,” said Ellen Shearer, a professor who taught Mr. Foley at Medill.

Unlike most freelancers who often take sizable risks without the safety net of an established news organization, Mr. Foley found a second family at GlobalPost, which paid a security firm millions of dollars to try to find him, Mr. Balboni said.

After his fortuitous release in Libya, GlobalPost brought him back to Boston, where he spent a stint as an editor, but it did not last long.

“When you are touched by being in a war, you can’t get rid of it,” said Mr. Balboni, a veteran reporter as well as a former Vietnam War officer.

Mr. Foley was remembered by colleagues for his courage — to some a bravery that he took to its extreme. Yet at the time of his capture, Ms. Tung said, the tank shell explosion in Syria had spooked him, and he was looking for some time off. “It landed close enough to feel like it was time to get out,” she said.

His colleagues point to the remarkable bravery he displays in his final moments as a testament to the man he was: Looking straight at the camera, Mr. Foley’s face is concentrated. When the jihadist lifts the knife to his throat, and pulls his head back, he does not try to pull away.

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Correction published August 23, 2014: An article on Thursday about the abduction of James Foley, an American journalist who was killed at the hands of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria earlier this week, and the demands for ransom for him and other hostages misstated the length of time that David Rohde, a Reuters columnist, was held captive by the Taliban when he was a reporter for The New York Times. It was seven months, not a year. The article also misstated the ransom amount demanded by Mr. Foley’s captors. It was 100 million euros (about $132 million) — not $100 million.
U.S. Policy Offered No Hope to Hostage's Family

Democrats Put Cultural Issues In Their Quiver

Democrats had been focusing on a tough 2014 election, but some party officials and members were concerned that the party's conservative tilt was leaving moderates and independents out. The party's failure to connect with moderate voters was seen as a key reason why it lost the House in 2010. Some Democrats believed that the party needed to focus on cultural issues, such as abortion and same-sex marriage, to hold onto those voters.

The Signs Are Clear, but Scotland's Future Is Less So

The independence referendum in Scotland is set for September 18, and the outcome is uncertain. The Scottish National Party, led by Nicola Sturgeon, is campaigning for independence, while the pro-unionist Better Together campaign is working to keep Scotland in the UK. The referendum is being watched closely by the British government and the EU, as it could have implications for the UK's place in the EU.

From Turkey, ISIS Draws Steady Stream of Recruits

Luring Troubled Youth Over Border With Extreme Ideology and Money

ISIS is attracting young men from around the world to its ranks with a combination of allure and intimidation. The group uses social media to spread its message and recruit new members, offering them a sense of belonging and a promise of adventure. At the same time, it threatens those who resist its_message with violence, creating a sense of fear and urgency.

Obama to Call For Expansion Of Ebola Fight

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama is scheduled to call for a major expansion of the U.S. effort to contain the Ebola outbreak sweeping across West Africa, presidential aides said late last night. Mr. Obama will offer help to the West African nations ravaged by the disease, officials said. Mr. Obama will deliver the speech to the nation from the Oval Office at 10 p.m. Eastern time.

In Pats' Killing, 'I Tried to Stop, but I Couldn't'

Philadelphia police officer Joseph Ambelas Jr. was killed in a shooting in his home on Monday night. Mr. Ambelas was shot in the head and killed, and his wife was critically wounded. The shooting occurred in a neighbor's home, and the suspect was later found dead in the house.

An armed man opened fire at a Philadelphia police station in the city's Fishtown neighborhood, killing Mr. Ambelas and wounding his wife, police said. The shooting prompted a massive police response, and several officers were injured in the firefight.

From Turkey, ISIS Draws Steady Stream of Recruits

With Extreme Ideology and Money

The group is using a combination of propaganda and recruitment strategies to attract new members. It offers a sense of purpose and a promise of adventure, but also threatens those who resist its message with violence.

Rising Death Toll for G.M.

Exploiting West African Eggs

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Exploiting West African Eggs

G.M., the world's largest automaker, said that it would invest $500 million in West Africa to expand its operations in the region, where it has a strong presence. The investment is part of G.M.'s strategy to expand its reach in the region, particularly in Nigeria, where it has a large customer base.

The World's Most Expensive Pill

Discount for $1,000-a-Day Pill

The world's most expensive pill is available for patients with a rare form of cancer. The pill costs $80,000 per month, but G.M. is offering a discount for patients who meet certain criteria. The discount is available to patients in the U.S. and some other countries, and covers the cost of the pill for up to six months.

The Latest YouTube Star Turn? Call My Agent

The latest entry in the world of YouTube stars is a new video by the popular channel "Call My Agent." The video features a group of young people, including some who are struggling with mental health issues. The video is intended to raise awareness about mental health and to encourage people to seek help.

In Their Quiver

James English joined the South Carolina police force as a 10-year-old boy, and now he is one of the youngest police officers in the state. Mr. English has been working with the police department for several years, and has quickly risen through the ranks. He is now a detective and is responsible for investigating serious crimes.

Ladies in Waiting

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CATHAL McNAUGHTON/REUTERS

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the United States government and by what we see as a lack of information about American officials.

As early as February of this year, the American ambassador from requesting American officials to respond promptly to any queries the families had, according to a person closely involved in the crisis who watched the exchange. The ambassador personally wrote to the American families. He said, "You are given many chances for negotiations, but you offered to extricate only one to the United States to pay ransom. You were given many chances, but you are not interested in a deal."

The families had said they were not interested in a deal. They also said they were not interested in a deal with the United States government.

Mr. Foley, according to the consultant, said he was "in a very, very frightening place that he and his family had to leave behind."

In the end, the family was told that the Bergdahl case did not constitute a national security crisis. The United States had handled such situations, including the one involving the Bergdahl case. The family was told that the Bergdahl case did not constitute a national security crisis. The United States had handled such situations, including the one involving the Bergdahl case.

One American official said that the F.B.I. agents spoke to the Foley family before the family was released. The agents said that the Foley family would be sent to Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. They were told that they were not allowed to see the F.B.I. agents, and that they had already spoken to the family.

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U.S. Policy Offered No Hope to Hostage’s Family

By RUKMINI CALLIMACHI

The email appeared in Michael Foley’s inbox a year after his brother James disappeared on a reporting trip in northern Syria. It made clear that the people holding him wanted one thing above all else: money.

Cautiously hopeful, Michael Foley and his parents, John and Diane, turned over the email to the agent from the Federal Bureau of Investigation assigned to their case. The agent provided general guidance but also some stern warnings: The United States would never trade prisoners for hostages, nor would it under any circumstances pay ransom. Moreover, the government told the Foleys that it was a crime for private citizens to pay off terrorists.

More important, in retrospect, was what the F.B.I. did not tell the family: Mr. Foley was being held alongside a dozen Europeans, whose countries have a history of paying ransoms.

Mostly, the government offered sympathy but little active support, the family and their advisers said, leaving them overwhelmed and unsure of what to do.

Guided by its strict no-ransom policy, the United States government’s hands-off approach was vastly different from the tack taken by European countries, which quickly negotiated the release of their citizens in exchange for cash.

This greatly frustrated the family of Mr. Foley, 40, a freelance journalist, and the other American hostages, who were desperate for Washington to take stronger action, according to interviews with two dozen people, including members of Mr. Foley’s family, witnesses to his time in captivity, his colleagues and a network of consultants who tried to win his release.

“The F.B.I. didn’t help us much — let’s face it,” Diane Foley said in a telephone interview. “Our government was very clear that no ransom was going to be paid, or should be paid,” she said. “It was horrible — and continues to be horrible. You are between a rock and a hard place.”

For much of the hostages’ captivity, the administration appears to have treated the abductions as unfortunate but relatively routine cases of Americans falling into the hands of extremists. Europeans, by contrast, treated the kidnappings as national security crises.

That placed the Foleys in the middle of a global debate about how to deal with terrorist kidnappings, with European countries and the United States taking opposite sides on an agonizing choice about whether to pay ransoms.

In hindsight, the family criticisms echo broader concerns that the administration did not foresee how the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria could become a major threat.

There is little indication that the administration anticipated how Mr. Foley and other American hostages could turn into grisly propaganda for ISIS, increasing pressure on the United States to begin what may become another extended military engagement in the Middle East.

A senior law enforcement official said that the F.B.I. agents spoke to the Foleys “each and every day,” and that a three-member team was assigned to the family. But they were limited by what they could share, both because much of the information was classified and because they did not want to cause further emotional strain.

“We cannot — and do not — want to give the families every single lead because some turn up to be dry holes, and we want to minimize the yo-yo effect,” said the official, who requested anonymity because he did not want to be seen as critical of a grieving mother.
Administration officials have defended their response to the hostage crisis, saying that the government mounted a risky raid in July, using American troops to try to free the captives, though the mission was not successful.

After that first email last November, the captors followed up with a demand for 100 million euros ($130 million) in ransom and the release of unspecified Muslim prisoners. Then, silence.

Eight months later, Ms. Foley would next see her son in a video showing him kneeling in the sand, an executioner’s knife at his neck.

The United States and Britain are among the only countries that abide by a zero-concession policy, refusing to accede to terrorists’ demands, arguing that doing so encourages more kidnapping. By contrast, European countries have repeatedly paid to free their citizens, despite signing numerous declarations vowing not to, prompting condemnation from former American officials and analysts.

“What is hard to prove is how many Americans have not been kidnapped as a result of the fact that the enemy knows they will not get a penny from us,” said Gen. John R. Allen, who recently retired as the top commander in Afghanistan. “In the aftermath of this horrific event it makes it hard to explain this policy. But the fact that there are Americans in the region who were never taken because they knew there was no advantage to doing so needs to be factored in.”

The willingness to pay ransoms for kidnapped victims is a source of debate and mounting tension between the United States and Britain on one side and their European allies on the other. From the families’ perspective, there is another dividing line between the two approaches: Many European nations take charge of the situation from the moment their citizens are captured and aggressively begin a negotiation. By contrast, relatives in the United States said they were left to puzzle through the crisis largely on their own.

While the F.B.I. declined to comment on its handling of the hostage crisis, a senior law en-
forcement official said that the bureau used every tool at its disposal. He conceded, however, that the bureau is bound by American law and cannot engage in a discussion over a potential ransom. “Those are the lanes in the road we are left to work with,” the official said.

From the perspective of the families, however, the policy of not bargaining with terrorists is itself controversial. They argue that the death of even one person seems a high price to pay for the broader goal of not encouraging further kidnappings.

A Broad Gulf

Unbeknown to the Foleys, the email they received last November was part of a blitz sent by ISIS over a four-month period to the relatives of the 23 Western hostages they would eventually hold in the same jail, including three other Americans.

There was immediately a gulf between how American and European officials responded.

A crisis cell was activated inside the Foreign Ministries of France, Spain, Switzerland and Italy, staffed around the clock with people working in shifts, said a European counterterrorism official who has worked on numerous hostage cases and was briefed on the negotiations with ISIS.

They waited for the kidnappers to reach out, and when they did, the intelligence services of at least one country took over the email accounts of family members, responding directly to the terrorist group, according to a person with direct knowledge of how the negotiations unfolded.

As early as February of this year, the Europeans proceeded from requesting proof of life to making a ransom counteroffer, according to a person closely involved in the crisis who said the average sum negotiated per person was around €2 million.

The Foleys and the other American families were left to answer the emails themselves and kept largely in the dark. They were not introduced to one another and had to find the other families on their own, Ms. Foley said.

While high-level officials met with them, they shared little information.

“They were always very cordial,” Ms. Foley said. “The problem was we never got any information about what the government was doing — if anything — on our behalf. Every bit of information we got was on our own.”

The families said they had little evidence that the kidnappings had become a major concern for the Obama administration, though they acknowledge that they were not necessarily aware of all of the government’s efforts. While they reached out to the State Department and were repeatedly told “everything was being done,” they said they never had any clear indication that this was a policy priority.

Mr. Foley’s former employer, the online publication GlobalPost, spent millions of dollars on a security firm it hired to search for clues of the missing journalist, said Philip Balboni, its chief executive.

“As to the F.B.I.’s role,” Mr. Balboni said, “we always felt that we had the laboring oar.”

Being Told to Stall

Because the Foleys did not initially know how to reach the other families, and because they were not aware of what the Europeans were doing, months elapsed before they realized that their son’s captors were releasing his cellmates for cash.

Around May, all four of the American families finally met one another and began holding group conference calls with the administration, Ms. Foley said.

They began comparing the ransom demands and realized that the four Americans were being held by the same people, who were coordinating their response.

In late spring, as more and more Europeans were let go, the Foleys learned that about $4.5 million had been paid to free one hostage, said Mr. Balboni, who declined to say which government or entity paid.

“The fund-raising didn’t start in earnest until relatively late,” Mr. Balboni said. “Our goal was $5 million. It was a kind of extrapolation from what we had learned from the West-
ern hostages that had been released.”

Although American officials initially advised the family that they could be prosecuted for paying a ransom, the bureau later privately told the Foleys that it was unlikely they would face charges and they could pursue their own course of action, independently of what the United States was attempting, a senior American official said. Once the family made it clear they wanted to pay, the bureau instructed them to stall, according to a consultant working on the hostage crisis.

“What the F.B.I. said is that their experience had shown that you want to draw out the process,” said the consultant, who requested anonymity because he did not want to be seen as being critical of the United States. “You want to have lots of back and forth. You want further proof of life. You want to ask if you can speak to your son by phone — anything that elongates the process.

“I asked, ‘Why do we want to do that?’ What they said is, ‘This is how you get the numbers down to a realistic figure,’” the consultant said. “At one point, I said: ‘Are you sure? I think we are just making them angry.’”

Cash was not the only thing Mr. Foley’s captors wanted. In one of the early emails to the family, they had demanded the release of unspecified Muslim prisoners, Mr. Balboni said. In subsequent messages to the families of the other Americans, the captors proposed a swap for a Pakistani neuroscientist, Aafia Siddiqui, whose incarceration in a Texas prison on charges of trying to kill Americans in Afghanistan has become a rallying cry for jihadists.

Such a swap was off the table, they were told, because of the no-concessions policy.

Yet on May 31, Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl was released by the Taliban after being traded for five Taliban detainees held at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.

This was a significant shift in how the United States had handled such situations. Dane Egli, who was a hostage rescue adviser for the National Security Council during the Bush administration, said Sergeant Bergdahl’s release “introduced a huge inconsistency in our policy.”

The families of the ISIS hostages were aghast. They angrily called their advisers and one another, feeling more than ever that they were on their own, said a person who worked alongside several of them.

A Confusing Rationale

The Obama administration argued that the Bergdahl case did not constitute an exception because he was considered a prisoner of war.
By contrast, the families were advised that Ms. Siddiqui’s release was impossible because she had been convicted in an American court, a different situation from that of the Guantánamo detainees, who have never been charged, according to one adviser.

If this rationale was confusing for the families, it was especially hard to explain to their sons’ captors.

By the summer, President Obama authorized a rescue operation after a group of French journalists were released. In April and May, one of the released hostages sat down with the F.B.I. in Paris to describe the oil facility on the outskirts of Raqqa, Syria, where the 23 foreigners had been held. He pinpointed the location on a Google Earth map, showing a building opposite three silo-like formations.

The unsuccessful rescue attempt took two more months to mount, as the authorities worked to corroborate the information from the former hostage, a senior official said.

Advisers to the families say this delay shows the administration was not carrying out surveillance of the town in Syria where the four Americans were held, and had to scramble to position a surveillance aircraft over the area in order to establish a baseline of human activity. (Officials refused to confirm or deny, saying the information is classified.)

Unaware of the July 3 rescue operation, the Foleys were working at full tilt on the only avenue open to them: trying to raise money. It was a humiliating endeavor. To save their son’s life, they were essentially passing a hat, asking donors to provide money that would go to a terrorist group deemed so extreme it had been expelled from Al Qaeda.

The family was particularly worried because they had not received a reply from ISIS since December. They were advised by the F.B.I. that the captors’ demands were not serious because they had asked for such a high initial figure.

Looking back, Ms. Foley said, she was “appalled” that the United States did not do more, and wondered if the government’s approach did not cause their son’s captors to single him out for retribution.

“Jim was in the hands of a very hateful, brutal group of people — only God knows,” she said. “But it was clear that they wanted to negotiate. That angered them more than anything — they would send nasty messages aimed at the government, and the family had to get back to them,” she said. “We would read it over, and tweak it and suggest changes, but it was obvious they wanted to engage with the government, and I don’t understand how it is that we were not willing to engage at some level. This made them more and more angry.”

On Aug. 8, Mr. Obama authorized airstrikes on ISIS positions in Iraq.

On Aug. 12, the Foleys received the last email from their son’s abductors. It appeared to
be addressed not just to the Foleys, but also to the United States government:

“You were given many chances to negotiate the release of your people via cash transactions as other governments have accepted,” said the email, published by GlobalPost. “We have also offered prisoner exchanges to free the Muslims currently in your detention like our sister Dr Afia Sidiqqi however you proved quickly to us that this is NOT what you are interested in,” they said. “You and your citizens will pay the price of the bombings.”

A week later, a video appeared on YouTube showing the execution of Mr. Foley.

Two weeks after that, a nearly identical video was uploaded showing the death of another American journalist, Steven J. Sotloff. This weekend, a British aid worker, David Cawthorne Haines, was beheaded.

Two other Americans and two British citizens remain in ISIS custody. At least 15 others held with Mr. Foley, all but one of them European, succeeded in getting out in return for cash.

In an effort to make sure the death of Mr. Foley brings about change, his parents are now working to establish an organization that will advise families of other victims, giving them the information early on that they say they were not given.

“It was a very, very frightening place to be,” Ms. Foley said. “And other countries do this better,” she added. “I would hope that our government and the international community is looking deeply at this issue, and we pray that by doing so, Jim’s death will not be in vain.”

Reporting for this article was contributed by Glenna Gordon, Eric Schmitt, Michael S. Schmidt and Karam Shoumali. Jack Begg and Sheelagh McNeill contributed research.
The father of a dead hostage showed a picture of the prisone who James Foley and others, including his son, were held.

The Horror Before the Beheadings

ISIS Hostages Endured Torture and Dashed Hopes, Freed Cellmates Say

By DAVID ANDERSON

BELÉM, Brazil — To start their day, the owners of a restaurant here set out to forage for the ingredients of dishes they hope to prepare for the evening meal. But a menu of the food they are about to offer — delicacies such as smoked mapará, a fish from the Amazon River. Move on to the food. Try the açaí, a berry with a bright purple hue that grows wild along the banks of the river. A vendor sold açaí berries at the Ver-o-Peso market in Brazil. A man in a white shirt,...

For Midterms, Betting on Feet And Good Apps

Daring Fare, From the Amazon's Mouth to Yours

By SUSAN BOKER

BELÉM, Brazil — At the heart of this town is the market that draws hundreds of thousands of visitors each day. The market's name, for which it is famous, translates to: "Where the Birds Sing." Within the market's walls, you can find everything from fresh seafood to exotic fruits and vegetables. But the real treasure is hidden away behind the stalls: bushels upon bushels of açaí berries. As a customer, you can order açaí...
Before Beheadings, Torture and False Hope
In ISIS' Jail Network

The militants have identified Mr. Foley as an American, according to a French-speaking guard. The Americans were often grouped together, according to a former hostage, one of five who spoke with The New York Times. Mr. Foley seemed to sense the end was near, his family said. He ordered his laptop, taken during his arrest, to be freed to his family. He explained there was a Plan A and Plan B. He practiced his family’s names from memory, saying his family could be called from Syria or Iraq. He explained to the remaining hostages that they were most likely to pay ransoms. A majority of the hostages had refused to pay ransoms.

At gunpoint, Mr. Sotloff and Mr. Abobaker were transferred to a prison underneath the prison where Mr. Foley was being held. They were then transferred to a prison near the border of Syria and Iraq. The group dragged its feet, reluctant to save Mr. Foley. They finally did, but only after they learned he was American. They hoped to use him as leverage against the American government.

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The father of a freed hostage showed a picture of the prison where James Foley and others, including his son, were held.

The Horror Before the Beheadings

ISIS Hostages Endured Torture and Dashed Hopes, Freed Cellmates Say

By RUKMINI CALLIMACHI

The hostages were taken out of their cell one by one.

In a private room, their captors asked each of them three intimate questions, a standard technique used to obtain proof that a prisoner is still alive in a kidnapping negotiation.

James Foley returned to the cell he shared with nearly two dozen other Western hostages and collapsed in tears of joy. The questions his kidnappers had asked were so personal (“Who cried at your brother’s wedding?” “Who was the captain of your high school soccer team?”) that he knew they were finally in touch with his family.

It was December 2013, and more than a year had passed since Mr. Foley vanished on a road in northern Syria. Finally, his worried parents would know he was alive, he told his fellow captives. His government, he believed, would soon negotiate his release.

What appeared to be a turning point was in fact the start of a downward spiral for Mr. Foley, a 40-year-old journalist, that ended in August when he was forced to his knees some-
where in the bald hills of Syria and beheaded as a camera rolled.

His videotaped death was a very public end to a hidden ordeal.

The story of what happened in the Islamic State’s underground network of prisons in Syria is one of excruciating suffering. Mr. Foley and his fellow hostages were routinely beaten and subjected to waterboarding. For months, they were starved and threatened with execution by one group of fighters, only to be handed off to another group that brought them sweets and contemplated freeing them. The prisoners banded together, playing games to pass the endless hours, but as conditions grew more desperate, they turned on one another. Some, including Mr. Foley, sought comfort in the faith of their captors, embracing Islam and taking Muslim names.

Their captivity coincided with the rise of the group that came to be known as the Islamic State out of the chaos of the Syrian civil war. It did not exist on the day Mr. Foley was abducted, but it slowly grew to become the most powerful and feared rebel movement in the region. By the second year of Mr. Foley’s imprisonment, the group had amassed close to two dozen hostages and devised a strategy to trade them for cash.

It was at that point that the hostages’ journeys, which had been largely similar up to then, diverged based on actions taken thousands of miles away: in Washington and Paris, in Madrid, Rome and beyond. Mr. Foley was one of at least 23 Western hostages from 12 countries, a majority of them citizens of European nations whose governments have a history of paying ransoms.

Their struggle for survival, which is being told now for the first time, was pieced together through interviews with five former hostages, locals who witnessed their treatment, relatives and colleagues of the captives, and a tight circle of advisers who made trips to the region to try to win their release. Crucial details were confirmed by a former member of the Islamic State, also known as ISIS, who was initially stationed in the prison where Mr. Foley was held, and who provided previously unknown details of his captivity.

The ordeal has remained largely secret because the militants warned the hostages’ families not to go to the news media, threatening to kill their loved ones if they did. The New York Times is naming only those already identified publicly by the Islamic State, which began naming them in August.

Officials in the United States say they did everything in their power to save Mr. Foley and the others, including carrying out a failed rescue operation. They argue that the United States’ policy of not paying ransoms saves Americans’ lives in the long run by making them less attractive targets.

Inside their concrete box, the hostages did not know what their families or governments were doing on their behalf. They slowly pieced it together using the only information they had: their interactions with their guards and with one another. Mostly they suffered, waiting for any sign that they might escape with their lives.

The Grab

It was only a 40-minute drive to the Turkish border, but Mr. Foley decided to make one last stop.

In Binesh, Syria, two years ago, Mr. Foley and his traveling companion, the British photojournalist John Cantlie, pulled into an Internet cafe to file their work. The two were no strangers to the perils of reporting in Syria. Only a few months earlier, Mr. Cantlie had been kidnapped a few dozen miles from Binesh. He had tried to escape, barefoot and handcuffed, running for his life as bullets kicked up the dirt, only to be caught again. He was released a week later after moderate rebels intervened.

They were uploading their images when a man walked in.

“He had a big beard,” said Mustafa Ali, their Syrian translator, who was with them and recounted their final hours together. “He didn’t smile or say anything. And he looked at us with evil eyes.”
The man "went to the computer and sat for one minute only, and then left directly," Mr. Ali said. "He wasn't Syrian. He looked like he was from the Gulf."

Mr. Foley, an American freelance journalist filing for GlobalPost and Agence France-Presse, and Mr. Cantlie, a photographer for British newspapers, continued transmitting their footage, according to Mr. Ali, whose account was confirmed by emails the journalists sent from the cafe to a colleague waiting for them in Turkey.

More than an hour later, they flagged a taxi for the 25-mile drive to Turkey. They never reached the border.

The gunmen who sped up behind their taxi did not call themselves the Islamic State because the group did not yet exist on Nov. 22, 2012, the day the two men were grabbed. But the danger of Islamic extremism was already palpable in Syria's rebel-held territories, and some news organizations were starting to pull back. Among the red flags was the growing number of foreign fighters flooding into Syria, dreaming of establishing a "caliphate." These jihadists, many of them veterans of Al Qaeda's branch in Iraq, looked and behaved differently from the moderate rebels. They wore their beards long. And they spoke with foreign accents, coming from the Persian Gulf, North Africa, Europe and beyond.

A van sped up on the left side of the taxi and cut it off. Masked fighters jumped out. They screamed in foreign-accented Arabic, telling the journalists to lie on the pavement. They handcuffed them and threw them into the van.

They left Mr. Ali on the side of the road. "If you follow us, we'll kill you," they told him.

Over the next 14 months, at least 23 foreigners, most of them freelance journalists and aid workers, would fall into a similar trap. The attackers identified the locals whom journalists hired to help them, like Mr. Ali and Yosef Abobaker, a Syrian translator. It was Mr. Abobaker who drove Steven J. Sotloff, an American freelance journalist, into Syria on Aug. 4, 2013.

"We were driving for only 20 minutes when I saw three cars stopped on the road ahead," he said. "They must have had a spy on the border that saw my car and told them I was coming."

The kidnappings, which were carried out by different groups of fighters josting for influence and territory in Syria, became more frequent. In June 2013, four French journalists were abducted. In September, the militants grabbed three Spanish journalists.

Checkpoints became human nets, and last October, insurgents waited at one for Peter Kassig, 25, an emergency medical technician from Indianapolis who was delivering medical supplies. In December, Alan Henning, a British taxi driver, disappeared at another. Mr. Henning had cashed in his savings to buy a used ambulance, hoping to join an aid caravan to Syria. He was kidnapped 30 minutes after crossing into the country.

The last to vanish were five aid workers from Doctors Without Borders, who were plucked in January from the field hospital in rural Syria where they had been working.

The Interrogation

At gunpoint, Mr. Sotloff and Mr. Abobaker were driven to a textile factory in a village outside Aleppo, Syria, where they were placed in separate cells. Mr. Abobaker, who was freed two weeks later, heard their captors take Mr. Sotloff into an adjoining room. Then he heard the Arabic-speaking interrogator say in English: "Password."

It was a process to be repeated with several other hostages. The kidnappers seized their laptops, cellphones and cameras and demanded the passwords to their accounts. They scanned their Facebook timelines, their Skype chats, their image archives and their emails, looking for evidence of collusion with Western spy agencies and militaries.

"They took me to a building that was specifically for the interrogation," said Marcin Suder, a 37-year-old Polish photojournalist kidnapped in July 2013 in Saraqib, Syria, where the jihadists were known to be operating. He was passed among several groups before managing to escape four months later.

"They checked my camera," Mr. Suder said. "They checked my tablet. Then they undressed me completely. I was naked. They looked to see if there was a GPS chip under my skin or in my clothes. Then they started beating me. They Googled 'Marcin Suder and C.I.A.,' 'Marcin Suder and K.G.B.' They accused me of being a spy."

Mr. Suder — who was never told the name of the group holding him, and who never met the other hostages because he escaped before
they were transferred to the same location — remarked on the typically English vocabulary his interrogators had used.

During one session, they kept telling him he had been “naughty” — a word that hostages who were held with Mr. Foley also recalled their guards’ using during the most brutal torture.

It was in the course of these interrogations that the jihadists found images of American military personnel on Mr. Foley’s laptop, taken during his assignments in Afghanistan and Iraq.

“In the archive of photographs he had personally taken, there were images glorifying the American crusaders,” they wrote in an article published after Mr. Foley’s death. “Alas for James, this archive was with him at the time of his arrest.”

A British hostage, David Cawthorne Haines, was forced to acknowledge his military background: It was listed on his LinkedIn profile.

The militants also discovered that Mr. Kassig, the aid worker from Indiana, was a former Army Ranger and a veteran of the Iraq war. Both facts are easy to find online, because CNN featured Mr. Kassig’s humanitarian work prominently before his capture.

The punishment for any perceived offense was torture.

“You could see the scars on his ankles,” Jejoen Bontinck, 19, of Belgium, a teenage convert to Islam who spent three weeks in the summer of 2013 in the same cell as Mr. Foley, said of him. “He told me how they had chained his feet to a bar and then hung the bar so that he was upside down from the ceiling. Then they left him there.”
Mr. Bontinck, who was released late last year, spoke about his experiences for the first time for this article in his hometown, Antwerp, where he is one of 46 Belgian youths on trial on charges of belonging to a terrorist organization.

At first, the abuse did not appear to have a larger purpose. Nor did the jihadists seem to have a plan for their growing number of hostages.

Mr. Bontinck said Mr. Foley and Mr. Cantlie had first been held by the Nusra Front, a Qaeda affiliate. Their guards, an English-speaking trio whom they nicknamed “the Beatles,” seemed to take pleasure in brutalizing them.

Later, they were handed over to a group called the Mujahedeen Shura Council, led by French speakers.

Mr. Foley and Mr. Cantlie were moved at least three times before being transferred to a prison underneath the Children’s Hospital of Aleppo.

It was in this building that Mr. Bontinck, then only 18, met Mr. Foley. At first, Mr. Bontinck was a fighter, one of thousands of young Europeans drawn to the promise of jihad. He later ran afloat of the group when he received a text message from his worried father back in Belgium and his commander accused him of being a spy.

The militants dragged him into a basement room with pale brown walls. Inside were two very thin, bearded foreigners: Mr. Foley and Mr. Cantlie.

For the next three weeks, when the call to prayer sounded, all three stood.

**An American Named Hamza**

Mr. Foley converted to Islam soon after his capture and adopted the name Abu Hamza, Mr. Bontinck said. (His conversion was confirmed by three other recently released hostages, as well as by his former employer.)

“I recited the Quran with him,” Mr. Bontinck said. “Most people would say, ‘Let’s convert so that we can get better treatment.’ But in his case, I think it was sincere.”

Former hostages said that a majority of the Western prisoners had converted during their difficult captivity. Among them was Mr. Kassig, who adopted the name Abdul-Rahman, according to his family, who learned of his conversion in a letter smuggled out of the prison.

Only a handful of the hostages stayed true to their own faiths, including Mr. Sotloff, then 30, a practicing Jew. On Yom Kippur, he told his guards he was not feeling well and refused his food so he could secretly observe the traditional fast, a witness said.

Those recently released said that most of the foreigners had converted under duress, but that Mr. Foley had been captivated by Islam. When the guards brought an English version of the Quran, those who were just pretending to be Muslims paged through it, one former hostage said. Mr. Foley spent hours engrossed in the text.

His first set of guards, from the Nusra Front, viewed his professed Islamic faith with suspicion. But the second group holding him seemed moved by it. For an extended period, the abuse stopped. Unlike the Syrian prison-
ers, who were chained to radiators, Mr. Foley and Mr. Cantlie were able to move freely inside their cell.

Mr. Bontinck had a chance to ask the prison’s emir, a Dutch citizen, whether the militants had asked for a ransom for the foreigners. He said they had not.

“He explained there was a Plan A and a Plan B,” Mr. Bontinck said. The journalists would be put under house arrest, or they would be conscripted into a jihadist training camp. Both possibilities suggested that the group was planning to release them.

One day, their guards brought them a gift of chocolates.

When Mr. Bontinck was released, he jotted down the phone number of Mr. Foley’s parents and promised to call them. They made plans to meet again.

He left thinking that the journalists, like him, would soon be freed.

**A Terrorist State**

The Syrian civil war, previously dominated by secular rebels and a handful of rival jihadist groups, was shifting decisively, and the new extremist group had taken a dominant position. Sometime last year, the battalion in the Aleppo hospital pledged allegiance to what was then called the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.

Other factions of fighters joined forces with the group, whose tactics were so extreme that even Al Qaeda expelled it from its terror network. Its ambitions went far beyond toppling Bashar al-Assad, Syria’s president.

Late last year, the jihadists began pooling their prisoners, bringing them to the same location underneath the hospital. By January, there were at least 19 men in one 20-square-meter cell (about 215 square feet) and four women in an adjoining one. All but one of them were European or North American. The relative freedom that Mr. Foley and Mr. Cantlie had enjoyed came to an abrupt end. Each prisoner was now handcuffed to another.

More worrying was the fact that their French-speaking guards were replaced by English-speaking ones. Mr. Foley recognized them with dread.

They were the ones who had called him “naughty” during the worst torture. They were the ones the hostages called the Beatles. They instituted a strict security protocol.

When they approached the cell holding Mr. Suder, the Polish photojournalist, they called out “arba’een”: Arabic for the number 40.

That was his cue to face the wall so that when the guards entered, he would not see their faces. Several hostages were given numbers in Arabic, which appeared to be an effort to catalog them — not unlike the numbers American forces had assigned to prisoners in the detention facilities they ran in Iraq, including Camp Bucca, where Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of the Islamic State, was briefly held.

“When the Beatles took over, they wanted to bring a certain level of order to the hostages,” said one recently freed European captive.

The jihadists had gone from obscurity to running what they called a state.
In areas under their control, they established an intricate bureaucracy, including a tribunal, a police force and even a consumer protection office, which forced kebab stands to close for selling low-quality products.

That focus on order extended to the hostages.

After months of holding them without making any demands, the jihadists suddenly devised a plan to ransom them. Starting last November, each prisoner was told to hand over the email address of a relative. Mr. Foley gave the address of his younger brother.

The group sent a blitz of messages to the families of the hostages.

Those who were able to lay the emails side by side could see they had been cut and pasted from the same template.

**Triage**

By December, the militants had exchanged several emails with Mr. Foley’s family, as well as with the families of other hostages.

After the first proof-of-life questions, Mr. Foley was hopeful that he would be home soon. As his second Christmas away from home approached, he threw himself into organizing a jailhouse version of Secret Santa, a tradition in the Foley household.

Each prisoner gave another a gift fashioned out of trash. Mr. Foley’s Secret Santa gave him a circle made from the wax of a discarded candle to cushion his forehead when he bowed down to pray on the hard floor.

As the weeks passed, Mr. Foley noticed that his European cellmates were invited outside again and again to answer questions. He was not. Nor were the other Americans, or the Britons.

Soon, the prisoners realized that their kidnappers had identified which nations were most likely to pay ransoms, said a former hostage, one of five who spoke about their imprisonment in the Islamic State’s network of jails on the condition that their names be withheld.

“The kidnappers knew which countries would be the most amenable to their demands, and they created an order based on the ease with which they thought they could negotiate,” one said. “They started with the Spanish.”

One day, the guards came in and pointed to the three Spanish captives. They said they knew the Spanish government had paid six million euros for a group of aid workers kidnapped by a Qaeda cell in Mauritania, a figure available online in articles about the episode.

As the negotiations for the Spanish prisoners progressed rapidly — the first was released this March, six months after he had been captured — the militants moved on to the four French journalists.

The European prisoners went from answering additional personal questions to filming videos to be sent to their families or governments. The videos became more and more charged, eventually including death threats and execution deadlines in an effort to force their nations to pay.

At one point, their jailers arrived with a collection of orange jumpsuits.

In a video, they lined up the French hostages in their brightly colored uniforms, mimicking those worn by prisoners at the United States’ facility in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.

They also began waterboarding a select few, just as C.I.A. interrogators had treated Muslim prisoners at so-called black sites during the George W. Bush administration, former hostages and witnesses said.

With time, the 23 prisoners were divided into two groups. The three American men and the three British hostages were singled out for the worst abuse, both because of the militants’ grievances against their countries and because their governments would not negotiate, according to several people with intimate knowledge of the events.
Hostage nationality
American or British  European/other
Where the hostages were captured

The Fate of 23 Hostages in Syria

James Foley was one of at least 23 foreign hostages from 12 countries who were kidnapped by Syrian insurgents, sold or handed over to the Islamic State, and then held underground in a prison near the Syrian city of Raqqa. A majority of the hostages were freed in exchange for large sums of cash, but those from the United States and Britain — two countries that abide by a strict no-ransom policy — were either killed or are still being held.

Hostage status
Still held  Freed for ransom  Killed

*Mr. Gorbunov may have been captured earlier. Notes: The female American aid worker is not being named at the request of her family. The names of the five Doctors Without Borders workers are not known.
“It’s part of the DNA of this group to hate America,” one said. “But they also realized that the United States and Britain were the least likely to pay.”

Within this subset, the person who suffered the cruelest treatment, the former hostages said, was Mr. Foley. In addition to receiving prolonged beatings, he underwent mock executions and was repeatedly waterboarded.

Meant to simulate drowning, the procedure can cause the victim to pass out. When one of the prisoners was hauled out, the others were relieved if he came back bloodied.

“It was when there was no blood,” a former cellmate said, “that we knew he had suffered something even worse.”

As the negotiations dragged on, conditions became increasingly grim.

During one extended stretch, the hostages received the equivalent of a teacup of food per day. They spent weeks in darkness. In one basement, their only illumination was the finger of sunlight that stretched under their locked door. After dusk, they could not see anything, spilling food on themselves until their guards eventually gave them a flashlight.

Most of the locations had no mattresses and few blankets. Some of the prisoners took discarded pants, tied one end and filled the trouser legs with rags to create makeshift pillows.

The prisoners turned on one another. Fights broke out.

Mr. Foley shared his meager rations. In the cold of the Syrian winter, he offered another prisoner his only blanket.

He kept the others entertained, proposing games and activities like Risk, a board game that involves moving imaginary armies across a map: another favorite pastime in the Foley family. The hostages made a chess set out of discarded paper. They re-enacted movies, retelling them scene by scene. And they arranged for members of the group to give lectures on topics they knew well.

**Execution Deadlines**

This spring, the hostages were moved from below the hospital in Aleppo to Raqqa, the capital of the Islamic State’s self-declared caliphate. They were incarcerated in a building outside an oil installation, where they were again divided by sex.

By March, the militants had concluded the negotiations for the three Spanish journalists.

When the first deliveries of cash arrived, the guards discovered that some of the bills were damaged. They complained to the remaining hostages that their governments did not even have the decency to send crisp notes.

By April, nearly half of the captives had been freed. There had been no progress, however, on the ransom demands the jihadists had made for their American and British hostages.

During the triage phase, the guards identified the single Russian hostage, a man known to the others as Sergey, as the least marketable commodity.

Identified in the Russian news media as Sergey Gorbunov, he was last seen in a video released in October 2013. Stuttering, he said that if Moscow failed to meet the kidnappers’ demands, he would be killed.

Sometime this spring, the masked men came for him.
They dragged the terrified prisoner outside and shot him. They filmed his body. Then they returned to show the footage to the surviving hostages.

“This,” they said, “is what will happen to you if your government doesn’t pay.”

**Goodbyes**

Mr. Foley watched as his cellmates were released in roughly two-week increments.

As the number of people in the 20-square-meter cell in Raqqa grew smaller, it was hard to stay hopeful. Yet Mr. Foley, who had campaigned for President Obama, continued to believe his government would come to his rescue, said his family, who learned this from recently freed hostages.

On May 27, the few remaining hostages were reminded that different passports spelled different fates.

Those who had been taken together were, in most cases, released together. Not so for the Italian and British aid workers for the Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development, a small French organization, who were grabbed less than a mile from the Turkish border after returning from a refugee camp where they had gone to deliver tents.

In late May, the Italian, Federico Motka, was told he could go, according to a fellow captive, allegedly after Italy paid a ransom. (The Italian government denied the claim.) But his co-worker, Mr. Haines, was left chained inside. Mr. Haines was beheaded in September after being forced to read a script blaming the British government for his death.

By June, the cellblock that had once held at least 23 people had been reduced to just seven. Four of them were Americans, and three were British — all citizens of countries whose governments had refused to pay ransoms.

In an article recently published in an official Islamic State magazine, the jihadists described the American-led airstrikes that began in August as the nail in those hostages’ coffins.

At the same time, they laid out the role European and American ransom policies had played in their decision to kill Mr. Foley.

“As the American government was dragging its feet, reluctant to save James’s life,” they wrote in the magazine, Dabiq, “negotiations were made by the governments of a number of European prisoners, which resulted in the release of a dozen of their prisoners after the demands of the Islamic State were met.”

Fifteen hostages were freed from March to June for ransoms averaging more than two million euros, the former captives and those close to them said.

Among the last to go was a Danish photojournalist, Daniel Rye Ottosen, 25, released in June after his family cobbled together a multimillion-euro ransom, three people briefed on the negotiation said. He was one of several departing hostages who managed to smuggle out letters from his cellmates.

“I am obviously pretty scared to die,” Mr. Kassig wrote in a letter recently published by his family. “The hardest part is not knowing — hoping, and wondering if I should even hope at all.”

Mr. Foley seemed to sense the end was near. In his letter, amid expressions of love, he slipped in a sentence instructing his family on how to disburse the money in his bank account.

In August, when the militants came for him, they made him slip on a pair of plastic sandals. They drove him to a bare hill outside Raqqa. They made him kneel. He looked straight into the camera, his expression defiant. Then they slit his throat.

Two weeks later, a similar video surfaced on YouTube showing Mr. Sotloff’s death. In September, the militants uploaded Mr. Haines’s execution. In October, they killed Mr. Henning.

Only three from the original group of 23 remain: two Americans, Mr. Kassig and a woman who has not been identified, as well as a Briton, Mr. Cantlie.

The militants have announced they will kill Mr. Kassig next.

Across Europe, those who had survived gasped when they saw the footage of their cellmate’s death: The cheap, beige-colored plastic flip-flops splayed next to Mr. Foley’s body were the same pair the prisoners had shared.

They had all worn those sandals to the bathroom.

Those who survived had walked in the same shoes as those who did not.
After Ethics Panel’s Shutdown, Loopholes Live On in Albany

Free Spending and Fudgy Donuts Persist

By JAMES B. RAYBURN Jr. and AL BAKER

The warmest of the three November days was March

and March

? the justice system can favor the

the state’s case in Char-

Mr. Cuomo, a Democrat,

and Missouri — illustrate how

THAT WAY

By CHARLIE SAVAGE

Continued on Page A12

December 8, 2014

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New York, Monday, December 8, 2014

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Six Men Detained at Guantánamo Are Transferred to Uruguay

**Your Morning Read**

The White House had announced plans on Monday to release six Guantanamo detainees to Uruguay, a long-time ally of the United States, in a bid to meet its goal of reducing the prison population. Mr. Obama’s national security team has been working diligently to transfer eligible detainees from Guantánamo, but the process has been slow and fraught with controversy. The transfers are part of a broader strategy to reduce the prison population and improve conditions for the remaining detainees.

**News Details**

- The six detainees being transferred to Uruguay are all from Yemen.
- Uruguay has agreed to assume responsibility for the detainees, who will be housed in a military hospital in Montevideo.
- The transfers are part of a broader effort to reduce the population of Guantánamo, which has remained controversial since its opening in 2002.
- The transfers are seen as a positive step in the process of closing Guantánamo, but many questions remain about the long-term future of the detention facility.

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**Impact**

The transfers are seen as a positive step in the process of closing Guantánamo, but many questions remain about the long-term future of the detention facility. The transfers are part of a broader strategy to reduce the prison population and improve conditions for the remaining detainees.

**Investors Recruit To Restore Farmland**

**Millions of acres of forest are converted to agriculture.**

By BRADBURY MALEK

MEXICO CITY — Conservation groups are calling on the government of Mexico to take action to protect forested land from conversion to agriculture. The groups say that the conversion of farmland has been a major contributor to deforestation in the country. The call for action comes as the government is preparing to sign a new climate change agreement with the United States and other countries.

The conservation groups say that the conversion of farmland has been a major contributor to deforestation in the country. They say that the government should take action to protect the remaining forested land and prevent further conversion to agriculture.

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**Impact**

The conversion of farmland has been a major contributor to deforestation in the country. The call for action comes as the government is preparing to sign a new climate change agreement with the United States and other countries. The conservation groups say that the government should take action to protect the remaining forested land and prevent further conversion to agriculture.
For 18 months, a group of civilians in South Africa worked to accomplish what their government had been unable to do: negotiate the release of a South African couple held by Al Qaeda in the lawless desert of southern Yemen.

In January, the civilian negotiators succeeded in securing the release of the woman, Yolande Korkie. And in recent weeks, they received confirmation that the terrorist group had agreed to free her husband, Pierre Korkie, in return for a $200,000 ransom. On Saturday morning, a convoy of cars was set to leave the southern Yemeni city of Aden to pick up the 54-year-old hostage from the remote outpost where he was being held.

At 6 a.m. in Johannesburg, Imtiaz Sooliman, the director of the aid group that had led the long effort, sent a text message to Mrs. Korkie: “The waiting is almost over.”

At 8:03 a.m. his phone rang with incomprehensible news: Mr. Korkie was dead.

Hours before his expected release, the South African hostage was killed by his Qaeda guards when a military operation by the United States to save his cellmate — Luke Somers, an American photojournalist — went wrong. Mr. Somers and eight civilians were also killed in the raid.

United States officials say they did not know that Mr. Korkie was about to be freed, revealing the dangerous disconnect that can occur when civilians are left to negotiate hostage releases on their own. The government of South Africa — like the United States — hews to a strict policy of not paying ransoms to terrorist groups holding their citizens, maintaining that payments encourage kidnappers and perpetuate the problem.

Yet as kidnapping for ransom has turned into a lucrative business for Al Qaeda and its more extreme offshoot, the Islamic State, an increasing number of Westerners have been abducted. Frustrated by what they see as passive responses from their governments, the families and colleagues of hostages have been thrust into the role of amateur negotiators, initiating contact with the terrorists themselves.

That role proved to be nerve-racking for Mrs. Korkie and the South African charity trying to free her husband, who went to Yemen as a teacher.

“The night before, I spent hours on the phone with Yolande to try to calm her down,” said Mr. Sooliman, who heads the charity, Gift of the Givers, which runs humanitarian projects in eight countries, including Yemen. “I told her, ‘I’ll call you the moment Pierre is in our hands,’” he said. “She went to sleep with that good feeling in her heart.”

Unbeknown to them, a risky nighttime raid was already in progress in Yemen. President Obama gave the go-ahead for a unit of Navy SEAL Team 6 commandos to try to rescue Mr. Somers after concluding that his life was in imminent danger, because a deadline that his captors had set to meet their demands was about to expire. Just as Mrs. Korkie was trying to fall asleep at her home in Bloemfontein, South Africa, the V-22 Osprey tilt-rotor planes were sweeping toward a darkened village in rural Yemen.

It remains unclear what went wrong. Soon after the commandos reached the compound where the hostages were being held, gunfire erupted. Both Mr. Korkie and Mr. Somers were shot by their guards before the commandos could get to them.

By RUKMINI CALLIMACHI
Mr. Korkie had already been dead for several hours when Mrs. Korkie awoke on Saturday and resumed texting with Mr. Sooliman, organizing the final details of her husband’s release.

Those planning the American operation had no indication that the South African hostage was about to be freed, they said.

“We were not aware in advance about any release plans for other hostages,” a United States official, who requested anonymity to discuss the delicate operation, said shortly after the failed rescue mission. “That was not part of our planning.”

Gift of the Givers had not informed Yemeni officials or the United States of the planned release because their Qaeda contacts had warned them to keep the plans confidential, Mr. Sooliman said. It remains unclear whether the South African government — which said in a statement that it had been working with Gift of the Givers and had “undertaken numerous initiatives” to try to free Mr. Korkie — had informed the United States or Yemen about his imminent release.

In addition to not paying ransoms, unlike some countries in Europe whose officials have secretly funneled tens of millions of dollars to free their citizens, South Africa and the United States, do not engage in other ways with the terrorist groups holding their citizens. A prisoner exchange that led to the release of an American soldier, Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl, was different, United States officials say, because special laws apply to prisoners of war and because the Taliban, which was holding Sergeant Bergdahl, had not been designated as a terrorist organization.

Gregory D. Johnsen, the author of a book on Al Qaeda’s branch in Yemen who was nearly kidnapped on the same street in Sana where Mr. Somers was abducted last year, said he was troubled by the United States’ approach.

“When the U.S. unilaterally takes all the other options off the table and leaves itself with only the military option, then if that goes wrong, the results can be tragic,” he said. “There are a lot of different ways to negotiate even without paying ransom. It calls for innovative diplomacy.”

Yolande Korkie appealing in January for the release of her husband, a hostage killed Saturday.
Mr. Sooliman said Gifts of the Givers felt a moral obligation to help the Korkies — fellow South Africans in harm’s way in a country where the charity had deep ties. Although he said that the South African government had helped with diplomatic hurdles — such as issuing Mr. Korkie a new passport — its policy of non-engagement meant that the charity was on its own in contacting the terrorist group.

A South African government spokesman, Nelson Kgwete, said in a text message: “We do not, under any circumstances, pay ransom.” He did not answer further questions about what else the country had done to help Mr. Korkie.

Using its tribal connections in southern Yemen, Gift of the Givers contacted the kidnappers last year.

More than seven months after her abduction on May 27, 2013, Mrs. Korkie was released by Al Qaeda in January with no ransom requirement. The group refused to let her husband go, demanding $3 million for him and saying that releasing him without payment would set a bad precedent.

“They said they would not be able to waive the ransom for Pierre, because ‘if we do it for you, then we will have to do it for everyone,’” Mr. Sooliman said.

After months of silence, Gift of the Givers had a breakthrough in August, when tribal leaders sent a delegation, acting on behalf of the charity, into the remote badlands. The assembled Qaeda fighters took a vote on reducing the ransom, and half the jihadists voted “yes” while half voted “no,” Mr. Sooliman said. In October, the abductors said that they would accept $700,000. The family, which had already said it could not afford $3 million, still did not have enough money.

In November, the tribal leaders went back to meet with Qaeda members. The car was hit by a drone strike, killing the mediators, according to Mr. Sooliman. “We thought it was over,” he said.

But that tragedy appears to have spurred Al Qaeda to agree to a lower sum, which it promised to use in part to reimburse families of the dead tribal negotiators. On Nov. 26, Mr. Korkie’s abductors sent word they would accept $200,000, to be split with the tribe members.

By Saturday, the money raised by Mrs. Korkie from friends and other donors had been delivered to Yemen. The cars were preparing to leave.

“That’s when I got the call. I said, ‘How can Pierre be dead?’” Mr. Sooliman said. “They are going now!”

The cash was not delivered and will be returned, he said.

Mr. Korkie’s body is due to be transported to South Africa on Monday. His remains will arrive at roughly the same time that Mr. Korkie was expected to be reunited with his family.

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Eric Schmitt contributed reporting from Manama, Bahrain, and Kareem Fahim from Sana, Yemen.