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Why Won't the State Department Speak Up for Amanda Knox

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Why Won't the State Department Speak Up for Amanda Knox?

Even as the case against her unravels on appeal, Seattle native and foreign exchange student, Amanda Knox, sits in an Italian prison awaiting justice. She's been there 3½ years, convicted at age 20, together with her Italian boyfriend, Raffaele Sollecito, and another man, of murdering her British housemate, Meredith Kercher, in what the prosecution fancied was a sex game gone wrong. In Italy the wheels of justice turn slowly. But a judge from outside the clubby Perugia cabal is in charge of the appeal, and there is hope that Knox's exoneration and freedom are but months away.

The State Department has remained curiously silent throughout Knox's ordeal, undoubtedly adhering to a long-standing policy of non-interference with the judicial process of a sovereign nation. But that policy is supposed to yield where mistreatment or rights violations have been shown. Italy is not China or North Korea or Iran, but that is all the more reason for concern.

On May 16, 2011, a Washington state court judge sent a letter to President Obama and members of Congress, co-signed by two others, outlining Italy's numerous violations of Amanda Knox's rights under Italian law. The letter went on to concede that Amanda Knox is but one person; she's not a war, or an oil field, or a revolution. But, as the letter says, her rights have been trampled beyond belief.

This is not a close case. Knox is plainly innocent of any involvement in the crime. Common sense says

that it was that other man, Rudy Guede, who murdered Kercher in a botched robbery. The sex game scenario is a concocted story with nothing to support it.

From the beginning, the forensic evidence has pointed solely to Guede, a man with a criminal history of breaking and entering. He had fled to Germany but was caught, extradited and returned to Italy to face trial. But the original narrative of the case had so taken hold in the press that Prosecutor Mignini and the police had to adhere to it or appear foolish.

The authorities had plenty of evidence against Guede but nothing on Knox or Sollecito. They needed to find something to support murder charges against the young couple, so they manufactured evidence to suit their theories, focusing on a large knife from Sollecito's kitchen and a bra clasp that belonged to the victim.

On June 29, 2011, the independent experts appointed by the appellate court to evaluate the DNA findings on the knife and clasp, submitted their report which concluded that such evidence is unsupported by scientifically validated analysis, and is unreliable, possibly the result of contamination. These findings will be debated in court from July 25 thru August 1, 2011.

The re-examination of the genetic testing of the knife and clasp will free Knox and Sollecito because when that evidence is eliminated, the house of cards constructed by the prosecution will collapse. Simply put, there is no other credible evidence to connect these two young people to the crime.

That Mignini and the police see the writing on the wall is evidenced by their stepped-up attempts to quash any reporting critical of their case. On April 19, 2011, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) wrote to the Italian president protesting Mignini's lawsuits and threats against reporters, writers, and press outlets, in connection with the Kercher murder investigation. Among other examples, the CPJ letter cited harassment of Perugia reporter Frank Sfarzo, whose blog, *Perugia Shock*, has been critical of the Kercher case. Even after the letter had been sent, Mignini sought and received a court order shutting down the blog. Mignini himself has been convicted of abuse of power in an unrelated case.

This case has been an embarrassment to Italy. On May 25, 2011, eleven Italian lawmakers wrote to the

president of Italy and to the Italian justice minister complaining that Knox has been treated unjustly. They are seeking an investigation into the corrupt handling of the case by the Perugia prosecutor's office.

Yet, even in the face of concerns expressed by Italy's own legislators, our State Department remains mum. It may be that State is working behind the scenes under the belief that quiet diplomacy is less likely to unleash a backlash that could work to hamper Knox's appeal. Even so, it would be nice to know that when we send our children to study abroad, and through no fault of their own they become embroiled in a foreign nightmare, someone in our government has their backs.

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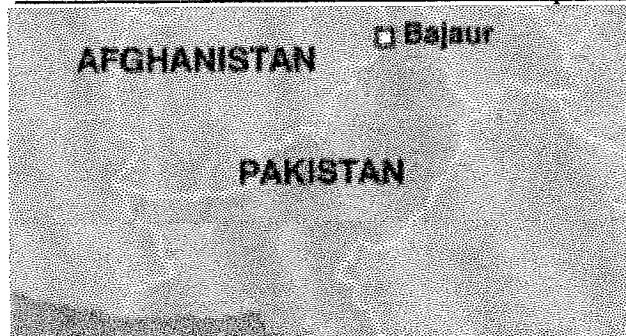
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