ITALIAN MORAL STUPIDITY IN IRAQ

Giuliana Sgrena does not lack a sense of self importance. The 56-year-old journalist for the Italian communist newspaper Il Manifesto thinks she knows so many deep dark secrets the U.S. military tried to shut her up permanently.

Sgrena went to Iraq to report on the heroic resistance to the American imperialists. Dutch journalist Harald Doornbos rode in the airplane to Baghdad with her. "Be careful not to get kidnapped," Doornbos warned Sgrena.

"You don't understand the situation," she responded, according to Doornbos' account in the Nederlands Dagblatt. "The Iraqis only kidnap American sympathizers. The enemies of the Americans have nothing to fear."

Sgrena left her hotel the morning of Feb. 4th to interview refugees from Fallujah, the resistance stronghold captured by U.S. Marines in November. The interviews didn't go well. "The refugees...would not listen to me," she said. "I had in front of me the accurate confirmation of the analysis of what the Iraqi society had become as a result of the war and they would throw their truth in my face."

Sgrena's feelings were hurt that the refugees could be so curt to: "I who had risked everything, challenging the Italian government who didn't want journalists to reach Iraq and the Americans who don't want our work to be witnessed of what really became of that country with the war and notwithstanding that which they call elections." (Maybe it reads better in Italian, or maybe she just can't write worth a damn.)

She got nabbed on her way back to her hotel. Sgrena told her captors she was on their side, and suggested they kidnap an American soldier instead. But the U.S. government doesn't pay ransoms.

The Italian government did pay a ransom estimated by various sources at between $1 million and $10 million, and Sgrena was released into the custody of Italian intelligence officers. On the night of March 4, their vehicle approached a checkpoint near Baghdad International Airport. The car did not stop. U.S. troops opened fire. Nicola Calipari was killed, Sgrena was slightly wounded.

Sgrena said the soldiers deliberately tried to kill her, but didn't hazard a guess as to how the soldiers knew she was in that vehicle. According to the U.S. embassy and the Third Infantry Division, the Italians did not inform the Americans she'd been released. And Calipari had rented a nondescript sedan to pick up Sgrena, rather than utilize one of the Italian embassy's armored SUVs, which the soldiers might have recognized.

Sgrena and the driver said they approached the checkpoint slowly. But "slowly" seems to be a

relative term for Italian drivers, and for communists. An Army officer told ABC news the car may have been going 100 mph when it was fired upon.

Sgrena claims the Americans shot without warning. "A tank started to shoot at us without any sign or any light," she told reporters March 7th. The soldiers say they used lights, and hand signals, and fired warning shots before shooting into the engine block to stop the vehicle. The car's driver said the soldiers did shine a spotlight, but opened up almost immediately afterwards.

Sgrena said "the tank" fired 300-400 shots at her car. But photographs of it published March 8th by the Italian newspaper La Repubblica indicate the vehicle suffered remarkably little damage for such a fusillade. There is a single bullet hole in the windshield, but the window glass and the fenders are otherwise intact, as is the hood.
Perhaps the soldiers were remarkably lousy shots. But if they were trying
to kill Sgrena, why did they take her to the hospital instead of finishing her off?

There are questions that need answers. The Italians say they notified the Americans of Sgrena's release, but the Americans deny it. Was the car going "slowly," as the Italians claim, or was it trying to run through the checkpoint, as the Americans say?

But there is no doubt about the credibility of Giuliana Sgrena. She entitled her story "My Truth," perhaps to distinguish it from the bourgeois concept of truth that depends on adherence to fact. Many on the Left in America embraced Sgrena's "truth," while refusing to give their countrymen the benefit of the doubt.

But hey, liberals support our troops. They say so all the time.

Jack Kelly is a former Marine and Green Beret and a former deputy assistant secretary of the Air Force in the Reagan administration. He is national security writer for the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.