

# Bigley makes his plea



COLIN LANE - THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

From left to right, **Stanley Bigley** (Kenneth Bigley's brother), **Craig Bigley** (Bigley's son) and **Philip Bigley** (Bigley's brother) speak to the media in Liverpool, England, Wed. after a video was released on an Islamic Web site of British hostages in Iraq. In the video, Kenneth Bigley made a direct plea to Prime Minister Tony Blair to save his life.

## Plea

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most vital areas of the capital. U.S. and Iraqi troops battled with insurgents in the central city of Samarra, where U.S. forces had earlier claimed success against militants waging a month-long insurgency, police said. At least one child was killed and five people wounded in the fighting, police said.

The confusion over the fate of female detainees began when the Justice Ministry official announced that Rihab Rashid Taha, a scientist who became known as "Dr. Germ" for helping Iraq make weapons out of anthrax, would be freed in the coming days because she was no longer a threat to national security.

The U.S. and Iraqi officials found themselves at odds over who had custody over Taha and another female scientist involved in Saddam Hussein's biological weapons programs, with Iraqi national security adviser Qassim Daoud saying they were in the hands of Iraqi security forces and that "Iraqi judges decided to release them because they didn't have any evidence." But a U.S. Embassy spokesman disagreed, saying the pair "are in our legal and physical custody."

Prime Minister Ayad Allawi told The Associated Press that his government has begun reviewing the status of its detainees, including the two female scientists. But he said the review process had nothing to do with the hostage situation and had started weeks ago in Iraq.

"We have not been negotiating and we will not negotiate with terrorists on the release of hostages," he said in a telephone interview from New York. "No release takes place unless I authorize it."

The conflicting U.S. and Iraqi statements raised questions over who has authority in the country, even after the hand over of sovereignty to Allawi's interim government in June. U.S. officials have been saying that they have been giving more decision-making power to Iraqis, including over security matters.

The U.S. military says it has two Iraqi women in custody, Taha and Huda Salih Mahdi Ammash, a biotech researcher known as "Mrs. Anthrax." Justice Ministry spokesman Noori Abdul-Rahman Ibrahim announced that "Iraqi authorities have agreed with coalition forces to conditionally release Rihab Rashid Taha on bail." He added that the decision ... has nothing to do with the threat made by the kidnappers.

But soon afterward, a U.S. Embassy spokesman ruled out any immediate release. The two female scientists from Saddam's regime "are in our legal and physical custody. Legal status of these two and many others is under constant review," the spokesman said.

Representatives of the Iraqi government and U.S. coalition forces have identified a group of about 14 high-value detainees, including Taha,

who may be eligible for release because they are no longer needed for questioning and do not pose a security threat, a multinational force official said on condition of anonymity.

The Iraqi government has already assented to all the names on the list, the official said. The list has gone to coalition forces and the U.S. Embassy for final approval.

"We want to make certain that there is no connection between the decision to release her with al-Zarqawi's demands," a Western official also said on condition of anonymity.

Al-Zarqawi's Tawhid and Jihad group announced Tuesday it killed Hensley, saying their demands had not been met. Hensley would have marked his 49th birthday Wednesday. On Monday, the group released a video showing the beheading of Armstrong, whose body was found in Baghdad the same day.

The group warned in a Web statement that Bigley, 62, would be the next to die unless all Iraqi women are released from jail — though it did not set a deadline as it has in past statements.

In Wednesday's video, Bigley said Blair was the only man who could keep his kidnapers from killing him.

"Mr. Blair, I am nothing to you. Here's just one person living in the United Kingdom, that's all, with a family like you, like your family, your children, your boys, your wife," the speaker said in the grainy video.

"Please, you can help. I know you can," he said, addressing the British prime minister.

The speaker wore an orange jumpsuit, the kind that kidnapers put on their hostages before killing them and like those issued to prisoners held by American forces at the U.S. military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Bigley sobbed in the middle of his message and wiped his forehead. A banner of the Tawhid and Jihad militant group hung on the wall behind him.

Earlier, Britain's Foreign Secretary Jack Straw appeared to hold out little hope for saving Bigley.

"We continue to do everything we can to secure Kenneth Bigley's safe release, but it would be idle to pretend that there's a great deal of hope," Straw told reporters in New York.

Tawhid and Jihad — Arabic for "Monotheism and Holy War" — has claimed responsibility for the slaying of at least seven hostages, including American Nicholas Berg. The group has also said it is behind a number of bombings and gun attacks.

Its spiritual leader, Sheik Abu Anas al-Shami, 35, was killed when a missile hit his car on Friday in western Baghdad, according to al-Shami's father. The U.S. military had no comment.

A host of militant groups have used kidnappings and bombings to undermine Allawi's interim government and force the United States and its allies out of Iraq. The violence has already persuaded companies to leave, hindered foreign investment, led firms to drop out of aid projects, restricted activities to relatively safe areas and forced major expenditures on security.

**"I think this is possibly my last chance. I don't want to die."**

— Kenneth Bigley  
British hostage

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