



Offers We Can't Refuse?

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An Iraqi acquaintance served as a member of a city council. She is Shia and religious. She had formed an alliance with other Iraqi women – Shia, Sunni and Christian; Arab and Kurd; religious and secular. All had united in pursuit of a common goal: guaranteeing basic human rights for all Iraqis.

Members of the Mahdi Army, the militia loyal to the radical Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, got wind of her activism. They approached her brother and said they heard she was “working with the Americans.” Her advocacy in favor of Western notions of freedom and democracy, they told him, was offensive. They suggested she resign from the city council. They made it clear that if she did not do as they asked, they would kill her.

She resigned the next day.

By coincidence, on that same day, one of her alliance partners learned that her boss, Meysoun al-Hashemi, had been murdered -- gunned down along with her bodyguard as they were driving to work.

There were no claims of responsibility, but the commander of al-Qaeda in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, has threatened any Sunnis who take part in the newly elected Iraqi government. And Meysoun al-Hashemi was a prominent Sunni, the sister of the new Iraqi Vice President, Tarek al-Hashemi. She also was the head of the Women's Affairs Department for the Iraqi Islamic Party, the country's largest Sunni political faction. She was the second member of the al-Hashemi family to be murdered within a month.

Perhaps you think that, as unfortunate as all this is, it's only happening in Iraq; surely, such intimidation

could never succeed in societies that have learned the habits of tolerance and freedom. Think again.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali was born and raised a Muslim in Somalia. She moved to the Netherlands where she rose from a cleaning woman to a member of parliament. She has been an outspoken critic of Militant Islamism. In response, Militant Islamists have let her know that what happened to Theo van Gogh could happen to her.

Van Gogh, you may recall, was a Dutch film director. He made a movie based on a script by Hirsi Ali. The movie dealt with violence against women in Muslim societies, a topic some Muslims found offensive.

On Nov. 2, 2004 van Gogh was murdered. His assailant, Mohammed Bouyeri, was a 26-year-old Dutch citizen born in Amsterdam. Bouyeri shot van Gogh eight times. Then he slit van Gogh's throat with a butcher's knife. Then he stabbed him in the chest. Two knives were left in the body; one pinned to the corpse a five-page manifesto railing against the West, Jews and Hirsi Ali.

Since then, the Dutch government has provided Hirsi Ali with police protection. Her neighbors in the apartment complex where she lives are nonetheless concerned -- for themselves. They have sued the government to get her evicted.

A court has now ordered her to move out, ruling that the neighbors

have been made to feel unsafe which violates their human rights.

In America, too, Militant Islamists have been learning how simple it is to take away freedoms. Recently, prestigious newspapers such as The New York Times and The Washington Post refrained from publishing Danish cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad despite their obvious newsworthiness: They had set off an international controversy. The papers claimed their restraint was motivated by respect for Islam -- a respect they would never exhibit toward Christianity or Judaism.

Walden books and Borders were more candid about why they refused to stock magazines containing the drawings: "For us," company spokeswoman Beth Bingham said, "the safety and security of our customers and employees is a top priority, and we believe that carrying this issue could challenge that priority."

Let's not delude ourselves about what is going on: In the Middle East, Europe, America and elsewhere, a campaign of violence and intimidation is being waged. We have not yet begun to fight back. Instead, we've dressed up our fears as sensitivity, attempted to appease those who threaten and kill, while allowing ourselves to be cowed into self-censorship. Surely, we know where this road leads.

In the last century, Nazis and Communists attempted to extinguish freedom. We fought back. Now, there are new bullies on the block. There is no guarantee that if

we fight again we will win again. table.
But if we don't fight, defeat is inevi-

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