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Middle East Perspectives

by Rick Francona

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"Taliban John" claims his religious rights are being violated in prison

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John Walker Lindh (AP)



An acknowledged Middle East expert, dynamic speaker, author of *Ally to Adversary - An Eyewitness Account of Iraq's Fall from Grace*, and former NBC News Middle East military analyst, retired intelligence officer Lt Col Rick Francona offers his thoughts and opinions on various Middle East topics.

Recommended by TIME.com, CNN.com, MSNBC.com and the Chicago Sun-Times.

I normally do not comment on legal cases unless they have some relation to the situation in the Middle East. I wrote recently about Wikileaks publisher Julian Assange and his source for hundreds of thousands of classified diplomatic and military documents, U.S. Army Private First Class Bradley Manning. (See [Julian Assange, PFC Bradley Manning and the Middle East.](#))

There are few cases for which I routinely make exceptions. The first is the case of admitted traitor and spy for Israel Jonathan Pollard, or as I prefer to call him, Prisoner #09185-016 (see my latest on this traitor, [Obama, Peres and Pollard - any "flexibility?"](#)).

The other case is that of admitted terrorist John Walker Lindh, also known as the "American Taliban," "Taliban John" or as I prefer to refer to this traitor, Prisoner #45426-083. Lindh has served about just over half of his negotiated 20-year sentence, and is scheduled to be released in 2019. The plea bargain was a gift - Lindh had joined the Taliban in Afghanistan and took up arms against American troops in combat. He was at the facility and participated in the prisoner uprising in which a CIA officer, Mike Spann, was killed.

My view of Lindh is no secret - see ["Taliban John" - His Father Speaks Out](#) and [John Walker Lindh wants out](#). I'll give you the bottom line - Lindh is a traitor to his country. He should have been prosecuted and given the death penalty. If it had been up to me, it would not have gotten even that far - he'd have been left dead on a battlefield in Afghanistan. Harsh? Maybe - let's ask Mike Spann's widow, who for that last 11 years has faced raising their son without a father.

The latest issue with #45426-083 is his claim that he is being deprived of his religious rights because the federal prison does not allow him to meet with other convicted violent Muslim felons for group prayer. The word "prison" keeps jumping into my mind. Isn't prison where you are supposed to be deprived of your rights?

Specifically, #45426-083 claims that the Hanbali school of thought (*mathhab*) to which he adheres requires group prayer "if it is possible." Short answer - you are in prison and it is not possible. Unfortunately, we have to have an ACLU circus to determine whether the inmates or the prison staff get to set the rules.

Lindh's parents have tried to mount a public relations campaign portraying their son as a victim of circumstances, a young man who made some bad choices. They rightly worry for #45426-083's safety once he is released from prison. His mother said recently, "It's critical for John's life at whatever point he gets out of prison that he is able to live without having to look over his shoulder for someone that wants to do him harm." I am surprised he's survived in prison.

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I picked up on the "at whatever point he gets out of prison" wording. The family wants presidential clemency for their son. The family asked President Bush to grant clemency to #45426-083, which was refused. I hope that President Obama follows suit and stands fast in keeping this traitor locked up for the maximum period of the extremely lenient sentence his lawyers were able to negotiate. I am not sure if an Obama re-election will give him the same "flexibility" in this case as he hopes to have in dealing with the Russians.

The Free John Walker organization - yes, there is one - asks that you write to Lindh, but to "please keep it clean. He's taken enough s**t as it is over the past few years." Yes, I am welling up over poor John.

I encourage you to write to #45426-083 - I have. I want him to know that his mother's fears are true - he will always have to be looking over his shoulder.

John Walker Lindh #45426-083
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[Newer Post](#)

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[Older Post](#)

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 - ▼ [August \(17\)](#)
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 - [HIP action - Syrian style](#)
 - [Assault helicopters over Al-Mizzih - ADDENDUM](#)
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 - [Julian Assange, PFC Bradley Manning and the Middle...](#)
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 - [Obama signs "secret" finding on Syria](#)
 - ▶ [July \(5\)](#)
 - ▶ [June \(3\)](#)
 - ▶ [May \(10\)](#)
 - ▶ [April \(10\)](#)
 - ▶ [March \(10\)](#)
 - ▶ [February \(4\)](#)
 - ▶ [January \(5\)](#)
- ▶ 2011 (86)
- ▶ 2010 (118)
- ▶ 2009 (151)
- ▶ 2008 (71)
- ▶ 2007 (131)
- ▶ 2006 (165)
- ▶ 2005 (54)

► 2004 (23)

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