

Beheading

2006

There is nothing like a beheading – or the threat of a beheading – to strike fear into the hearts of Westerners. I remember as a child going to WWII movies and occasionally coming upon a scene where the Japanese general was standing in front of his POW's brandishing a sword. Which prisoner would he choose to make an example of? Which prisoner would have his head severed so swiftly and cleanly that he would still be left standing at attention? Grisly, hair-raising and paralyzing stuff to contemplate and it could only be explained away by the fact that such perpetrators were foreigners, not of our culture or religious beliefs, more akin to ruthless, Godless infidels.

In the Iraq war, we have seen many threats of beheading. In fact, one American young man, an engineer from Pennsylvania, I believe, was beheaded. In addition there have been many video threats made by Iraqi insurgents standing behind the blindfolded American with a razor-thin scimitar at the ready. Apparently, it is just not Americans who are frozen with fear at the prospect of being beheaded, but Iraqis too. Within the last week, there have been at least two reports of the heads of Iraqi's delivered to the city center in banana boxes with a note: Beware! This is what happens to traitors! – or words to that effect.

And now Canada: the Internet headlines lead one to believe that their home-grown terrorists were planning to behead the prime minister. News media outlets kill for

such headline opportunities – plot to behead prime minister! Who could even imagine such a thing?

Personally, I do not wish to be beheaded. Even the thought sends a shiver down my spine, which after all, is the intent of the threat. But when you compare war apples to war apples, how much different is the threat – and the act – of beheading someone, than say, randomly pulling an Iraqi out of a passing car and executing him on the street, or kicking in the door of an Iraqi residence and executing two dozen family members, or “accidentally” killing a prisoner through the torture method known as water boarding? Which one is more – or less – humane? Which one is more civilized? More Godless? More ruthless? Perhaps, in the end, there is no difference.

Here is some home grown public relations advice: if you want to create a screaming international headline – true or not – and put the fear of God into the Western populace, threaten to behead someone, but choose wisely: a pope, a president, a prime minister, or a queen are far better publicity choices. Not to worry whether such a beheading is even in the realm of the possible, it is the threat that counts. However, a word of caution: the threat of beheading a head of state is more credible if you own a scimitar.