

\223I'll Eat His Liver---But Not With Chianti.\224  
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Who doesn't remember the movie in which Hannibal Lector, the criminally insane psychiatrist, tells his interviewer about the delights of eating someone's liver with \223a nice little Chianti.\224 In our society, his cannibalism is considered a mark of his insanity.

However, The Guardian, a British newspaper, showed a much worse case of cannibalism that cannot be excused by need (famine) or insanity. According to The Guardian, Human Rights Watch has identified a well-known Syrian rebel commander, Abu Sakkar, in a video, cutting the heart and liver (or lungs) out of a government soldier's body. He actually shouted that when they finish this war, they will eat the hearts and livers of all Alawite soldiers.

The man's excuse, says Time Magazine, was that he opened the dead soldier's cell phone and \223found a clip of a woman and her two daughters fully naked and he was humiliating them\224 with sticks. The Assad forces rape and humiliate, and the rebel forces retaliate by eating the soldier's heart (or liver). They also rape and humiliate.

Before we try to psychoanalyze all the Syrian combatants' behavior, as some reporters have tried to do, blaming it on \223war,\224 we need to take a look at the cultural context of such behavior.

There is a description in the Koran of a famous battle, the battle of Badr, when the wife of the chief leader of Mecca and an early enemy of the Prophet Muhammad, went among the Muslim dead and mutilated corpses, one of them Muhammad's uncle Hamzah, cutting out his liver and eating it. She and her \223ladies\224 also wore \223victory jewelry\224 made of the ears and noses of the fallen soldiers.

Arab tradition has a long history of this behavior. It is not only the victors' women, who do this; it is also the men. This can be said to be the ultimate personal terror weapon.

To be sure, in Medieval Europe, victors cut off the noses and put out the eyes of the vanquished too. One American Indian tribe early in America's history also cut off pieces of captives and ate them in front of their eyes. However, why are we still seeing this kind of behavior among modern Syrians today?

What kind of a choice do we have when the Syrian government tortures, rapes, bombs and shells, and uses every modern means of intimidation while the rebel forces devolve into literal Islamic history for their atrocities? We know Assad; he is terrible; we now know the rebel forces, and they may be worse.

One of the few American Muslim modernizers, Dr. Zuhdi Jasser, noted that our problem, should the Islamist rebel forces win (of course, after their own civil war), is the nature of their beliefs. \223Islamism is an all-encompassing political, religious, societal and cultural philosophy which believes that all citizens derive their rights not individually from God but from their national leader's interpretation of Islam enacted on behalf of God.\224 He gives an example of Egypt's ruling party, the Muslim Brotherhood's recent public rejection of the UN Charter on Women as being \223anti-Islam.\224 Human Rights are not their thing either.

Jasser further notes that there \223is a more dangerous pan-national global supremacism that exploits all minorities, whether Jewish, Christian, or atheist, or minorities from within the faith such as the Shiites, Isma'ilis, or dissenting Sunnis (like himself).\224

There will be no acceptable winners here; there must be negotiations, obnoxious as that is. One former political negotiator who spent five years in painful negotiation to resolve the Bosnian conflict had to deal with the loathsome Slobodan Milosevic. He said that every time he had to talk to Milosevic, he felt like he needed a shower. Talking to Assad would be no better.

However, the Russians may be right that the same kind of negotiations will be required in which Assad will be a participant. Awful as that is, there may be a point in recognizing that a political settlement will certainly be better than any of the

other options. Remember, after the Bosnian agreement, Milosovic was arrested and tried.

677 words

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