

CBS News October 19, 2014, 10:12 AM

Ben Stein: Time for us to pay ransom to terrorists

Recent brutal acts in the Middle East, and our government's policy for dealing with them, are weighing on the mind of our contributor Ben Stein:

Could anything be worse than being made to kneel in the sand, read a slander against your own country, and then have a psychotic killer slowly cut your head off with a small knife?

You are all alone in the desert, in unspeakable fear and pain.

As most of us know, this is what recently happened to two Americans, [Steven Sotloff](#) and [James Foley](#), both journalists, at the hands of the horrifyingly cruel terror group, the so-called "Islamic State." The same horrific fate happened to two British aid workers, [David Haines](#) and [Alan Henning](#), kidnapped recently by ISIS.

According to news reports (which could be wrong), part of the reason ISIS did these cruel acts was because the governments of the United States and the United Kingdom refused to pay ransom to the terrorists as the kidnapers demanded.

The reason? The U.S. does not pay ransom to terrorists. Same goes for the U.K.

This sounds fine and noble and high-minded if you are sitting in a comfy office in the White House or on Downing Street. But maybe it's not so smart or so kind.

- [ISIS emailed \\$132.5 million ransom demand](#) (CBS News, 08/21/14)
- ["Multiple kidnappings for ransom" funding ISIS, source says](#) (CBS News, 08/21/14)
- [Extorting ransoms has become a cash cow for ISIS](#) ("CBS Evening News," 08/22/14)
- [Is it time to rethink U.S. policy toward hostage negotiations?](#) (CBS News, 08/25/14)
- [Obama vows ISIS killing of journalist Steven Sotloff won't intimidate U.S.](#) ("CBS This Morning," 09/03/14)
- [PM David Cameron: "We must do everything we can to defeat" ISIS](#) (10/04/14)

Why *don't* we pay ransom? France apparently pays ransom. The Germans, whom we don't think of as softies, pay ransom. What is so great about not paying ransom?

We paid an immense ransom [for the release of U.S. Army Sergeant Bowe Bergdahl](#) from the Taliban recently, when we exchanged him for five "high value" terrorists being kept at Guantanamo.

- [GOP on Bowe Bergdahl release: U.S. shouldn't negotiate with terrorists](#) (CBS News, 06/01/14)
- [Sen. Chambliss: Bowe Bergdahl swap sets "very dangerous precedent"](#) (CBS News, 06/03/14)

From what one hears, oil companies routinely pay bribes to keep their pipelines running.

In the Iraq War, we bribed local sheiks with planeloads of money to be on our side.

Look, not paying ransom has a nice ring to it. But it's not going to beat ISIS. It's not going to stop the allure of a fundamentalist, murderous movement to sick minds.

Instead, it means that a fellow human who was not a spy or an assassin, who was maybe just trying to help inform people or save people's lives, dies an excruciating, lonely death -- and *no one* is any better off for it.

These men don't deserve to die this way.

If they can be ransomed, let's do it. We have plenty of money.

Let's show some mercy to our own people -- and let's keep them from being kidnapped by keeping them the heck away from the whole area