



Source: Steven R. Weisman, 'Saudi women depart from the script', *New York Times* in *International Herald Tribune* online, 29/09/05.

Tags: [disenchantment](#), [security](#), [travel](#)

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The decapitated head, held by the hair, slowly swung and twisted. The eyeballs pointed in different directions and a thick plume of smoke emanated from the cauterised skin and sinew where the neck used to meet the shoulders.

The Politician, leaning on his podium, smirked as he froze the image on the portable monitor, the bodiless head now in suspended animation. His hair greying at the temples, the Politician was at least a head taller than the tallest reporter. Tall was in. Voters had been polled and surveyed using a variety of methods. The results showed that size mattered, literally. The electorate overwhelmingly liked someone to look up to.

This rat frenzy of a media debacle was being held in Sydney Airport, of all places. The reporters pointed their recording devices at the politician like space age weapons, clamouring for a sound byte, the juicy quote, the subtle look. The Politician adjusted his jacket, twisted his neck to one side, then the other until he heard a loud crack. Turning to the reporters, he jabbed a pointed finger at the screen. 'This is how we deal with terrorists!' He enunciated every word slowly and clearly. 'We will not stand for terrorist activities in our country. Nor will we bow to demands made by terrorists.'

The traveller stood about ten metres away, waiting, suitcases chained to her wrists and vacuum sealed in Kevlar. These scripted politico-media 'events' made her ill. She wasn't sure which politician it was. Perhaps the Minister for Territorial Security. Maybe the Minister for Law, Order and Control. They all looked and sounded alike to her. They all said the same things.

She'd sold nearly everything she owned to leave the country. All she had left was contained in her two battered suitcases. Although she was sad, her lack of possessions wasn't the cause of her sorrow.

'Excuse me, ma'am.'

She turned, greeting two security guards, a man and a woman, both standing over six feet tall, both with crew cuts. Their uniforms doubled as body armour. Both had one hand resting on their firearm, while the other clutched a hand-held scanner. She shivered involuntarily. Her voice quavered. 'Yes?'

'Random internals check. Please hold your arms out, widen your stance, and remain as still as possible.'

'I've had two today already.'

'Please remain still.'

The guards swept their scanners over the back of her head, to her shoulders, then her back, under her arms, down her side, legs, back up to her crotch, belly, over her breasts, where she thought the male lingered too long, and finally her face.

'Why'd you pick me?'

Both guards looked at the screens on their scanners. The male guard answered without looking at her. 'We're not obliged to divulge that information.' A light on the guards' scanners flashed, then they beeped simultaneously.

'Can I put my arms down?'

The guards conferred and nodded to each other. The female guard dismissed her while looking away. 'You're free to go.' They silently strolled away.

She didn't know why, but said 'thanks' anyway, and lowered her arms.

A crowd of civilians had gathered behind the media cohort. The politician was again gesticulating at the screen. 'Due to an anonymous tip-off, this individual was caught red-handed in his own home. After months of meticulous surveillance, the Terrorist Surveillance Unit apprehended this individual. Using the new Fast-Track laws, he was tried, prosecuted and sentenced within weeks. This is just another example of how our laws are working perfectly to protect our society.'

Raising his voice, the politician now had the crowd in the palm of his hand. 'The longer we allow them to be in our society, the more chance they have of threatening our values and destroying our way of life. Nor should they be foisted upon or deported to other law abiding countries. These individuals do not deserve a second chance.'

The crowd of spectators clapped enthusiastically. The traveller overheard a young woman speaking to her equally young boyfriend. 'Beheading is too good for them if you ask me.'

Standard extensive governmental department cross-checking meant she waited two years before she was allowed to book a flight. She had a return ticket but she wasn't coming back. She wasn't saddened that she wasn't coming back, leaving friends and family behind. Her sorrow was because she was leaving alone.

Before waiting two years for the cross-checking, she'd waited four years for her husband to come home. He worked in the Terrorist Surveillance Unit before it had a name. She had called the office asking where he was. 'We're not obliged to divulge that information,' was the only response offered until she received a letter, which, in part, stated that her husband had 'expired' in the course of his duties. The letter had no name or signature above Head of Operations—Territorial Security, only blank space. Four years, and no-one to take responsibility.

'Sydney Airport is the jewel in our anti-terrorist crown. There has not been one single incident where a known or suspected terrorist, neo-terrorist, or potential terrorist has been detected entering or leaving the country for over twelve months. This simply means that Australia is being crossed off their list as a potential target, and proves that our unique hard-line approach is being recognised throughout the world. This message is simple, loud and clear. Australia is a free country and we intend to keep it free.'

The politician paused, leaned forward and peered straight into the lens of the nearest camera. 'This means—Do not fuck with us.'

The traveller turned away and checked her watch. Still over two hours till her flight departed. Only two hours. She felt a tap on her shoulder.

'Random internals check.'

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Ross Murray.