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USC College of Letters, Arts & Sciences' School of International Relations*

The Danish Cartoon Crisis: The Import and Impact of Public Diplomacy April 5, 2006
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Invaluable research support provided by Iskra Kirova.

In early September 2005, Flemming Rose, the culture editor for a right-of-center Danish newspaper, commissioned over 30 Danish cartoonists to submit caricatures of the Islamic prophet Mohammed that he could print in his paper, *Jyllands-Posten*. Rose had recently become concerned that European media organizations were self-censoring themselves with regard to issues sensitive to Islam, and was worried that the principles of freedom of speech were under attack. On September 30, with the intent of “pushing back self-imposed limits on expression that seemed to be closing in tighter,” Rose published twelve cartoons depicting the Islamic prophet Mohammed, images that are considered blasphemous by followers of Islam.

Two weeks later, 3,500 protestors organized in Copenhagen to non-violently protest the cartoons, calling for a formal apology from the paper. Flemming and *Jyllands-Posten* refused, and tensions escalated. On October 20, eleven ambassadors from Muslim-majority countries asked to meet Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen to discuss the government’s reactions to the publication of the cartoons. Prime Minister Rasmussen declined to meet the ambassadors, stating: “I won’t meet with them because it is so crystal clear what principles Danish democracy is built upon that there is no reason to do so. . . . As prime minister I have no tool whatsoever to take actions against the media, and I don’t want that kind of tool.” Outraged by the Prime Minister’s refusal to meet, Abu Laban, an imam living in Denmark, initiated a campaign to bring international attention to the issue. He contacted the Organization of Islamic Faith and organized a group of Muslims that would tour the Middle East presenting and criticizing the cartoons. The tour presented a 43-page book that included the 12 cartoons as well as 3 more images of Mohammed that had never actually been published. After showing the booklet to religious leaders, politicians, and journalists in Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria, public outcry quickly grew. On January 30, 2006, the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and the Arab League jointly called for a UN resolution, backed by possible sanctions. The political firestorm escalated when in response to the debate, numerous publications around Europe began republishing the cartoons in addition to several new, and perhaps more offensive, images.

As Western diplomats and media industries in the West paused to debate the free-speech implications of the cartoon debate, what began as a public diplomacy crisis for Denmark quickly spread to negatively effect images of countries such as Italy, the United Kingdom, and the United States. At the height of the crisis in February 2006, Muslims around the world took to the streets in sometimes violent protest

against the publication and re-publication of Danish political cartoons considered sacrilegious, deeply offensive, and disrespectful to the religion of Islam.

These protests targeted Western embassies, fast food chains, and even diplomats themselves. In addition to often violent street demonstrations, protests against the cartoon publication have taken a number of forms - each with important implications for the study and practice of public diplomacy. Iran formally declared an economic boycott of Danish products on February 6. Bakeries across Iran renamed pastries formerly referred to as a "danish" as a "rose of Mohammed." In Saudi Arabia, the cartoon crisis sparked the birth of a new social movement, campaigning under the banner of "Victory for the Prophet," and dedicated to promoting better awareness about Islam in the West. The group launched an economic boycott of Danish products, collected signatures to deliver to the Danish Embassy and is now conducting research into strategies for making the public insulting of the prophet illegal. Major Saudi supermarkets posted notices saying "Danish products are not sold" over their cheese displays, while text messages circulated urging consumers to boycott Danish products.

The anti-cartoon demonstrations quickly prompted counter-protests in the West, which intensified outrage in the Middle East. Numerous websites featuring the offensive cartoons quickly appeared. In what was perhaps one of the most high-profile counter-protests, Italian Minister Roberto Calderoli began wearing a t-shirt featuring the cartoons.

Contrastingly, many governments and businesses are conducting image repair campaigns in the Middle East in an effort to overcome the political and economic ramifications of the crisis. Some Scandinavian companies have taken out full-page ads in Middle Eastern publications disassociating themselves from the crisis, while others are conducting advertising campaigns to ensure that consumers know they are not Danish-owned. Pundits remain divided about whether the cartoon protests were orchestrated for political gain or truly represented the majority of public opinion in the Arab world. Either way, it seems to be the consensus that while protesters are no longer taking to the streets, the cartoon crisis continues to be a critical symbol of the hurdles to dialogue and public diplomacy between Western and Middle Eastern countries. The following is an aggregation of key recent articles and commentary about the Danish cartoon crisis. The links are divided into four sections: (1) general editorials and analysis about the crisis, (2) articles that detail governmental attempts at image repair, (3) articles about corporate diplomacy in response to the economic boycott against Western products, and (4) public opinion polls about the cartoon crisis. If you would like to post your reactions and ideas about the Danish cartoon crisis, you can add your comments at the bottom of this page.

General Editorials and Analysis

A Muslim Looks Back at the Danish Cartoon Controversy

(Hawazen Nassief, *The Daily Star*, April 4, 2006)

Alarmed by the developments that took place in the Muslim world following the publication of cartoons depicting the prophet Mohammad, a group of young Muslims, including myself, flew to Denmark in February to initiate a peaceful dialogue and promote mutual understanding. The trip was facilitated by the Danish Foreign Ministry and gained enormous publicity in Copenhagen. We interviewed many people in an attempt to understand how Danes viewed the issue. We also participated in discussions, interviews, lectures, and a press conference. The visit revealed that the cartoon issue developed the way it did because of a communication gap between Muslim and Western societies.

What Clash of Civilizations?

(Amartya Sen, *Slate.com*, March 29, 2006)

"The portrayal of the prophet with a bomb in the form of a hat is obviously a figment of imagination and cannot be judged literally, and the relevance of that representation cannot be dissociated from the way the followers of the prophet may be seen. What we ought to take very seriously is the way Islamic identity, in this sort of depiction, is assumed to drown, if only implicitly, all other affiliations, priorities, and pursuits that a Muslim person may have. A person belongs to many different groups, of which a religious affiliation is only one."

Selling Out Moderate Islam; Washington's Misbegotten Campaign to be Loved in the Middle East

(Reuel Marc Gerecht, *The Weekly Standard*, UK, February 20, 2006)

The Danish Cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, like Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's 1989 fatwa against the British author Salman Rushdie and those who helped publish his Satanic Verses, have revealed more disturbing things about the West than they have about Muslims in Europe and the Middle East. With Denmark, the initial response of the Bush administration aligned America more with those Muslims who felt the cartoons impugned their sacred messenger than with the European press that had printed the caricatures. Sean McCormack, the assistant secretary of state for public affairs, declared, "Anti-Muslim images are as unacceptable as anti-Semitic images, as anti-Christian images, or any other religious belief." Former President Clinton echoed this sentiment while visiting the Persian Gulf emirate Qatar: "None of us are totally free of stereotypes about people of different races, different ethnic groups, and different religions. . . . There was this appalling example in northern Europe, in Denmark, . . . these totally outrageous cartoons against Islam." Senator John Kerry, too, took umbrage: "These and other inflammatory images deserve our scorn, just as the violence against embassies and military installations are an unacceptable and intolerable form of protest."

Cartoon Crisis Echoes "Why They Hate Us" Debate

(Jim Lobe, *Inter Press Service*, February 17, 2006)

"While the administration's greater focus on assailing the violence and the alleged responsibility for it of Washington's two remaining Middle East nemeses and radical Islamists appears to have pacified its hawkish supporters, the crisis has also given rise to a new public discussion reminiscent of the "Why Do They Hate Us" and "Clash of Civilisations" debates that followed the Sep. 11, 2001 al Qaeda attacks on New York and the Pentagon. As in those debates, one side argues that radical Islam, if not Islam itself, represents an existential threat to western ideals -- in this case, freedom of speech and the press -- and that any suggestion that European newspaper publishers should show greater sensitivity to Muslim sentiments constitutes weakness and signals the decline of western civilisation."

Mohammed Cartoons: Western Governments Have Nothing to Apologize For

(Paul Marshall, *The Weekly Standard*, UK, February 13, 2006)

"Defending freedom of religion and freedom of the press requires distinguishing who is being criticized, and distinguishing criticism from threats. It is one thing to condemn Jyllands-Posten for offending millions of people. It is a very different thing to criticize the Danish or other governments, since the criticism itself, even apart from invidious calls for cartoonists to be punished by the state, assumes that government should control the media. Saudi Arabia, Iran, and their authoritarian brethren, as well as jihadist vigilantes, are attempting to export and impose their media censorship and version of sharia on the world at large, using economic pressure, international organizations, or violence."

U.S. Muslims Try to Ease Europe's Discord

(Laurie Goldstein, *The New York Times*, February 13, 2006)

As the crisis over the Danish cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad flared over the last two weeks, leaders of several American Muslim groups began working quietly to try to mediate between European Muslims and the West...The American Muslim leaders are holding up their approach to living in a Western nation as a model. They told the Danish ambassador that they had lived in the United States longer than Muslims have lived in most European countries, and despite obstacles had managed to build effective organizations and achieve greater integration, acceptance and economic success than their brethren in Europe have. They portray the cartoons as part of a wave of global Islamophobia and have encouraged Muslim groups in Europe to use the same term. "We told the ambassador flat out that the biggest resource you have is the American Muslim community," said Ahmed Younis, national director of the Muslim Public Affairs Council, referring to the meeting with Mr. Petersen. "We, too, deal with Islamophobia and discrimination, but we have developed lines of communication for trying to resolve these problems."

The Real Truth Behind the Cartoon Fury

(Rami Khouri, *The Age*, February 9, 2006)

According to Rami Khouri, Editor of the *Lebanon Daily Star* "the cartoons, including one depicting the prophet's headdress as a bomb, are only the fuse that set off a combustible mixture of pressures and tensions anchored in a much wider array of problems. These problems include the cartoons themselves, provocative and arrogant European disdain for Muslim sensitivities about the prophet Muhammad, attempts by some Islamist extremists and criminal-political elements to stir up troubles, the Europeans' clear message that their values count more than the values of Muslims and a wider sense by many citizens of Islamic societies that the West in general seeks to weaken and subjugate the Muslim world."

Controversy May Affect U.S. Efforts; Outreach to Muslims, Diplomacy in Middle East Are at Stake

(Glenn Kessler, *The Washington Post*, February 8, 2006)

The outrage over cartoons depicting the prophet Muhammad poses a challenge for the United States at a time when the Bush administration is investing greater resources to reach out to the Muslim world, U.S. officials said yesterday...The controversy could also have broader foreign policy repercussions, such as weakening European resolve against a Hamas-led Palestinian government as a way of calming restless Muslim minorities. The Bush administration has supported Israeli efforts to isolate the Palestinian government since Hamas, formally known as the Islamic Resistance Movement, swept Palestinian legislative elections. But the real test about whether European leaders will maintain a hard line will come when the makeup of the new government becomes clear. Although few U.S. news organizations have published or broadcast the images, some of the violence has turned toward American facilities, including the consulate in Surabaya, Indonesia. At least three people were killed Monday outside Bagram air base in Afghanistan. "We're starting to see the American flag popping up with the Danish flag in protests," said a U.S. official who has been watching the situation. "This could be the beginning of a long misunderstanding between the West and East."

Callous Cartoons; Images Depict A Growing Islamophobia In The West

(Shakeel Syed, *The Press Enterprise*, February 8, 2006)

Freedom of speech is an inherent right and, in many societies, is legally protected. But that doesn't make every expression of it right. The inflammatory content of the Danish cartoons - comparing Prophet Muhammad to a terrorist - belies the claim that it was an exercise in "freedom of the press." Muslims worldwide see it as anti-Semitism reborn as "Islamophobia" in a Europe that gave the world the Inquisition, the Holocaust and the recent Bosnian genocide. From the Islamic perspective, freedom of speech and expression (*hurriyyat al-qawl wa bayan*) is "vindication of truth" and "protection of human dignity," with embedded maxims of morality and legality. Slander and libel are not protected under free speech. The outcry over the Danish cartoons didn't emerge overnight. After their first publication in September, Muslim and Arab envoys tried to persuade the publishers that the cartoons were at best insensitive and at worst inciting hatred toward an entire community. The Danish courts refused even to admit the case on the grounds of freedom of expression; and the Danish prime minister cried off, citing freedom of press in his country.

Depicting Mohammed. Why I'm Offended by the Danish Cartoons of the Prophet.

(Reza Aslan, *Slate*, February 8, 2006)

The fact is that Muslim anger over the caricatures derives not merely from their depiction of Mohammed. That may have upset more conservative Muslims, but it alone would not have engendered such a violent and widespread response. Rather, most Muslims have objected so strongly because these cartoons promote stereotypes of Muslims that are prevalent throughout Europe. It is difficult to see how these drawings could have any purpose other than to offend. So, while in Europe and the United States the row over the cartoons has been painted as a conflict between secular democratic freedoms and arcane religious dogma, the controversy is really about neither. Instead, it's another manifestation of the ongoing ethnic and religious tensions that have been simmering beneath the surface of European society for decades, like last year's Paris riots and the murder two years ago of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh.

Danish cartoons: Racist Provocation or 'Free Speech'?

(Michael Karadjis, *Green Left*, March 8, 2006)

In the international blow-out over the publication of racist, anti-Islamic cartoons by the right-wing Danish *Jyllands-Posten* daily, a number of leftists have played along with the dominant "free speech" rhetoric of most Western governments and mass media. However, what is ignored in these arguments in defence of "free speech" is the political context in which the cartoons have been published — the systematic racist depiction by the Western corporate media of Muslims — a besieged minority within Western countries and a majority in a number of countries now under Western military occupation. The cartoons do not merely "lampoon" Islam. A number send the message that violence and terrorism stem from the nature of Islam itself. This is the key propaganda message of the phoney imperialist "war on terror" — that the "civilised" West must impose its allegedly "democratic" principles on the "barbaric" Middle East.

After the Cartoons: Longer-term Impact?

(Elizabeth Bryant, *United Press International*, February 6, 2006)

Move over Great Satan. When it comes to being Western country non grata in the Middle East -- and the Muslim world in general -- the United States now has competition. Today, it is European embassies not American ones being attacked by angry mobs in Lebanon and Syria; European products threatened with boycotts; European citizens being warned not to travel to certain countries. Anger, in short, is exploding on the Muslim streets against Copenhagen and Brussels -- and not Washington D.C. -- ever since the European press began reprinting cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed. "It's very interesting that it's

European governments and their freedom of speech which are on the dock, rather than the U.S.," says Richard Whitman, a European Expert at the Royal Institute for International Affairs in London. "And I do wonder whether the long-term consequence will actually be not to reverse the hostility that the U.S. faces [in the Muslim world, and the Middle East in particular], but for the Europeans to be bracketed much more closely with the U.S." in opposing extremist views, particularly directed against Israel.

Government Attempts At Image Repair

Danish TV Seeks Forgiveness With Veiled Anchor Woman

(Hasan Cucuk, *Zaman Daily*, Turkey, April 3, 2006)

Harshly criticized for the cartoon crisis in the international arena, the Danish government continues its "image repairing" activities in the eyes of the Muslims. Danish state channel DR2 employed a Muslim woman that practices wearing the headscarf to present a TV program in the frame of "respect towards different thoughts and beliefs." Palestinian-origin Asmaa Abdulhamid, in the eight-week program, will host a different guest every week together with Danish journalist Adam Holm and ask questions in accordance with her beliefs.

Muslims Express Anger and Hope at Danish Conference

(Squad Mekhennet, *New York Times*, March 11, 2006)

Denmark sought Friday to tamp down the fierce Muslim protests over cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad at a conference with Muslim preachers and scholars that produced calls for dialogue but also fresh protests over the Danish government's refusal to apologize for the publication. Financed by the Danish Foreign Ministry, the conference prominently featured Amr Khaled, a 38-year-old preacher from Egypt who has built up a large following among young Muslims and women for his youthful style and sermons that apply Islam to the issues of modern life. Mr. Khaled sought to emphasize that "we are here to build bridges for dialogue," and suggested that a continuing boycott of Danish goods in Arab countries could stop if Danes and their government reached out with initiatives like help for small businesses, or health care.

Could Turkey Be a Middleman in the Cartoon Conflict?

(Baha Gungor, *Deutsche Welle World*, February 14, 2006)

Turkey occupies a unique position among nations -- halfway between East and West. In the current row over Mohammed caricatures, which have outraged the Muslim world, Turkey could take on an important mediating role. Turkey can certainly have a moderating effect on Islamic countries to which it has close economic and political ties. At the same time, Ankara will not be able to pull a perfect recipe for a solution to this conflict out of its hat. One also has to be careful not to link Turkey's success as an intermediary with its EU ambitions. That would not only be unfair, it would belie the fact that in the current cartoon row, Ankara, with its unique ability to work toward a meaningful East-West dialogue, is working very much in concert with Europe.

Mohammed Cartoons Likely Protected by German Law

(*Deutsche Welle World*, February 9, 2006)

Germany's stance on Holocaust denial has been targeted by some Muslims in the current row over Mohammed caricatures. But experts said the pictures -- unlike Holocaust denial -- are likely protected under German law. "Some want to strike back and want to put Holocaust deniers in the same category," said Wolfgang Wippermann, a professor at the Freie University in Berlin who studies Nazism and right-

wing extremism. "But that is like comparing apples and oranges," he added. "The caricatures, whether good or bad, are a part of press freedom. The other side is a denial of historical fact that also has political aims."

Rice is Faulting Syria, Iran for Stoking Riots

(Eli Lake, *The New York Sun*, February 9, 2006)

President Bush yesterday urged Arab and Muslim leaders to put a stop to the violence that has already led to the burning of three Danish embassies in the Middle East, while Secretary of State Rice accused Syria and Iran of inflaming populations about a series of cartoons depicting Muhammad published in a Danish newspaper in September. The reaction from America yesterday struck a new tone in the public diplomacy over the cartoons. Only last week the State Department spokesman called anti-Muslim images "unacceptable." The Danish Embassy here has been emphasizing the existence of a blasphemy law in Denmark, adding that anyone who would burn a Koran in Copenhagen could be jailed for hate speech, according to Denmark's deputy chief of mission in Cairo, Christian Gronbech-Jensen. In Johannesburg, the high court ruled that newspapers may not publish the 12 cartoons depicting Muhammad that were first run in the Danish newspaper, Jyllands-Posten. Even yesterday, Mr. Bush said, "With freedom comes the responsibility to be thoughtful about others."

Leaders Seek to Calm Muslim Fury; Diplomacy Hits High Gear as Protests Surge

(Dan Bilefsky, *International Herald Tribune*, February 7, 2006)

With the first deaths being reported from the cartoon uproar, governments around the world rushed on Monday to contain the damage, even as Iran blocked all ties with Denmark and demonstrations continued to rage across Europe and the Middle East. From Washington to Copenhagen, from the Vatican to Lebanon, leaders searched for the words to salve the rage of Muslims angered by satirical representations of the Prophet Muhammad that have appeared in many European newspapers, while also trying to uphold the ideals of free expression.

A Call For Respect and Calm

(Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, *International Herald Tribune*, February 5, 2006)

In an open letter published in the International Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Spanish Prime Minister Luis Rodriguez Zapatero called for an end to the violence and the promotion of cross-cultural understanding: "In a globalized world, in which the relationships and exchanges among different civilizations continue to multiply, and in which a local incident may have worldwide repercussions, it is vital that we cultivate the values of respect, tolerance and peaceful coexistence. Freedom of expression is one of the cornerstones of our democratic systems and we shall never relinquish it. But there are no rights without responsibility and respect for different sensibilities. The publication of these caricatures may be perfectly legal, but it is not indifferent and thus ought to be rejected from a moral and political standpoint."

Religious Delegation Heads for Middle East

(*Aftenposten*, February, 13, 2006)

Two Muslim leaders from Norway and a leading Norwegian pastor traveled to the Middle East over the weekend, to spread the word that the editor of a small Christian publication in Norway has apologized for printing cartoons that sparked Muslim fury around the world. The trip is also a public relations effort on the part of Norway, which has tried to broker peace in the Middle East for years and instead suddenly

found itself the target of Muslim outrage, because the cartoons that originated in Denmark were reprinted in the Norwegian publication.

Corporate Diplomacy

Possible Crack in the Boycott of Danish Goods

(Hassan Fattah, *New York Times*, April 5, 2006)

A group of prominent Muslim scholars has called for ending a boycott on a Danish food products company over the publication in Denmark of derogatory cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad. In a statement issued over the weekend, the International Conference for the Support of the Final Prophet, made up of influential Muslim scholars, advised that the company, Arla Foods, "should be withdrawn from the boycott on Denmark" in recognition of its efforts to reach out to the Muslim world.

Support Fading For Danish Goods Boycott

(*Gulf Daily News*, Bahrain, April 3, 2006)

"So far only relatively few customers have chosen to lift the boycott, but we've had positive signals from others and we're hopeful that one of the large chains will decide to list our products again," said Arla Foods executive director Finn Hansen. "This could well create a chain reaction." But while the company's staff in the Middle East remain cautiously optimistic, Mr Hansen warned against expecting an early recovery. "While we may be seeing a slow lifting of the boycott by retailers, it remains to be seen whether consumers will, in fact, buy our products," he added.

Danish Companies Endure Snub By Muslim Consumers

(Eric Pfanner, *New York Times*, February 27, 2006)

This article details attempts by Danish companies operating in the Middle East to recoup their standing with consumers in the wake of the economic boycott prompted by the cartoon crisis. During the crisis, Arla foods saw its prophets drop by \$1.5 million per day and Kuwaiti Danish Dairy saw sales drop by 95% in some markets. Companies such as Arla Foods have sought advice from public relations firms, taken out advertisements in Middle Eastern newspapers explaining their position about the cartoon publication, and seen their logos removed from stores across the Middle East.

When Markets Melt Away

(*The Economist*, February 9, 2006)

"Across the region, nervous retailers fear a backlash from the row over cartoons depicting Muhammad. Carrefour, a French retailer, has drawn scorn in Europe for voluntarily pulling Danish products from its shelves in the Middle East—and boasting about it. Iran has raised the stakes by stopping all trade with Denmark, which accounts for about \$280m in annual imports. The European trade commissioner warned Saudi Arabia that it could be hauled up before the World Trade Organisation, which it recently joined, if it is seen as supporting the boycott."

Public Opinion Polls

Publics in Western Countries Disapprove of Muhammad Cartoons

(Angela Stephens, *WorldPublicOpinion.org*, February 16, 2006)

Stephens analyzes a series of national public opinion polls conducted in the wake of the cartoon controversy. She finds that "the prevailing attitude across several Western nations—Norway, Britain,

France, the United States and Australia—is that while the media have the right to publish the cartoons, it was not the right choice to do so."Her analysis covers polling results about the cartoon controversy on a country-by-country basis. [WorldPublicOpinion](http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/) is a publication of the Program on International Policy Attitudes(PIPA).

Poll of Palestinians About Denmark

(Near East Consulting, Ramallah, February 13, 2006)

Between February 9th and 11th Near East Consulting (NEC) conducted a phone survey of 702 Palestinians living in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and Jerusalem. Out of those surveyed, 24% believe that Denmark is a friend of the Palestinians, 42% believe that Denmark holds a neutral position, while 34% view Denmark as an enemy of the Palestinians and 59% view Denmark as an enemy of Islam. Only 4% believe that the Danish government has been acting appropriately regarding the crisis.

PollingReport.com on Religion

Polling Report.com aggregates the results for ABC, CBS, CNN, Gallup and other nationwide surveys of Americans 18 and older on the subject of religion. Several of the polls refer to the cartoon crisis. While 61% believe the European newspapers that printed the cartoons acted irresponsibly, the same percentage find that the controversy is due more to Muslims' intolerance of different points of view. 57% think that the U.S. news media have an obligation to show controversial items that are newsworthy even if they may offend the religious views of some people.

The Offending Danish Cartoons

(COMPAS Inc. Public Opinion and Customer Research, February 20, 2006)

Journalists Speak — Part I of a Two Part Series, from a National Poll of Journalists is the first in a series of un-sponsored studies of press freedom, undertaken at COMPAS initiative and cost. The purpose is to provide journalists with a platform for conveying their own professionally based concerns about challenges to journalistic freedom. According to the poll, most Canadian Journalists found the cartoons on the web and want media to carry them; a mix of respect and fear explains non-publication; and most journalists believe that non-publication plays into the hands of Muslim extremists.