Why was it that Denmark became the centre of the cartoon crisis which, in 2006, developed into an international crisis between Muslim countries and the West? Why was it that – in a liberal country such as Denmark which was among the first countries to accept women to be seen topless – we, in 2007, experienced the headscarf row about how great an extent, Muslim women should be allowed to cover themselves?

“From Cartoon Crisis to Headscarf Row” seeks to describe and analyse these two conflicts and the responses to them from various political and religions groups and to reflect on the significance of these events which attracted worldwide attention.

Dr. Mogens S. Mogensen is a acknowledged consultant in interreligious and intercultural issues and part time lecturer at the University of Copenhagen.
1. THE CARTOON CRISIS

In February 2006 Denmark experienced its worst crisis in terms of international politics since World War Two. The crisis, however, had been brewing for months in Denmark, before it exploded. On September 30 2005, Denmark’s largest newspaper Jyllands-Posten published 12 cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, one showing Muhammad wearing a turban shaped as a bomb with a burning fuse, another depicted him wielding a cutlass, and a third had him saying that paradise was running short of virgins for suicide bombers. The images, considered blasphemous under Islam drew intense criticism from across the Muslim minority in Denmark and from the Muslim world at large.

The growing anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiments in Denmark

The Muhammad cartoons, however, did not come out of the blue. The cartoons were published amid the growth of an anti-immigrant sentiment in Denmark, reflected in the rise of the far-right Danish People’s Party. The party, which held 13% of the seats in the Danish parliament, had helped to push through the toughest anti-immigration rules on the continent, including a rule preventing Danish citizens aged 24 or younger from bringing in spouses from outside Denmark. Søren Krarup, a now retired pastor and leading voice in the party, said the Muslim response to the cartoons showed that Islam was not compatible with Danish customs. “Muslims who come here reject our culture,” he said. “Muslim immigration is a way for Muslims to conquer us, just as they have done for the past 1,400 years.”

The Liberal-Conservative government led by Anders Fogh Rasmussen was from its inception in 2001 dependent on the Danish People’s Party for its majority in Parliament, and the Danish People’s Party with the two pastors, Søren Krarup and Jesper Langballe, had clearly managed to influence the development concerning immigration and integration and also the political rhetoric concerning Muslims. Politicians from the Danish People’s Party called Islam “a fascist ideology”, “religious Nazism”, “an ideology of evil”, “a plague”, “the greatest threat to world peace since the fall of communism”, “a terror organization”, and they called for all Muslims to be repatriated. Politicians and newspapers critical of the government

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3) An earlier version of this chapter has been published in Lissi Rasmussen (ed.), Bridges instead of Walls. Christian-Muslim Interaction in Denmark, Indonesia and Nigeria (Minneapolis, MN: Lutheran University Press, 2007).
4) Flemming Rose, “Muhammads ansigt”, in Jyllands-Posten, September 30, 2006. The drawings are available on the internet, among others at http://Muhammad.hoterv.dk/jp/ 20-06-2006. Some of the drawings, however, made fun, not of Muhammad, but of those who they perceived were anti-Muslim, including the Jyllands-Posten editors and the head of the Danish People’s Party.
objected to the aggressive anti-Muslim rhetoric, and international commissions and committees criticized the treatment of Muslims and other immigrants and the rhetoric against them, but the government rejected the criticism.

On September 25 2005, the Minister for Cultural Affairs Brian Mikkelsen at the annual meeting of the Conservative Party called on a new offensive in the culture wars, and specifically directed his remarks against Muslim immigrants who allegedly would not recognize Danish culture and European norms, but have developed a parallel society based on medieval standards and undemocratic ways of thinking. Mikkelsen claimed that freedom of expression was threatened because a Danish stand-up comedian would not dare to urinate on the Qur’ân, and illustrators did not dare to put their name under drawings of Muhammad in a children’s book.7

The publication of the Muhammad cartoons in Jyllands-Posten
It did not come as a surprise that it was Jyllands-Posten that decided to publish such cartoons of Muhammad. On the contrary it was the culmination of a yearlong anti-Muslim campaign. From the late 1980s onwards the tabloid newspaper, Ekstra Bladet, had initiated a campaign against immigrants and Muslims in which Søren Krarup was allowed to write more than 200 articles. Later Jyllands-Posten became the most important newspaper in terms of aggressively anti-Muslim letters to the editor, editorials and some of its articles.8

On September 30 2005, Jyllands-Posten published a series of cartoons of Muhammad drawn by twelve Danish illustrators. In the accompanying article called “The Face of Muhammad”, the culture editor, Flemming Rose, picked up the same issues raised by the minister in an article on self-censorship and freedom of speech. Rose wrote that he decided to commission the cartoons for Jyllands-Posten when he heard that Danish cartoonists were too scared of Muslim fundamentalists to illustrate a new children’s biography of Muhammad, annoyed at the self-censorship he said had taken over Europe.

The modern, secular society is rejected by some Muslims. They demand a special position, insisting on special consideration of their own religious feelings. It is incompatible with contemporary democracy and freedom of speech, where you must be ready to put up with insults, mockery and ridicule. It is certainly not always attractive and nice to look at, and it does not mean that religious feelings should be made fun of at any price, but that is of minor importance in the present context. [...] we are on our way to a slippery slope where no-one can tell how the self-censorship

8) At the same time Jyllands-Posten also published articles that were much more nuanced and sensitive to Muslims, e.g. by one of their senior journalists, Orla Borg, who has received EU’s anti-discrimination prize for his journalism. Journalisten, 2005, vol. 8.
will end. That is why Morgenavisen Jyllands-Posten has invited members of the Danish editorial cartoonists union to draw Muhammad as they see him.\(^9\) Later Rose explained his decision by reference to the killing of the Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh. “The cartoons did nothing that transcends the cultural norms of secular Denmark and this was not a provocation to insult Muslim,” said Mr. Rose. “But if we talk of freedom of speech, even if it was a provocation, that does not make our right to do it any less legitimate before the law.”\(^10\) In an article in The Washington Post, Rose justified the commissioning and publication of the cartoons by stating that

*The cartoonists treated Islam the same way they treat Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism and other religions. And by treating Muslims in Denmark as equals they made a point: We are integrating you into the Danish tradition of satire because you are part of our society, not strangers. The cartoons are including, rather than excluding, Muslims.*\(^11\)

**Initial reactions**

Many Muslims felt offended by the cartoons and protested in many different ways. A few days after the publication of the cartoons eleven Muslim organizations led by The Islamic Society in Denmark (Islamisk Trossamfund i Danmark) wrote a letter to the ambassadors of eleven Muslim countries asking them to alert their governments with a view to the issuing of an official protest, and in a press release they expressed their criticism of Jyllands-Posten stating that there are normally limits to the freedom of expression when it comes to anti-Semitism and scorn of the Danish flag, and that they demanded that Jyllands-Posten expressed its regret for its action. They furthermore wrote to the Minister for Cultural Affairs asking for a dialogue with the media, politicians and other key people in society to prevent negative reactions and consequences of this arrogant attitude towards a minority. Three thousand five hundred Muslims demonstrated peacefully in Copenhagen against the cartoons in Jyllands-Posten.

The other major Danish newspapers chose not to publish the cartoons. All of them emphasized the importance of the freedom of expression, but most of them at the same time dissociated themselves from Jyllands-Posten’s decision to print the cartoons, which was an unnecessary insult to the Muslims.

Within a matter of weeks the cartoons were turning into an international issue. On October 11, Imam Sheikh Raed Hlayhel, Aarhus, was interviewed on al-Jazeera


where he protested against the publication of the cartoons. Soon afterwards other mass media in the Muslim world began to report on the issue.

In a letter to the Danish Prime Minister, October 12, ambassadors from eleven Muslim countries, tried to draw the Prime Minister’s attention to an “on-going smearing campaign in Danish public circles and the media against Islam and Muslims.” Apart from public statements by a minister and a Member of Parliament, they in particular protested against the cartoons published by Jyllands-Posten, all of which were against the spirit of Danish values of tolerance, civil society, and which “can also cause reactions in Muslim countries and among Muslim communities in Europe.” Therefore they urged the government to “take all those responsible to task under law of the land and in the interest of inter-faith harmony, better integration and Denmark’s overall relations with Muslim world.”

The ambassadors asked for a meeting with the Prime Minister, which however was declined nine days later by Anders Fogh Rasmussen in a letter, in which he stated that he would not intervene in the affair.

The Social Democrats and the Socialist People’s Party also advised the Prime Minister to meet with the ambassadors, but he still declined. Later, on December 20, twenty-two former Danish ambassadors, of whom a considerable number had done service in Muslim countries, criticized the Prime Minister for not agreeing to meet the eleven ambassadors. In their opinion freedom of religion and freedom of expression were constitutional freedoms, but it had never been Danish policy to use these freedoms to intentionally offend the faith of a minority. They expressed sympathy for the hurt feelings among Muslims, but condemned the threats by Muslims against Jyllands-Posten and the artists. In their opinion such emotional wounds should have been healed through dialogue.

It would have suited Danish democracy if the Prime Minster had met the request for a meeting put forth by eleven foreign ambassadors from Muslim countries. It would also have been in accordance with the democratic spirit if a minister had

12) At http://www.rogerbuch.dk/jpabrev.pdf 29-06-2006. The ambassadors represented Turkey, Saudi-Arabia, Iran, Pakistan, Egypt, Indonesia, Algeria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Libya, Morocco and Palestine.

taken the time to receive the signatures that Danish Muslims had collected.\footnote{Nikolaj Lauta, “22 tidligere ambassadører signerer fra” in \textit{Politiken.dk}, August 22, 2006, at http://politiken.dk/incoming/article163878.ece 16-12-2007 (my translation).}

The following day, the former Foreign Minister, Uffe Ellemann Jensen, who is from the same party as the Prime Minister, and who in October 2005 had already criticized Jyllands-Posten severely for publishing the Muhammad-cartoons\footnote{Christian Brøndum, “Ellemann: Diplomatiske fejltrin”. Berlingske Tidende, October 26, 2005.}, supported the ambassadors’ criticism of the Prime Minister. “It is quite unusual that such a group does this. Therefore it has to be taken seriously”.\footnote{“Ellemann støtter kritik af Fogh”, in \textit{TV-2 Nyhederne}, December 21, 2007, at http://nyhederne-dyn.tv2.dk/politik/article.php?id=3394299.html 16-12-2007.}

From the middle of October onwards the crisis spread to many parts of the Muslim world through the intervention of Muslim organisations such as the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC), the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) and the Arab League.\footnote{Larsen & Seidenfaden, op.cit. pp. 64-72.} One example is the general secretary of OIC, representing more than one billion Muslims in 57 Muslim countries, who in a letter to the Prime Minister warned him that the conflict might escalate unless the Danish government unequivocally made its stand regarding the cartoons clear and took all the necessary measures.\footnote{Larsen & Seidenfaden, op.cit., p. 65.} “This has trespassed all limits of objective criticism into insults and contempt of the religious beliefs of more than one billion Muslims around the world, including thousands in Denmark,” so Al-Azhar’s Islamic Research Academy said in a statement issued on December 10.\footnote{Adel Abdel Halim, “Al-Azhar Takes Anti-Prophet Danish Cartoons to UN”, in \textit{IslamOnline.net}, December 11, 2006, at http://www.islam-online.net/English/News/2005-12/11/article04.shtml 29-06-2006.}

Also non-Muslim organisations began to express their criticism of the publication of the cartoons. Louise Arbour, the United Nations human-rights commissioner, said she was “alarmed” by such an “unacceptable disregard for the beliefs of others”. Similar condemnations came from the European Commission and the Council of Europe. But neither the editors of Jyllands-Posten nor the Danish government wanted to accept the criticism, which according to them would lead to an undermining of the principle of freedom of expression.

In December, two delegations were sent by Muslim organizations in Denmark to present their case to the media, politicians and Muslim leaders in the Middle East. The Danish Muslims felt that they had not received any proper response to their complaints from the Danish authorities or media and therefore chose to seek support from Muslim friends abroad. The delegations had compiled a file of the cartoons and other drawings and articles which they felt were an insult to Muslims. Later, two interrelated issues about the journeys of these two delegations were hotly debated in the Danish media and among politicians. Were these Muslim delegations guilty of misinformation about the situation of the Muslims

in Denmark? And was the subsequent crisis with a boycott of Danish goods, demonstrations, burning of embassies etc, primarily a result of the misinformation by the delegations? There were a few examples of incorrect information in the files, which some of the Muslim leaders later accepted, but there are clear indications that the subsequent crisis was not primarily a result of the few mistakes or the activities of the delegations.

So far the Prime Minister had tried to defuse the row mostly by ignoring it. After having rejected a request for a meeting with eleven ambassadors from Islamic countries, he was attacked by twenty-two former Danish ambassadors to Muslim countries, who deplored his neglect of diplomatic niceties. After weeks of hesitation, the Prime Minister finally tried to tackle the matter in his New Year’s address, in the last section of which he dealt with the cartoon crisis, albeit without directly commenting on the Muhammad drawings published in Jyllands-Posten. While strongly affirming that freedom of speech in Denmark is absolute and non-negotiable, he condemned “any expression, action or indication that attempts to demonize groups of people on the basis of their religion or ethnic background.” While some found the tone of the debate too shrill and unpleasant, he concluded that, apart from a few exceptions, the debate was civilized, fair and peaceful. “However, we are all responsible for administering freedom of speech in such a manner that we do not incite to hatred and do not cause fragmentation of the community that is one of Denmark’s strengths.”

On the international scene these statements were used to persuade Muslim leaders that the Danish government dissociated itself from the cartoons and to underline its respect for other religions. On the domestic scene, they were used to emphasize the government’s strong position concerning freedom of expression.

The Prime Minister’s statements were positively received by some of the ambassadors from Muslim countries, and the Foreign Minister, Per Stig Møller, succeeded in reaching an agreement with the general secretary of the Arab League that the cartoon issue should be closed. This decision was based on a common understanding of mutual respect between religions and non-interference by politicians in the affairs of private media.

The cartoon crisis – an international crisis
In early January 2006 the cartoon crisis was generally assumed to be over. However, in mid-January, the crisis gathered new momentum, climaxing in the last days of January and in February where the cartoon crisis developed into not only a Danish but also an international crisis.

On January 10, a conservative Christian magazine in Norway published the twelve Muhammad cartoons. So far Jyllands-Posten had declined requests to give other mass media permission to publish the cartoons, but now it changed its policy and allowed the cartoons to be spread through other mass media all over the world. In this way the Muslim world’s attention was again directed towards the cartoons. The OIC condemned the republication of the cartoons, and the grand mufti of Saudi Arabia demanded an apology from Jyllands-Posten. On January 25, Saudi-Arabia was the first of a number of Muslim countries to withdraw its ambassador from Denmark. In the following days, a boycott against Danish products spread in the Middle East and beyond. On January 29, the Danish flag was burned in Gaza, and shortly afterwards Danish flags were burned in many Muslim countries during mass demonstrations.

The crisis had now reached such dimensions that the Prime Minister had to act. For the first time since the publication of the cartoons four months earlier, Anders Fogh Rasmussen on January 30 publicly expressed an opinion of the cartoons. Without committing his government, he personally dissociated himself from the cartoons. “Personally I have such a respect for people’s religious convictions that I would never represent Muhammad, Jesus or any other religious figure in a way that might offend other people,” he said on the TV2 News. However, he underlined the freedom of the press in Denmark, stating that since the media are free and independent they can decide which cartoons they want to present themselves.

On the same day, Jyllands-Posten issued a kind of apology to the Muslim world,

*In our opinion, the twelve drawings were sober. They were not intended to be offensive, nor were they at variance with Danish law, but they have indisputably offended many Muslims for which we apologize.*

Jyllands-Posten did not apologize for the publication of the cartoons, but only for the offence that the publication of the cartoons had caused involuntarily. Subsequently, twenty-five Muslim organisations in Denmark demanded a new and more unreserved apology from Jyllands-Posten before they could contribute to a solution of the boycott.

A few days later, Anders Fogh Rasmussen was interviewed on the Arabic TV station al-Arabiya, where he repeated his previous statements.

*The Danish people have defended freedom of expression and religious freedom for generations. We deeply respect all religions including Islam and it is important for me to tell you that the Danish people have no intention of offending Muslims. On*

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21) Later, also a number of other media in the West (and a few in the Middle East!) decided to publish the cartoons or some of them.
the contrary we will do our utmost to continue our historic tradition of dialogue and mutual respect. And therefore I am deeply distressed that many Muslims have seen the drawings in a Danish newspaper as a defamation of the Prophet Muhammad.24

The following day, the Prime Minister held a meeting with seventy-six ambassadors where he also repeated his previous statements and concluded by expressing the hope that they might now return to a constructive dialogue. However, the Prime Minister did not issue an official apology for the cartoons - neither in al-Arabiya, nor at the diplomatic meeting. These initiatives by the Prime Minister apparently did not contribute significantly to solving the crisis.

Mass demonstrations took place in a number of Muslim countries. Many of the demonstrations turned violent. Danish (and other Western) flags were burned, property was destroyed, the Danish embassies in Damascus, Beirut and Teheran were attacked, and dozens of people were killed in clashes with the police in places ranging from Afghanistan to Nigeria. Apparently governments and local political and religious groups took advantage of the public anger over the cartoons to mobilize the masses for their own political or religious purposes.

The international community condemned the attacks on the embassies and the threats against Danes, but often coupled with a criticism of the cartoons published in Jyllands-Posten. Denmark’s allies in NATO and the EU supported Denmark strongly: violence was completely unacceptable. However, some of them also dissociated themselves from the publication of the cartoons.

Jyllands-Posten also received support for its publication of the cartoons. On March 1, an international group of intellectuals issued a manifesto in the French satirical weekly newspaper, Charlie Hebdo, stating that the cartoon crisis was part of a struggle between Islamism and democracy. This was immediately printed in Jyllands-Posten in which they expressed their view.

After having overcome fascism, Nazism, and Stalinism, the world now faces a new totalitarian global threat: Islamism. We, writers, journalists, intellectuals, call for resistance to religious totalitarianism and for the promotion of freedom, equal opportunity and secular values for all. The recent events, which occurred after the publication of drawings of Muhammad in European newspapers, have revealed the necessity of the struggle for these universal values.25

Among the initial twelve signatories were Salman Rushdie, Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Bernard Henri Lévy. A number of media people, however, were concerned about the newspapers’ printing of the manifest.

**From October 2005 to February 2006, all newspapers could agree on solidarity with a newspaper under attack, a newspaper afforded the right - or the duty - to inform its readers. This 1st of March manifesto is totally different because it reintroduces a left-right divide. Some right-wing newspapers will consider that they agree with the manifesto and they will promote it, the left-wing newspapers will be worried by a threefold risk:**

- firstly, the always easy assimilation between Islam and Islamism
- secondly, the threat the manifesto makes to the possibility of beginning a real dialogue with the Muslim world after the Mohammed cartoons controversy
- thirdly, the risk to fall into the “clash of civilizations” trap and the “World War IV” assertion.

In other words, the Salman Rushdie / Taslima Nasreen manifesto (among others) could add fuel to the fire.26

In Denmark, Muslims did not protest violently against the cartoons. At a later date, a leader of the police intelligence service informed the public that they had worked closely with a number of Danish imams before and during the crisis. He believed that the imams had significantly contributed to maintaining peace by calling on the Muslim community not to resort to violence, but only to use democratic means.27

**Diplomacy and dialogue**

Throughout the cartoon crisis there were both private and official attempts to promote dialogue and reconciliation. In mid-February, a Danish church delegation, which was sponsored by the Danish Foreign Ministry and led by two bishops, went to Egypt in an attempt to reduce the tensions between Muslims and Christians in Denmark and the Middle East. The delegation met with the leader of Al-Az-har, Sheik Muhammad Sayyed Tantawy and the grand mufti Dr. Aly Gomaá and presented the public statements from Jyllands-Posten and the Danish prime minister and statements on the cartoon crisis by church organisations. In the Middle East, the visit was perceived as an expression of an understanding of the frustration in the Muslim world, and evidence that there were groups in Denmark who wanted dialogue with Muslims and distanced themselves from the

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27) Larsen & Seidenfaden, op. cit., p. 183.
publication of the cartoons.\textsuperscript{28}

Already in November 2003, Danmission had initiated a project to promote dialogue between Christians and Muslims in Egypt. The project, which was supported by Danida, was led by the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOSS) and had led to the establishment of 250-300 local dialogue groups. In October 2004, an Egyptian-Danish dialogue conference was held in Copenhagen with Muslim and Christian participants from both countries, and in January 2005 a delegation from Danmission went to visit Egypt to have dialogues with Christian and Muslim leaders.

When the cartoon crisis broke out, the Foreign Ministry had also asked the Danish Mission Council for suggestions about possible initiatives to contain the conflict between Denmark and Arab countries. Danmission then contacted its Egyptian partners and asked for advice about what could be done to reduce the violent reactions in the Middle East. CEOSS then proposed - with full support from church leaders in Egypt - that a high profile church delegation should be sent from Denmark to Egypt to meet with Muslim leaders.\textsuperscript{29}

Towards the end of February, the United Nations (UN), OIC and a number of Arab countries called for restraint and dialogue. At the opening of a meeting in Qatar for the Alliance of Civilizations UN General Secretary, Kofi Annan, tried to contribute to reconciliation by stating, that

\textit{In truth, the present conflicts and misunderstandings probably have more to do with proximity than with distance. The offensive caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad were first published in a European country which has recently acquired a significant Muslim population, and is not yet sure how to adjust to it. And some of the strongest reactions - perhaps especially the more violent ones - have been seen in Muslim countries where many people feel themselves the victims of excessive Western influence or interference.}\textsuperscript{30}


\textsuperscript{29} Uffe Torm & Harald Nielsen, “Rapport fra kirkedelaget til Egypten feb. 06”. Danmission.dk, at http://www.danmission.dk/index.php?indl_id=3110&id=933 6-12-07. After the cartoon crisis, Danmission has continued and even increased its dialogue work in Egypt and Lebanon and in Denmark. In Lebanon, Danmission worked together with the Forum for Development, Culture and Dialogue about a series of dialogue workshops for Muslims and Christians in Lebanon and Denmark. In early May 2006, a Danish Arab dialogue seminar with the title “I see myself through you...” was held in Lebanon. The aim of the conference was “to overcome some of the stereotypes and anxieties that exist between the Arab world and Denmark, and were highlighted by the publication of the cartoons considered offensive to Islam and Muslims and therefore caused tensions worldwide” (Forum for Development, Culture and Dialogue, “Narrative Report of The Danish-Arab Dialogue Seminar entitled “I See Myself Through You – Filming the Process of Cross-cultural Understanding and Communication” May 1-4, 2006”, at http://www.fedcd.org/docs/narrative.pdf 17-12-07). Mette M. Madsen, “Unge fra Mellemøsten I dialog med unge fra Vesten”. Kristendom.dk, June 25, 2007, at http://www.kristendom.dk/artikler/2007/kvartal2/unge_fra_mellemoesten_i_dialog_med_ unge_fra_vesten 17-12-2007.

\textsuperscript{30} Doha, Qatar, 26 February 2006 - Statement by the Secretary-General at the opening session of the Second Meeting of the High-level Group for the Alliance of Civilizations, at http://www.un.org/apps/sg/sgstats.asp?nid=1936 05-09-2006.
On February 26, the Danish ambassador returned to Damascus and normal diplomatic activities were resumed in the Middle East. The following day, foreign ministers of the EU agreed on a statement in which they emphasized the principle of freedom of expression while regretting any harm that the cartoons might have caused to the feelings of Muslims. They stated that freedom of expression must be used responsibly, and they strongly condemned the violent reactions in a number of countries. With this statement, the EU countries set the stage for a number of initiatives geared towards strengthening the dialogue between Europe and the Muslim world.31

Towards the end of March a delegation of Muslim leaders from Denmark went to Bahrain to attend a big conference with about three hundred Muslim leaders from around the world in order to bring to an end the trade boycott against Denmark, or at least restrict it. Their initiative, however, was not successful, and the conference communiqué called for the boycott to continue.32

In April, the cartoon crisis waned and during the summer months other international issues began to make the headlines.

Legal responses
The Muhammad cartoons were also dealt with by the Danish judicial system. On October 29, eleven Muslim organisations in Denmark filed a complaint with the police claiming that Jyllands-Posten had violated the laws against blasphemy and racial discrimination. The spokeswoman for the eleven Muslim organisations, Asmaa Abdol-Hamid, emphasised that while they supported freedom of expression, they called for decency in the expressions. “What we notice is the article accompanying the publication of the cartoons. As we read it, it is evident that the intention of the newspaper has been to scorn and mock.”33

In January 2006, the regional public prosecutor in Viborg rejected the complaint. The decision was appealed against, and the public prosecutor upheld the previous decision on March 15. Interestingly, the prosecutor commented that freedom of expression in Denmark is not without limit.

Although there is no basis for instituting criminal proceedings in this case, it should be noted that both provisions of the Danish Criminal Code – and also other penal provisions, e.g. about defamation of character – contain a restriction of the freedom of expression. Section 140 of the Danish Criminal Code protects religious feelings against mockery and scorn and section 266 b protects groups of persons against scorn and degradation on account of i.e. their religion. To the extent

32 Larsen & Seidenfaden, op. cit., pp. 181f.
33 Jyllands-Posten, October 29, 2006.. Here quoted from Larsen & Seidenfaden, op. cit. p. 244 (my translation).
publicly made expressions fall within the scope of these rules there is, therefore, no free and unrestricted right to express opinions about religious subjects. It is thus not a correct description of existing law when the article in Jyllands-Posten states that it is incompatible with the right to freedom of expression to demand special consideration for religious feelings and that one has to be ready to put up with “scorn, mockery and ridicule”.

In March 2006, seven Muslim organisations led by The Islamic Society in Denmark (Islamisk Trossamfund i Danmark) started legal proceedings action against Jyllands-Posten’s editor-in-chief, Carsten Juste, and the culture editor, Flemming Rose, Jyllands-Posten for having violated paragraph 267 and 268 in the Danish penal code concerning defamation and slander of Muslims in Denmark by having published the twelve cartoons. In October, the editors of Jyllands-Posten, however, were acquitted by the city court in Aarhus. In his ruling, the judge stated that it could not be ruled out that the cartoons might have offended the honour of some of the Muslims, but that there was no basis for assuming that the purpose of the cartoon had been to offend or slander Muslims.

Political responses

The cartoon crisis became the occasion for Naser Khader, a Muslim immigrant from Syria and Member of Parliament for the Social-Liberal Party (Det Radikale Venstre) to launch a political initiative. While initially critical of the cartoons, he decided on February 4, following the escalation of the cartoon crisis, to form a network of moderate Muslims, called Democratic Muslims (Demokratiske Muslimer). This was in opposition to the Islamic Society in Denmark and all the imams who had actively protested against the cartoons both in Denmark and in the Middle East. The Network, which soon received 1500 Muslim members and 6,000 non-Muslim supporters of the organization, was warmly welcomed by the government as well as other political parties. While the Prime Minister had been very hesitant to meet with Danish Muslim religious leaders, he had already on February 13 invited representatives of this new network to a meeting. The result was a polarization developed in the Muslim community between a more radical Muslim group around imam Abu Laban and the Islamic Society in Denmark, and a secular Muslim group around Naser Khader and Democratic Muslims. Most Muslims, however, apparently did not feel that either of the two groups represented their position or their interests.

36) Larsen & Seidenfaden, op. cit., pp. 113ff.
From the beginning, the position taken by the Danish government was that the cartoon crisis was about freedom of expression. The government chose to interpret the letter from the ambassadors from Islamic countries in which they asked for a meeting with the Prime Minister as if they asked the government to interfere with the free press and to curb freedom of expression. When the government was criticized for its handling of the cartoon crisis and for its unwillingness to effectively dissociate itself from Jyllands-Posten’s publication of the cartoons, the Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen, in a big interview in the conservative daily, Berlingske Tidende February 26, went on the offensive attacking representatives of the media, intellectuals and business people for their betrayal of the principles of free speech. Just as President Bush after September 11 2001 with reference to the fight against terrorism had said that either you are with us or against us, Fogh stated that it was time to separate the sheep from the goats. Either you are for free speech or you are against.\textsuperscript{38}

The polarizing statement by the Prime Minister was strongly criticized by the former Foreign Minister, politicians from the opposition as well as industrial leaders, but received strong support from the Danish People’s Party and most politicians from the parties in the government.\textsuperscript{39}

**Christian responses**

From the beginning, it was very clear that the cartoon crisis was not a religious conflict between Muslims and Christians but rather a conflict between people with religious sensitivities and people with secularist views. While defending freedom of expression (at the legal level), many Christian groups expressed their condemnation of the printing of the cartoons (at an ethical level).

*We should treat Muslims in Denmark in the same way that we would like to be treated. When I do not like to see my own religion smeared, I should not smear theirs either. I am not of the opinion that we should stop drawing Muhammad but we should not make drawings of him in situations that are offending.*\textsuperscript{40}

Other Christians, however, were of the opinion that Muslims had to accept scorn and ridicule just as Christians had been used to in a secular society.

When the international crisis erupted in the beginning of February, the bishop of Copenhagen called on both Muslims and Christians to keep cool. “We have to dissociate ourselves both from the cartoons and from the burning of the Danish flag with the white cross. And then it is extremely important that we continue to talk to each other”.\textsuperscript{41}


\textsuperscript{40}Statement by Mogens S. Mogensen, in Bente Clausen, “Sund reaktion fra muslimer” in *Kristeligt Dagblad*, October 12, 2006 (my translation).

\textsuperscript{41}Karin Dahl Hansen, “Biskopper maner til besindighed”, in *Kristeligt Dagblad*, February 1, 2006 (my translation).
On February 2, the board of the Committee for Church & Encounter with other Religions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark (Stiftssamarbejdet “Folkekirke og Religionsmøde” F&R) issued a statement in which it said that freedom of speech does not exclude showing respect for the individual person’s religious faith. On the contrary, the respect for the individual person is the presupposition for having freedom of speech in Denmark. With freedom of speech follows respect for others. [...] In the public debate an understanding of what is sacred and what can offend the individual person of which faith he or she may be is often missing. To provoke or offend another person’s faith for the sake of provocation alone does not serve any purpose.

The committee therefore had decided to work towards the creation of a dialogue forum where religious leaders could debate common issues.42

The following day, the Roman Catholic bishops in the Nordic countries issued a joint statement about the cartoons in which they state that they deplore this attack on the religion and the unquestionable wounds that this has caused among our Muslim friends. For most people religion gives meaning to their life and its basic rules are the source of the traditions and rules, according to which they live. Again and again it appears that certain opinion leaders feel that they are totally free to say what they want without any respect for the understanding and faith of others. We are adherents of a free and open discussion that seek the truth but in a context and climate of mutual respect and knowledge of what you talk about.43

Already in November 2005, Danmission, the largest Lutheran mission society in Denmark, had “dissociated itself from these drawings, which are rightfully perceived as offending to the religious feelings of all people of the Islamic World. As Christians we also feel repulsed by these drawings.” Now on the February 6, they issued a statement addressed to its partners in which the declared that

Being the second largest Christian NGO in Denmark, and one that has been working to build up dialogue between Muslims and Christians for the last 27 years, Danmission looks with a worried mind upon the present agitated situation that has followed upon the drawings. Therefore Danmission ask that all good forces pursue dialogue rather than conflict as Danmission will continue to build up dialogue.44

In February 2006, Christian groups in collaboration with Muslim groups arranged prayers and demonstrations for peace and reconciliation in Copenhagen and Aarhus.\(^45\)

As a follow-up to the statement by the board of F&R, this committee initiated a listening round, in which a team of two Christians and a Muslim visited twenty-two Muslim organizations and mosques in order to establish more and better contacts and relations between the church and the Muslims. The report, published in June, states that the vast majority of the Muslim leaders interviewed were very positive towards the establishment of a Christian-Muslim or interreligious forum.\(^46\) In August a conference was held between fifteen Muslim leaders and fifteen Christian leaders. At this first dialogue conference between national leaders from the Muslim and Christian communities it was agreed to carry on with this dialogue process.\(^17\)

At the end of April, seven Danish bishops went on a study tour to Leicester, UK, to learn from the Anglican Church how to relate to Muslim and other religious communities. One of the conclusions was that a forum for Christians and Muslims (and representatives of other religious groups) should be set up in Denmark.

Probably in reaction to this initiative, a group of pastors in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in May established a so-called Islam Critical Network (Islamkritisk Netværk). Many of the more than one hundred pastors in this network belonged to the theological group Tidehverv\(^6\), and some of them were also related to The Danish People’s Party. Instead of dialogue with the Muslims, they called for mission understood as verbal proclamation of the gospel. The two pastors who took the initiative to establish the network dissociated themselves from the idea of an interreligious council. “... why should we have this, if we do not share the same faith, and why should we give the imams a platform to speak from? It is not the task of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (folkekirken) to give them this, but to proclaim Jesus as Christ.”\(^49\)

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\(^46\) Vestergaard, Bektovic & Mogensen, op. cit.


\(^48\) Tidehverv is a Danish theological group established in 1926 in reaction to liberal theology from the beginning of the 20th century. It is an independent dialectical theology, which apart from Karl Barth based itself on Luther, Kierkegaard, Otto Moller and Jakob Knudsen. Today the leader of Tidehverv is Søren Krarup, and he has moved Tidehverv in a more nationalistic and political direction.

\(^49\) Katrine Winkel Holm & Torben Reinholdt Rasmussen, "Kristendom er modsigelse", in Kristeligt Dagblad, May 23, 2006 (my translation).

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**New configurations in the Muslim community**

Initially, the cartoon crisis seemed to polarize the Muslim community in Denmark by strengthening the more conservative group of imams under the leadership of Abu Laban from the Muslim Society in Denmark and the more secular
“Democratic Muslims” under the leadership of Nasser Khader. As time went on, however, it turned out that it was the religiously moderate groups of Muslims who had mainly kept quiet during the crisis that came out of the cartoon crisis as the winner.

The group of imams that became known not only in Denmark but also worldwide during the cartoon crisis were all of Arabic background and were not representative of the 200,000 Muslims in Denmark. During the last year, they have lost influence among Muslims in Denmark. Imam Akmed Akkari, who had had a high profile during the crisis, decided to withdraw from the public arena. Imam Abu Laban died, and imam Raed Hlayhel left Denmark. Furthermore, the terror cases in Denmark within the last two years have also thrown a critical light on the most conservative Muslim groups in Denmark, and although no links to any of these imams and their mosques have been identified, it has still weakened their positions.

After the initial success for Democratic Muslims in general and its leader Naser Khader in particular, Democratic Muslims has not been able to keep up the momentum and Naser Khader has turned his interest away from Democratic Muslims to his new party The New Alliance. Democratic Muslims carry on their activities but they are not as powerful as they were earlier.

In September 2006, a number of big Muslim organisations joined together to establish The Muslim Council in Denmark (Muslimernes Fællesråd i Danmark, MFR). The chairman of the council, Asmatullah Mojaddedi, later explained that MFR was established as a response to the cartoon crisis.

The problem is that only the extremist points of view were represented while mainstream Muslims could not make themselves heard. There is a need for a joint platform for Muslims in Denmark with a view of contributing to active citizenship, promotion of dialogue, mutual tolerance and respect in Denmark and internationally.50

According to its constitution, the goal of MFR is

- To unite Muslim organizations in Denmark and function as a joint platform for them
- To contribute towards active citizenship, and work for the spread of dialogue and mutual tolerance and respect in the Danish society as well as internationally
- To advise ministries, authorities, media, NGOs and private institutions on issues of principal importance for Muslims in Denmark
- To manage tasks and initiate projects, which promote and ensure the interests of Danish Muslims as well as the general benefit of the Danish society.51

Since its inception, MFR has attracted some of the most important Muslim organisations in Denmark, including the biggest Turkish organisation. Some of the organisations behind the conservative imams that were very active during the Muhammad crisis, however, are not members, e.g., The Islamic Society in Denmark. There are clear indications that MFR will be the most important Muslim organisation in Denmark.

A new cartoon crisis?
On October 6, Nyhedsavisen, a small daily newspaper, published photos from a video footage taken in early August at a summer camp for the youth organisation of The Danish People’s Party. The video clips, later also to be seen in other media showed the young politicians competing as to who could draw or present Muhammad in the most ludicrous and degrading way. Muslims all over the world protested against the new Danish cartoons.

This time, however, the Danish government reacted promptly to prevent the situation from escalating into a new dangerous crisis. Already two days after the publication of the video footage, Prime Minister Anders Fogh dissociated himself from the actions of the young politicians.

I strongly condemn the behaviour of members of the youth wing of the Danish Peoples’ Party during their summer camp. It is an unacceptable behaviour of a small group of young people. Their tasteless behaviour does in no way represent the way the Danish people or young Danish people view Muslims or Islam. I have noted with great satisfaction that a broad spectrum of the youth wings of the political parties, including the Liberal Party, jointly have expressed their strong condemnation of the behaviour.

This time, ambassadors for all Muslim countries represented in Denmark were called for a meeting with the director of the Foreign Ministry at which they were briefed about the Danish government’s position. The Foreign Minister, Per Stig Møller, held a number of meetings with representatives from Muslim countries, and Danish embassies worked hard to contain the crisis. The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt called for a trade boycott of goods from countries that allowed such actions. The government of Indonesia officially condemned the insults against the prophet. There were demonstrations in front of Danish embassies, but the situation never developed into a serious crisis.

51) The founding members of MFR were: Islamic Cultural Center, Muslim Cultural Institute, Muslims in Dialogue, Danish Turkish Islami Foundation, The Islamic Society, Dialogue Forum, Danish Muslim Aid, The Albanian Association, The IQRA Society, Afghan Cultural Institute, The Network.

What was the cartoon crisis all about?
The cartoon crisis started with the publication of the Muhammad cartoons in Jyllands-Posten September 30, 2005, escalated into an international crisis in February, and had slowly faded away by June 2006. From February onwards, the cartoon crisis brought Denmark into the international media as had never happened before. As Prime Minister Fogh stated, it was Denmark’s most serious political crisis since World War II. Danish exports to Muslim countries (albeit only a very small percentage of total exports) suffered losses amounting to hundreds of millions of Danish crowns. Moreover, the crisis initially seemed to have contributed to a polarisation in the Muslim community and also to a certain extent in the political life in Denmark. What was the crisis really about? At least four interpretations may be offered.

Was it a matter of freedom of expression? This was the position taken by Jyllands-Posten. The reason for publishing the Muhammad cartoons was to overcome an increasing self-censorship in Denmark regarding issues that were sensitive to Muslims. Therefore Jyllands-Posten could not make an apology for having published the cartoons but only for any unintended harm to the feelings of Muslims. The Danish Government took the same position. It decided to defend this freedom, and would therefore not comment on what the press had written or apologize for it, but on the contrary would defend this freedom by all means.

A second possible interpretation is that the cartoon crisis has to do with the recognition or the lack thereof of a religious minority. In retrospect, the Danish authorities’ refusal to enter into dialogue with the representatives of Muslims in Denmark and abroad who felt offended by the cartoons led to the escalation of the crisis. The Minister of Cultural Affairs refused to meet with Danish Muslims, and no minister would take the time to receive the 16,000 signatures gathered in protest against the cartoons. Most important was the Prime Minister’s refusal to meet with the eleven ambassadors. In an official analysis of the so-called “Arab Initiative”, conducted by scholars it is stated that...

...it was the absence of the recognition that there are individuals who have another view on freedom of expression than Jyllands-Posten and the Danish government that caused the cartoon issue to escalate as much as it did. By completely dismissing that there might be other points of view than unlimited freedom of expression, the dialogue was blocked. This was perhaps the real offence (or insult) in the cartoon issue: Not that the prophet was scorned, but the lack of recognition of the offence of the scorn of the prophet. Would the recognition that somebody might feel offended have led to a restriction of e.g. the right of Jyllands-Posten to print the cartoons? Not in the least, but it might have opened up a real dialogue much earlier in the course of events.53

In favour of this interpretation speaks the development of the immigration and integration policy and the growing anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiments in Denmark over the last few years.

Maybe we have to look outside Denmark in order to really understand the crisis. Did Arabic governments under pressure from Islamists use the cartoons as a very convenient valve to direct the attacks by the Islamists away from themselves to Denmark as a representative of the West? Maybe it was no coincidence that they chose Denmark as the object towards which the wrath of the Islamists was turned, since Denmark is a small and weak country from which no serious reprisals might be expected. The fact that the Syrian government did not prevent the demonstrators from attacking the Danish Embassy in Damascus might speak in favour of this interpretation.\(^{(54)}\)

Or was the cartoon crisis an indication of a clash of civilizations? Was it basically a clash between a democratic West and an undemocratic Muslim world? It was of course tempting to combine the conflicts in the cartoon crisis with the fight against terrorism, which in the minds of most people is a fight against Islamism. Furthermore, for many it does not make sense to distinguish between Islam and Islamism. Some of the statements from among politicians in The Danish People’s Party point clearly in that direction.\(^{(55)}\)

The cartoon crisis, however, is still too much with us to allow us to draw any final conclusion now.


\(^{(55)}\) Larsen & Seidenfaden, op.cit., pp. 305-313.