

The Shameful Scandal of Contradictory Reactions to Prophet Muhammad and Similar Cartoons

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If I insult you that's my right for freedom of speech that allows me to do that, but if you insult me, that's hate speech and beyond the permissible limits. You tell me who the target of the insult is, I tell you whether it is free speech or hate speech.

You might have been surprised when you read the above lines. But that's one of the most bitter realities of today's world. In this article, we compare the reactions to the cartoons of Prophet Muhammad and 5 other similar cases.

Prophet Muhammad Cartoons

The following is a brief history of the controversial cartoons of Prophet Muhammad. In 2002, the American newspaper Tallahassee Democrat published a defamatory cartoon of Prophet Muhammad. The newspaper received thousands of letters of protest demanding an apology for the misrepresentation of the Prophet Mohammed. In September 2005, the Danish daily Jyllands-Posten published 12 cartoons of Prophet Muhammad. In February 2006, the French magazine Charlie Hebdo reprinted the Prophet Muhammad cartoons of the Jyllands-Posten and added several new cartoons by its own contributors. In August 2007, several Swedish newspapers including Aftonbladet, Dagens Nyheter, Expressen, and Upsala Nya Tidning along with the Nerikes Allehanda, published derogatory drawings of Prophet Mohammad. In 2008, five major daily newspapers, 10 smaller papers, and a Swedish daily reprinted another set of cartoons. In November 2011, Charlie Hebdo featured a cartoon of Prophet Muhammad on its cover. In September 2012, Charlie Hebdo again published a series of satirical cartoons of Prophet Muhammad. In 2015, Charlie Hebdo published a special edition which again showed a cartoon of Prophet Muhammad. In May 2015, the American Freedom Defense Initiative, an anti-Muslim hate group held a "Draw the Prophet" event, in Garland, Texas. A \$10,000 award was offered for the winning cartoon [1]. The same group was responsible for billboards in Marion County depicting a cartoon of Prophet Muhammad [2]. In December 2019, Dutch anti-

Islam lawmaker Geert Wilders revived his plan to hold a contest for cartoons caricaturing the Prophet Muhammad. Wilders called on people to send in their Muhammad cartoons [3]. In September 2020, Charlie Hebdo republished the cartoons of the Prophet Mohammad.

What strikes the attention is the deliberate insistence and stubbornness in publishing defamatory cartoons of Prophet Muhammad. The question is why they try to do that again and again. We have also answered this question in this article.

Netanyahu on the Body of a Dog

In April 2019, the international version of The New York Times published a cartoon, depicting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's head on a dog's body with a blue Star of David dog tag, leading the former US President Donald Trump, who is blind and wearing a Jewish skullcap [4][5]. The cartoon has similarities with Lars Vilks' derogatory drawings of Prophet Mohammad published in 2007 in several newspapers. The reactions to these cartoons have been compared in the below table:

Reactions to Prophet Muhammad Cartoons	Reactions to Netanyahu Cartoon on Body of a Dog
Charlie Hebdo reprinted 12 cartoons of Prophet Muhammad of Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten along with their own cartoons in 2006 [6].	The New York Times removed the cartoon from the website [7]. Sergio Florez, the managing editor for the Times's Licensing Group: The cartoon has been deleted from the Licensing Group's collection [7].
Charlie Hebdo published Prophet Muhammad cartoons again in 2011, 2012, 2015 and republished them again in 2020 [8].	Eileen Murphy, New York Times spokeswoman: We are committed to making sure nothing like this happens again [7].
Flemming Rose, the Jyllands-Posten's editor who commissioned the 12 cartoons: I don't regret it. It is incompatible with contemporary democracy and freedom of speech, where you must be ready to put up with insults, mockery, and ridicule [9].	Eileen Murphy, New York Times spokeswoman: The paper is "deeply sorry" for publishing the cartoon. It's unacceptable [7].
The American author, Larry Johnston: They go further when suggesting that certain groups must be protected from what those groups take to be derogatory comments [10].	White House counselor Kellyanne Conway: The anti-Semitic cartoon which I'm not even going to describe the particulars because it is so odious and offensive [11].
David Harris, CEO of American Jewish Committee: If people of supposedly progressive views cannot see that, they badly need to reset their moral compass [10].	David Harris, CEO of American Jewish Committee: The cartoon is beyond shocking [12].
David Harris, CEO of American Jewish Committee: Why should a particular faith group have the privilege of not being insulted? [10].	David Harris, CEO of American Jewish Committee: Antisemitic in the extreme [12].
The American Freedom Defense Initiative, the anti-Muslim hate group behind the cartoon contest:	The Pulitzer Prize-winning American Journalist, Brett Stephens:

<p>No matter how offensive to some, free speech is still guaranteed [1].</p>	<p>The publication of the cartoon isn't just an error of judgment. The paper owes the Israeli prime minister an apology. It owes itself some serious reflection as to how it came to publish that cartoon and how its publication came, to many longtime readers, as a shock but not a surprise [13]</p>
<p>David Harris, CEO of American Jewish Committee: Charlie Hebdo is upholding the principle of freedom of expression [10].</p>	<p>Eileen Murphy, New York Times spokeswoman: The editor was working without adequate oversight because of a faulty process that is now being reviewed. We are evaluating our internal processes and training [7].</p>
<p>French President Emmanuel Macron: Satire is not a discourse of hate [14].</p>	<p>Elaina Plott, White House correspondent for The Atlantic: We're talking about normalizing hate speech [11].</p>
<p>Pen America organization honored Charlie Hebdo for its Prophet Muhammad cartoons by giving the Freedom of Expression Courage Award to it. Andrew Solomon, the president of PEN America organization, and Suzanne Nossel, the PEN's executive director, in a letter: There is courage in refusing the very idea of forbidden statements, an urgent brilliance in saying what you have been told not to say in order to make it sayable [15].</p>	<p>The US former Vice President Mike Pence tweeted, We stand with Israel and we condemn antisemitism in all its forms [7].</p>
<p>The American author, Larry Johnston: It would give the right of 7.5% of the population of France to determine what can be said to the remainder of the population [10].</p>	<p>David Harris, CEO of American Jewish Committee: Dear New York Times, Please allow me 3 questions: Has the full chain of command for approving this incendiary, antisemitic cartoon been identified? Will there be any serious consequences for those involved in the decision? Have steps been taken to ensure this won't happen again? [12].</p>
<p>Kurt Westergaard, the cartoonist of Denmark's Jyllands Posten: I never apologize for that [16].</p>	<p>David Harris, CEO of American Jewish Committee: Apology not accepted, No, apology isn't adequate [12].</p>
<p>Flemming Rose, Jyllands-Posten's editor condemned Islamic spiritual leaders who feel entitled to interpret the prophet's word, and cannot abide the insult that comes from being the object of intelligent satire [17].</p>	<p>French Nazi-hunter Serge Klarsfeld: The cartoon was insulting [18].</p>
<p>Flemming Rose, Jyllands-Posten's editor who commissioned the 12 cartoons: It is discriminatory toward Muslims to say that we should not make fun of their religion [19].</p>	<p>Simon Wiesenthal Center, the organization which researches anti-Semitism and the Holocaust: Someone drew it, someone approved it. They should be fired [18].</p>
<p>The Dutch prime minister, Mark Rutte, has termed the event disrespectful but defended the right to hold the contest for cartoons of Prophet Muhammad on the grounds of freedom of expression [20].</p>	<p>Eileen Murphy, New York Times spokeswoman: We anticipate significant changes [7].</p>
<p>The American author, Larry Johnston: Freedom of speech is too important to be circumscribed by conditions determined by individuals or groups to be critical of their own beliefs [10].</p>	<p>The Journalist of the Jerusalem Post Seth Frantzman: An apology after the fact isn't enough. This cartoon wasn't just mildly antisemitic. It wasn't like 'whoops.' It was deeply anti-Semitic [12].</p>
<p>Jorgen Paulsen, the Danish Red Cross secretary-general: Our government cannot stop the press from publishing materials that could offend people because the press is extremely free there [21].</p>	<p>Elaina Plott, White House correspondent for The Atlantic: The New York Times only aids in that when it publishes cartoons and gives this meek, silly little statement of regret about it [11].</p>
<p>Flemming Rose, the editor of the Danish newspaper, Jyllands-Posten:</p>	<p>Israel's ambassador to the US, Ron Dermer:</p>

In a democracy with freedom of expression, one must tolerate scorn, mockery, and ridicule [22].	A cesspool of hostility towards Israel that goes well beyond any legitimate criticism of a fellow, imperfect democracy [23].
Offending Prophet Muhammad cartoons were projected onto government buildings in France [24].	The publisher AG Sulzberger said the newspaper had stopped running all syndicated cartoons, which are created by outside parties, and had canceled its contract with CartoonArts international, the group that provided the controversial image [18].
Charlie Hebdo's editor-in-chief Gérard Biard: The cartoon of Prophet Muhammad is the symbol of freedom of speech, of freedom of religion, of democracy, and secularism [25].	Jonathan Greenblatt, CEO of the Anti-Defamation League: The cartoon was anti-Semitic propaganda of the most vile sort [18].
Stephane Charbonnier, director of the French magazine Charlie Hebdo: We are using freedom of expression to comment on the news in a satirical way [22].	Ambassador Danny Danon: The cartoon could have been taken from the pages of Der Sturmer, the Nazi propaganda paper, and yet these actions have gone unpunished [18].
Charlie Hebdo journalist Laurent Leger: The aim is to laugh [22].	The Pulitzer Prize-winning American Journalist, Brett Stephens: A Despicable Cartoon in The Times [13]
The Editor of the Swedish newspaper, Nerikes Allehanda: It is permissible to ridicule Islam's most foremost symbols [26].	The publisher AG Sulzberger: Disciplinary steps would be taken for the production editor who selected the cartoon and additional oversight would be required in the future. We are updating our unconscious bias training to ensure it includes a direct focus on anti-Semitism [18].
Zineb El Rhazoui, a journalist for Charlie Hebdo: A thousand bravos. The republication of the cartoons is a victory for the right to blasphemy [27].	The New York Times staffer: My sense is that management was caught unaware of how big a deal the cartoon was to the people who were offended [28].
Charlie Hebdo refused to apologize and defended the Prophet Muhammad cartoons as examples of free speech. Charlie Hebdo republished Prophet Muhammad cartoons again and again and was honored by some groups [29].	The New York Times apologized and admitted that the Netanyahu cartoon was offensive and was an error of judgment. Times decided to stop publishing daily political cartoons in its international edition and ended its contract with two political cartoonists [30][4].

Macron Billboard Depicting Him as Hitler

In 2021, Michel-Ange Flori, a wealthy billboard operator created and pasted billboards that showed Macron represented as the Nazi leader, with his toothbrush mustache, in full uniform and with the swastika armband altered to read LREM (La République En Marche), the president's governing center-right party. The accompanying slogan reads: "Obey. Get vaccinated" [31]. The large images appeared in the Var in the south of France. The billboard has similarities to some of the published cartoons of Prophet Muhammad. The two sets of reactions have been compared in the below table.

Reactions to Prophet Muhammad Cartoons	Reactions to Macron Billboard Depicting Him as Hitler
French President Emmanuel Macron: I will always defend in my country the freedom to say, to write, to think, to draw [32].	French President Emmanuel Macron took legal actions against the billboard operator and sued after him [31].

The French state defended Charlie Hebdo's right to publish Prophet Muhammad cartoons [33].	Michel-Ange Flori, the billboard operator: There had been a complaint from the Elysée [31].
There is in France a freedom to blaspheme which is attached to the freedom of conscience. I am here to protect all these freedoms [34].	Michel-Ange Flori, the billboard operator: In Macron-land, insulting the Prophet is satire, but when it is a matter of making fun of the president by depicting him as a dictator, then it becomes blasphemy, then it is unacceptable [31][35].
French President Emmanuel Macron: We will not give up on cartoons and drawings, even if others back down [32].	Jean Ennochi, a lawyer for Macron: The legal complaint was filed for Macron in a personal capacity because of the offensive nature of the comparison of the President of the Republic with Adolf Hitler [32].
French President Emmanuel Macron refuses to condemn Charlie Hebdo cartoons of Prophet Muhammad, defending citizens' right to freedom of speech [34].	Macron's personal lawyers and his party have filed legal complaints alleging that the depictions were a public insult, and Flori said he has been contacted by police acting on the complaint [32].

Israel Prime Minister Carrying a Missile

In May 2018, the German national daily newspaper, Süddeutsche Zeitung published a cartoon of Netanyahu carrying a missile marked with the Star of David in his hand. He is dressed up as Israeli singer Netta Barzilai, who won this year's Eurovision contest. A speech bubble on top says: "Next year in Jerusalem" [36]. The cartoon has similarities with some of Prophet Muhammad's cartoons depicting him with bombs or weapons. The reactions have been compared in the below Table:

Reactions to Prophet Muhammad Cartoons	Reaction to the Cartoon of Israel Prime Minister Carrying a Missile
John Winn Miller, the Executive Editor of the American newspaper, Tallahassee Democrat: I defend Marlette's right to ridicule anyone. This is an honored American tradition, I do not apologize for his right to make a point, even if it makes some people mad [37].	Wolfgang Krach, the Editor-in-Chief of the German newspaper, Süddeutsche Zeitung: Publishing the cartoon, carried in the May 15 issue of the daily, was a mistake, and we apologize [38].
The cartoonist Doug Marlette: With all due respect, an apology is not in order. Free speech is the linchpin of our republic [37].	The cartoonist Dieter Hanitzsch was fired [38][36].
President Emmanuel Macron has vigorously defended the publication of cartoons depicting the Prophet on free speech grounds [21].	Felix Klein, Germany's new anti-Semitism commissioner: The drawing was similar to the intolerable depictions of Nazi propaganda distributed by Joseph Goebbels and other anti-Semitic figures in the 1920s through World War II [39].
Human Rights Watch: Speech that targets a religion for disrespect is protected, however offensive it may be [40].	Jonathan Greenblatt, the CEO and national director of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL): This is insensitive, inappropriate, and offensive [41].
Flemming Rose, the editor of the Danish newspaper, Jyllands-Posten: Free speech is in jeopardy [42].	Wolfgang Krach, the Editor-in-Chief of the German newspaper, Süddeutsche Zeitung: We ask forgiveness [36].

Charlie Hebdo Fired its Cartoonist

In July 2008, Maurice Sinet, the French cartoonist, wrote a column in the magazine Charlie Hebdo about then-president Nicolas Sarkozy's son Jean. It contained a comment on Jean's rumored impending conversion to Judaism so he could marry a Jewish heiress of the wealthy Darty family, Jessica Sebaoun-Darty: "He'll go a long way in life, that little lad" [43]. The reactions have been compared below:

Reactions to Prophet Muhammad Cartoons	Reactions to Charlie Hebdo's Column
The former director of Charlie Hebdo, Philippe Val: Republishing Prophet Muhammad cartoons, a remarkable idea for defending freedom of thought and expression [27].	Charlie Hebdo (Editor Philippe Val) fired the columnist Maurice Sinet [44].
Charlie Hebdo's director, Laurent Riss Sourisseau, wrote in an editorial: We will never lie down. We will never give up [45].	Mr. Val's decision to fire Mr. Sinet was backed by a group of eminent intellectuals, including the philosopher Bernard-Henry Lévy [43].
The drawing Prophet Muhammad cartoon contest was held in the USA as a part of a free speech campaign [46].	Mr. Sinet was accused of being Anti-Semitic [43].
Charlie Hebdo journalist Laurent Leger defended the magazine, saying: It was within its rights and not responsible for people's reactions [22].	Mr. Sinet faced charges of "inciting racial hatred" for the column he wrote [43].
But Jean-Baptiste Thoret, a film critic for the magazine: Nothing is sacred for us [47].	The journalist Claude Askolovitch described the comments as anti-Semitic [48].

French President's Lash out at a Journalist

In September 2020, A French journalist, Georges Malbrunot, wrote a piece published in Le Figaro exposing in an article an unannounced meeting by French President Macron with Hezbollah. He reported that Macron has threatened to impose sanctions against leaders of the militant faction who may be resistant to the necessary reforms that France seeks [49]. Here is the comparison of two sets of reactions:

Reactions to Prophet Muhammad Cartoons	Reactions of French President Macron to a Journalist
French President Emmanuel Macron: The French press is free to publish what it wants [33].	French President Emmanuel Macron lashed out at the French journalist following a news conference in Beirut, Lebanon for his article published in Le Figaro newspaper [49].
French President Emmanuel Macron: It's never the place of a president of the Republic to pass judgment on the editorial choice of a journalist or newsroom, never. Because we have freedom of the press [49].	French President Emmanuel Macron: What you are doing here is irresponsible in regard to the sensitive nature of the issue. It is highly irresponsible towards France and the parties involved, considering what you know about the history of this

	country. I speak to you frankly. What you are doing is serious, unprofessional, and petty [49].
French President Emmanuel Macron: In France, one can criticize a president, governors, blaspheme [34].	After reading Malbrunot's article, Macron criticized those who write the worst nonsense on the subject without any verification [50].

Comparison of the Words and Statements

The words and statements that reveal the judgments of different groups of people about Prophet Muhammad cartoons and the similar cases have been compared in the below Table:

Prophet Muhammad Cartoons	Similar Cases
Contemporary democracy	Unacceptable
Freedom of speech	So odious
Not a hate speech	Beyond shocking
Intelligent satire	Antisemitic in the extreme
Freedom of expression	Offensive
Freedom of the press	Not just an error of judgment
Right to blasphemy	Faulty process
Freedom to say, to write, to think, to draw	Hate speech
Right to ridicule anyone	Insulting
No apology is required	Apology isn't adequate
Protected speech that targets a religion for disrespect	Cesspool of hostility
Freedom of thought and expression	Beyond any legitimate criticism of a fellow
Nothing is sacred	Imperfect democracy
Symbol of freedom of speech and religion	Despicable
Symbol of democracy and secularism	Error of judgment
Comment on the news in a satirical way	offensive nature
The aim is to laugh	Public insult
It is permissible to ridicule Islam's most foremost symbols	A mistake
You must be ready to put up with insults, mockery, and ridicule	We apologize
They badly need to reset their moral compass	We ask forgiveness
A particular faith group should not have the privilege of not being insulted	Insensitive and inappropriate
They must tolerate scorn, mockery, and ridicule	Inciting racial hatred
	Irresponsible
	Unprofessional and petty
	Nonsense

The tables are self-explanatory! It illuminates huge blatant double standards.

Irrational Double Standards

The above tables do not need any explanations. Similar contents prompted contradictory reactions. It is very shameful for those who claim they are defending the freedom of speech. Those who give and receive courage awards in free speech because of Prophet Muhammad

cartoons. The similar content (a cartoon or an article) that they find insulting and defamatory, when it comes to Prophet Muhammad becomes a symbol of free speech. They just agree with mocking and insulting Prophet Muhammad and in many other similar cases, they do not believe in freedom of speech and are against it. It seems that the freedom of speech is being used as a tool to defame Prophet Muhammad, Islam, and Muslims but it is significantly ignored or limited by the same group wherever they prefer. That's a shameful irrational double standard. There are three possible reasons for such reactions:

- 1- There exist a calculated plan of defamation, libeling, and insulting of Prophet Muhammad that publishes such cartoons.
- 2- They have mixed up insult, defamation, and libel with free speech.
- 3- The Prophet Muhammad cartoons are abused as a means of intellectual posturing by some people to show themselves as defenders of freedom of speech.

It has been previously proved in several studies that insult, defamation, and libel are not free speech. Insulting and mocking other people has nothing to do with criticism of something or starting a debate [51]. The cartoons link Prophet Muhammad with violence, terrorism, and the oppression of women, in ways that involve little or no ambiguity and no attempt at humor or satire [52]. It has been already proved that the Prophet Muhammad cartoons constitute hate speech in the context of European legal developments and precedent [52].

The right to freedom of speech is being abused by some people to defame and damage the reputation of others. They are trying to mix up the explicit defamation and mockery of Prophet Muhammad with the freedom of speech and introduce it as a modern value so that they can pretend to be champions of free expressions in the modern age.

The mixing up of the insulting and defamation with the freedom of speech is either a matter of unawareness or a means of escaping to forward. Most of those who were involved in publishing defamatory cartoons (cartoonists, editors, and their supporters) try to draw a veil over their advocacy of hatred and damaging the reputation of others, and pretend that they are the defenders of freedom of speech. They violate human rights and with their astonishing intellectual posturing claim that they defend it. They have found a good way to escape forward. A strategy to divert the view of the others toward them as heroes and a tool utilized to escape from fulfilling their commitments such as defamation, libel, and insult which are criminal offenses according to law.

While they stay silent about many war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide corruptions, human rights issues, etc., they are brave champions in inferiorly mocking the respectful Prophets like Prophet Muhammad and Jesus who are symbols of dignity, higher goodness, and kindness or saint Mary who is a symbol of purity, goodness, eternal innocence and motherly affection.

If they are unable to distinguish between free speech and insulting speech, I suggest that the world leaders think about this quote of Prophet Muhammad: "I joke but I do not speak other than the truth". Quran and the Prophet Muhammad's teachings have prohibited mocking, ridiculing, defamation, libeling, and insulting others, no matter who they are but respect the right for freedom of speech and criticism in a polite way. It seems that this should be adopted as a more reliable modern value than what we see in today's world. A teaching that erases all the double standards.

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