



Not Child's Play: The Teddy-bear Intifada

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Editor's note: There is rioting in Sudanese streets calling for the death of a woman over a teddy bear named Mohammed. What can we in the West possibly do with this -- nationally, individually? How do we help? What must we learn from it? National Review Online asked a group of experts and commentators.

Bat Yeor

The rioting in the Sudanese streets calling for the death of an innocent woman, Gillian Gibbon, over a teddy bear's name, would not surprise any person familiar with traditional Islamic society. The rioting occurred under government instigation and that, without it, probably nothing similar would have happened. The Sudanese government's motivation might have been to arouse in the Muslim mob anti-British and anti-Western feelings, while humiliating the former colonial British power and the West.

What can we do in the West? First, each of us should understand how the theological and legal rules and framework in sharia society function. We should know that the whole Muslim world, even the countries we mistakenly call "moderate," moves toward unification under sharia rule and traditional Koranic values. We should understand that because we share this planet with over a billion Muslims, represented by 57 countries, this situation concerns each one of us in our homeland and abroad.

What can we do to save this innocent woman? We should create a world movement of solidarity with her, hang her portrait everywhere, organize manifestations for her liberation putting her poster in every newspaper, and oblige our governments to move out of their usual cowardly silence. We should do that also for the innocent victims of Darfur, of Chad, masses of men, women, children enslaved, expelled, dehumanized, whose martyrdom one finds endlessly repeated over a millennium and more of dhimmitude throughout the land of Islam.

-- Bat Yeor, born in Egypt, is a British citizen who has been living in Switzerland since 1960. She is the author of Islam and Dhimmitude: Where Civilizations Collide, among other books.

Jonathan Foreman

Much of the response to the teddy-bear incident has been naïve. In Khartoum, the crowds baying for Gillian Gibbons's blood carried pre-printed posters, just as the anti-Danish cartoon protesters on the West Bank and elsewhere, just happened to have lots of Danish flags at hand. The Islamist Khartoum regime is exploiting the teacher's arrest -- apparently the result of a rivalry between her and a politically connected colleague -- to foment anti-western feeling and to combat pressure about Darfur.

Regimes like that of Sudan's Omar Bashir know all too well that the Western media has an endless appetite for apparent manifestations of "Muslim anger," and invariably takes them at face value. Earnest anchormen and BBC "experts" take one look at screaming (always all-male) demonstrators -- whether Sadrist rent-a-mobs in Basra, semi-professional demonstrators in London, or government-sponsored crowds in Damascus -- and assume they express genuine Muslim "fury." In response, Western politicians call for more attention to be paid to ultra-delicate yet violent Muslim sensibilities. At the same time many ordinary Muslims wonder if they should be as angry as their coreligionists waving banners and threatening murder.

We should be wary of manufactured "rage" in the Arab or North African street -- and our journalists should be more skeptical when confronted by telegenic demonstrations -- otherwise we play into the hands of cynical murderous regimes and encourage the worst tendencies in modern Islam.

As for the absurd blasphemy charge in the teddy-bear case, it should be clear by now that the standard cowardly response of Western societies to "Muslim anger" helps no-one; indeed it empowers extremists and encourages an Islamic sensibility that is both hypersensitive and bullying. Perhaps we need to show that, though we are no longer have an "honor culture," we too can be dangerously offended, especially by the uncivilized religious intolerance of certain Muslim states.

-- Jonathan Foreman has reported from the Muslim world.

Tawfik Hamid

Assyrian International News Agency

We have much to learn from the teddy-bear riots in Sudan. We see, in stark relief, the hypocrisy of many Islamic organizations in the West; in democratic societies they demand freedom of religion and civil rights -- whether it is the right to wear the hijab, or have prayer rooms in football stadiums, or be provided with Islamic foot baths in college restrooms. In contrast, Westerners in Islamic nations lack basic civil rights. Today, because a student named a stuffed animal "Mohammed," Gilliam Gibbons rots in jail, and large mobs clamor for her decapitation.

The silence of the world's Muslims should send warning signals to heads of national security. Powerful Islamic bodies have not condemned the violent reaction of the rioters, and Muslims -- who not long ago took to the streets to protest cartoons -- cannot muster a word in her defense. Why? Because Islamism is far more pervasive among Muslims than politicians and the media can comprehend. A community that is silent in the face of barbarism is one that tacitly endorses it. Who really is a "moderate Muslim?" Free nations must not allow our cherished tolerance to be exploited by an Islamist community which seeks to use our civil protections to end civil protections.

-- Tawfik Hamid is a former member of Jemaah Islamiya, an Islamist terrorist group. He is currently a medical doctor and Muslim reformer living in the West.

Victor Davis Hanson

Same old, same old-whether a teddy bear, a cartoon, or a papal sermon, whether in Khartoum or Islamabad.

They take offense, we understand, or rationalize, or equivocate -- either out of condescension or fear of terrorism or worries over oil or multicultural guilt or all that and more.

Then the moderate Muslim spokesman is trotted out to condemn the nuttiness, but also to anguish over the media that "sensationalizes" and "inordinately" reports the latest Islamic lunacy.

We usually then get the silly Timothy McVeigh or IRA comparison, and forget the entire absurdity -- until the next opera, film, or novel brings out the fist-shaking, swords, and death threats.

The only dramas seem to be our infighting over whether this reflects Islam itself, or the reaction of radical Islamists angry at the modern world -- or whether at this point that really matters any longer anyway.

-- Victor Davis Hanson is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution. He is the author, most recently, of A War Like No Other. How the Athenians and Spartans Fought the Peloponnesian War.

Paul Marshall

British teacher Gillian Gibbons's sentence for blasphemy, and the subsequent demonstrations calling for her death, is one of a series of such incidents that, by their very absurdity, have shone media attention on the perils of accusations of blasphemy, apostasy, and insulting Islam. We need this attention to lead the West to become aware of and address the far wider and more serious political repercussions of such accusations in the Muslim world and beyond.

Examples could be taken from Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and elsewhere, but Sudan provides enough of its own. In 2005, Mohammed Taha, who edited the al-Wifaq newspaper in Sudan's capital, reprinted an article that debated the background of Mohammed. He was charged with blasphemy, though the charges were later dropped. However, in 2006 his body was found in a Khartoum street. He had been beheaded.

In the early 1990s, Gaspar Biro, the courageous United Nations Special Rapporteur on Sudan, produced a series of reports documenting the National Islamic Front government's massacres, slavery, draconian penal code, and other depredations. In 1994, the NIF (an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood) called his work "a vicious attack on the religion of Islam." In 1995, Sudanese officials said "we don't want to speculate about his fate if he is to continue offending the feelings of Muslims worldwide." These accusations of blasphemy were deemed dire enough that the U.N. General Assembly described it as "an unacceptable threat against his person."

Perhaps the most striking instance was Mahmoud Mohamed Taha. He was one of the country's leading Islamic scholars, and a co-founder of the Republican Brotherhood, which pushed, on Islamic grounds, for an open and democratic society. A major opponent of the regime, in January 1985 he was tried and executed on charges that amounted to apostasy because of his views on Islamic teaching.

As these examples show, a major function of blasphemy laws is silencing those who want to debate and discuss the meaning of Islam, particularly those who favor open and democratic societies.

How do we respond? Well, first, with diplomatic pressure to have Ms. Gibbons released, which appears to be progressing. But it is vital not to treat blasphemy accusations and convictions as merely idiosyncratic vagaries of Muslim regimes that simply require a

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humanitarian response on behalf of the unfortunates involved. Blasphemy charges are the front line of the war of ideas within Islam. If there is to be debate within Islam, we need to work to remove such laws.

A good place to start is for the U.S. to seriously campaign against the ongoing, partly successful, multi-year effort by the Organization of the Islamic Conference to have the United Nations condemn "blasphemy" in the international sphere (an effort couched in the language of combating 'Islamophobia'). A good occasion for this campaign is the preparatory meetings for the 2009 U.N. conference on "Racism," which, under the leadership of Iran, Libya, and Pakistan, is set to condemn all "insults to Islam," whether those purportedly by Ms. Gibbons, or those of political targets such as Gaspar Biro or the Tahas.

-- Paul Marshall is senior fellow at Hudson Institute's Center for Religious Freedom and is writing a book on blasphemy. The new edition of his World survey of Religious Freedom will be published by Rowman and Littlefield in January.

Clifford D. May

This affair will not come out well -- not even if Gillian Gibbons is eventually freed. Why not? Because we're still going to be treated to an outpouring of nonsense about how she didn't mean to cause offense, and how we all have to learn to be more sensitive toward "the Muslim world."

As for the value of tolerance, demonstrators in Khartoum this week made their point clearly: "No tolerance - execution." Others yelled: "No one lives who insults the prophet." The spokesman for the Sudanese embassy in London, Khalid Al Mubarak, spun the same idea more diplomatically: "If a lesson can be learned, it's that anybody going abroad should learn about the culture and orientation before taking any job."

Would some reporter mind asking him if that applies equally to Muslims in Europe who ought to learn about freedom and what it implies when it comes to satirical cartoons? And if that doesn't apply, why not? (I'll offer a theory in a moment.)

Pay a visit to the website of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. Note that the OIC has not a word to say about Gibbons's predicament (as of Sunday night). The Arab League has been silent, too.

If the United Nations were not an Orwellian junkyard, its secretary general, Ban Ki-moon, would be reading the riot act to Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, and the U.N. Human Rights Council would be meeting in emergency session.

Instead, the British government has sent Muslim Labor peer Lord Ahmed and Tory Baroness Sayeeda Warsi to visit with al-Bashir. You think they are telling him: "Curse your moustache! You don't realize what this makes the world think of our religion?" Or do you think they are saying: "You know the English are stupid, so show mercy this time around. You'll be rewarded in due course."

Here's what ought to be happening: The few civilized and not spineless nations of the world should be recalling their ambassadors for "consultations," making it clear to al-Bashir that he is risking all foreign aid and economic cooperation. British Prime Minister Gordon Brown should be quietly sending al-Bashir the message that he will hold him personally responsible for Ms. Gibbons's welfare. And two rumors should be spread: 1) that Brown is re-reading Churchill's *The River War*, and 2) that British Special Forces are on alert. Brown can deny both publicly.

After Ms. Gibbons is freed, there should be no effort to quickly "put the incident behind us." An apology and a commitment to tolerance in the future should be expected.

Instead, I fear, when this is over, the West will be one step closer to accepting the deal the Islamists are demanding: They get to say -- and do -- anything at all in regard to Christians and Jews. But Christians and Jews -- "infidels" who are the descendants of monkeys and swine -- are to learn their place and avoid acting uppity, either at home or abroad.

-- Clifford D. May is the president of the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies.

Andrew C. McCarthy

We need to start breaking stuff, and people, in Sudan. At a minimum, we should cut off all aid (it is simply intercepted and used to help sustain the barbarous regime), and end all immigration from Sudan (in addition to expelling any Sudanese Muslims who cannot make an asylum case for staying here).

Sudan is one of the worst places on the planet and -- what a coincidence! -- a prime well-spring of jihadism. A short history lesson. Hassan al-Turabi's National Islamic Front came to power in Sudan in 1989, and he promptly put out the welcome mat for every Islamic terror organization in the world. Sudan provided a soft place to land when Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman (the "Blind Sheikh") left Egypt and when Osama bin Laden left Afghanistan. Sudan brokered the cooperative relationship between al Qaeda and Iraq, and between al Qaeda

and Iran (and Hezbollah, Iran's creation).

In 1993, in addition to the Blind Sheikh, I prosecuted several Sudanese members of his organization. They had been apprehended in New York City while plotting a campaign to follow up the bombing of the World Trade Center with simultaneous strikes against several New York City landmarks. One of targets was the United Nations -- and the plan was to drive what appeared be a diplomatic vehicle, laden with explosives, into the complex. The diplomatic plates for the plot were to be provided by two Sudanese diplomats assigned to the regime's U.N. Mission -- the Clinton administration quietly expelled the diplomats in 1995; no further action was taken against Sudan for this act of war. (Nearly a decade ago, I wrote a lengthy piece on this for the Weekly Standard, "The Sudan Connection: The Missing Link in U.S. Terrorism Policy." It's still missing.) In 1998, after our embassies in east Africa were bombed, the Clinton administration carried out a cruise missile attack against a pharmaceutical plant in Sudan based on intelligence that it was a joint chem/bio weapons venture colluded in by Sudan, Iraq, and al Qaeda. The operation was much maligned, but top Clinton officials (including President Clinton) told the 9/11 Commission they still stand behind the intelligence, and my complaint is not that we did it, but that it was too weak a response given the provocations from these venturers.

Meanwhile, the Islamic government has perpetrated -- not one -- but two genocides, and the even dirtier little secret, ignored by the American media, is that the jihadists take many of their victims as slaves; young women are kept as concubines (rape being one of the prime weapons of the jihad) ,and boys are often maimed to prevent them from fleeing. At the U.N., China protects this despicable regime because of its extensive energy and trade interests, and the Organization of the Islamic Conference rallies around it as needed, so it's a pipe-dream to think sanctions of any kind will work discernible improvement in Sudanese behavior.

The only thing surprising about the teddy-bear incident is that anyone is surprised by it.

-- *Andrew C. McCarthy, a former federal prosecutor, is a senior fellow at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies.*

Daniel Pipes

The mob demanding the execution of Gillian Gibbons -- for allowing her seven-year-old pupils to name a teddy bear Mohammed -- may have been government-prompted. In any case, it represents the latest example of one type of Islamist aggression. Most Muslim-majority countries have rules against insulting the Islamic prophet -- most notoriously, clauses 295 and 298 of the Pakistani penal code. Islamists capriciously use such laws as a weapon to hound free-thinking Muslims and non-Muslims.

In 2002, for example, 105 persons were killed in riots in Kaduna, Nigeria, following the publication of an article suggesting Mohammed would have approved of a beauty contest. At this very moment, mobs are howling in India for the death of Taslima Nasreen, the Bangladeshi author critical of Islam. Statements coming out of the West, from the Salman Rushdie affair in 1989, to the Danish cartoons, to Pope Benedict's speech in 2006, have inspired multiple violent eruptions.

These incidents point to two of the deepest problems in modernizing Islam. One is permitting freedom of speech concerning Mohammed, the Koran, and other aspects of the religion. The other concerns the right of Muslims to leave Islam. These twin transitions must be accomplished for Islam to leave its current backward and oppressive condition.

-- *Daniel Pipes is director of the Middle East Forum.*

Father James V. Schall

When Cassius Clay became a Muslim, he called himself "Mohammed." I have a young student in class whose last name is "Mohammed." Normally, young girls endow their dolls with names of affection. Evidently, in Muslim theology, to say Jesus Christ is also a man is blasphemy, as is the truth that a Trinity of persons is found within the Godhead's oneness. To threaten a girl with death for calling a teddy bear "Mohammed" not only insults Mohammed himself but also insults creatures like bears together with all human relationships to God and to the things that He created to be good. No incident could be more helpful in understanding the way such murderous minds work. The disorders in the streets, and threats of death, arise from confusions in minds about the order of rank in God's creation, and the way we name things that exist. The real blasphemy does not consist in affectionately calling a doll-like teddy bear "Mohammed." The real blasphemy consists of demanding that the rest of the world, in the noble name of Mohammed, live by such untenable confusions evidently prevalent in the Sudan.

-- *James V. Schall, S. J. is a professor of government at Georgetown University and author of The Regensburg Lecture, among other books.*

Robert Spencer

This incident is another attempt to strong-arm the West into shying away from, and even prohibiting, any critical examination of Islam, precisely at a moment when jihad terrorists use Islamic texts and teachings to justify violence. If you can't name a teddy bear Mohammad

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without calls for blood, you certainly can't call for a critical reevaluation of the Islamic texts and doctrines that jihadists use to justify violence and make recruits among peaceful Muslims.

The OIC and other Islamic entities began calling for blasphemy laws after the cartoon riots of 2006. But the prohibition of blasphemy, whether it takes the form of teddy bears, cartoons, or books about Islam and Mohammad, has no place in a free society. Freedom of speech must encompass the freedom to annoy, to ridicule, and to offend, or it is hollow. The instant any person or ideology is placed off-limits for critical examination and even ridicule, freedom of speech has been replaced by an ideological straitjacket.

Will the West acquiesce in the Islamic world's efforts to place Islam beyond criticism, when it needs to be reexamined and reformed more than ever? Or will we stand up and defend ourselves and our societal principles of free speech and free inquiry? The teddy-bear incident, as ridiculous as it is, only underscores the urgency of these questions.

-- *Robert Spencer is the director of Jihad Watch and the author of The Truth About Muhammad.*

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