



Written by on September 10, 2010

Protests Against Quran Burning Erupt in Afghanistan

VOA noted that a man was shot and killed outside a NATO base in the city of Faizabad in northern Badakhshan province, after protesters started hurling rocks at security officers on the base, provoking a clash. The conflict occurred shortly after worshippers concluded their prayers marking the start of Eid-al-Fitr, the Muslim holiday which marks the end of Ramadan.



During his message to mark the start of Eid-al-Fitr, Afghan President Hamid Karzai criticized Jones's threats to burn the Quran, and said the Quran cannot be harmed because it is in the hearts and minds of all Muslims.

□□The [New York Times](#), citing Afghan officials, reported that the NATO base, manned by German troops, was stormed by a crowd of young men armed with sticks and rocks who overpowered Afghan security forces on the outer wall of the compound, and then tried to storm the inner wall. Soldiers fired into the crowd, hitting five protestors. Maj. Sunset Belinsky, a spokeswoman for the security force, was quoted by the *Times* as saying: "Reporting indicates no ISAF troops fired shots during any protests today. Initial reporting does indicate Afghan forces fired shots, but I would have to defer" to the Afghan Ministries of Interior and Defense for confirmation.

Despite reports indicating that the widespread protests in Afghanistan were prompted by the American pastor's threats to burn the Quran, a statement made by Aga Noor Kentooz, the provincial police commander in Faizabad, indicated another motivation for the attack against the NATO base. Kentooz said protesters outside the German-staffed base were angered because of reports that the German chancellor, Angela Merkel, had attended an award ceremony held in Potsdam to recognize Danish cartoonist Kurt Westergaard, whose caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad angered Muslims worldwide.

However, reported the *Times*, while present at the ceremony, Merkel criticized the plans of Terry Jones to burn the Quran, stating: "If a fundamentalist evangelical pastor in America wants to burn the Quran on Sept. 11, I find that — in a word — disrespectful, also abhorrent and false."

In addition to the incident in Faizabad, there were reports of demonstrations against the planned Quran burning in the Afghan cities of Kabul and Jalalabad and in Bamian, Kunar, and Kapisa Provinces. These protest were described as small and, for the most part, peaceful.

Sue Turton, a correspondent for the Middle East-based [al Jazeera news network](#), reported about the demonstrations from Kabul: "A demonstration has taken place in Farah, in the far west of Afghanistan, and there are reports that a number of people were injured. There are reports of protests set to take place in other parts of the country too,"

indicating that people in the Middle East were following the Florida Quran episode closely, al Jazeera reported:



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Terry Jones, a Christian pastor of a small church in Gainesville, Florida, has called off his planned Quran-burning event slated for the ninth anniversary of the September 11 attacks, after drawing international condemnation and a warning from Barack Obama, the US president, that it could provoke al-Qaeda suicide bombings and incite violence around the world.

The report continued, citing Jones's statement on ABC's *Good Morning America* on September 10:

"Right now we have no plans to go ahead with the event," Jones confirmed to the US television programme *Good Morning America* on Friday.

Jones, the head of the Dove World Outreach Center, first announced the event's suspension on Thursday, but then indicated he might reconsider, accusing a Muslim leader of lying to him about moving a planned Islamic centre in New York. □□ Imam Muhammad Musri, president of the Islamic Society of central Florida, and the sponsor of the New York mosque both denied such an agreement had been reached. □□ However, Jones says he will fly to New York on Saturday with Musri to meet Feisal Abdul Rauf, the New York imam at the centre of another controversy. □□ "We believe that the imam is going to keep his word, what he promised us yesterday.... We believe that we are, as he said, and promised, going to meet with the imam in New York tomorrow," Jones told *Good Morning America*. □□ "Right now we have no plans to go ahead with the event."

One wonders how an insignificant pastor of a tiny congregation of about 50 people could have become the center of such a well-publicized, world-wide controversy and if the media are responsible for having fanned the flames.

A September 10 [Christian Science Monitor](#) article asked the question in its headline: "Could the media have ignored Terry Jones and his Koran-burning plan?" The article quoted from an e-mail sent by Deepak Chopra, author of the forthcoming book *Muhammad*, who said: "The media has a responsibility to not contribute to rage and possible violence by not making a global phenomenon of what could have been a nonevent by an unimportant pastor."

It also quoted an opinion from Stephen Burgard, author of *Faith, Politics and Press in Our Perilous Times*, who said: "Far from avoiding these stories, we should learn about how to be better about how we do cover them."

That the media have a responsibility to cover news that potentially might incite violence or have socially destructive consequences seems the very definition of responsible journalism. The fact that the question has been raised, however, suggests that many observers believe that the media has been an ally to Jones's provocations. Making the story even more curious, however, is the sudden tie-in between the actions of a small congregation in Gainesville, Florida, and the ongoing controversy that has been raging over the planned building of an Islamic cultural center and mosque a short distance from the Ground Zero site of the former World Trade Center in lower Manhattan.

Just how did that connection come about? Was it all the idea of an unknown independent preacher in Florida? Was the trouble in New York all the idea of a small group of Muslims attempting to build a center for religious studies and prayer? Or were larger forces responsible for setting one group of Americans against another?

When we asked Arthur R. Thompson, CEO of The John Birch Society, for his take on the potential violence associated with these current events, he said:

People have not considered that the growing number of incidences across both the Muslim and



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Christian world are actually designed to provoke and divide people against each other. Divide and conquer is an age-old scheme for people who want to use the ensuing violence to build government power in the name of quelling the violence and healing the division. There are all the appearances of exactly that scheme going on today.

The society that Thompson heads has an organizational memory that extends back over half a century and recalls many other turbulent eras in U.S. history — including the racial strife that occurred during the height of the civil rights movement. On more than one occasion back in the 1960s, JBS members mediated differences and calmed tensions between black and white citizens in the South (Americus, Georgia, being the outstanding example) who had come close to violent confrontations against each other after having been deliberately misled and provoked by trained professional agitators on both sides.

With experience like that, members of The John Birch Society are in an excellent position to recognize professionally incited agitation when they see it and to recommend basic human charity and respect for both our neighbors and our Constitution as the answer to such social problems.

Photo: Afghans shout anti-U.S. slogans as they burn tires and block a highway during a protest in reaction to a small American church's plan to burn copies of the Quran, at Jalalabad, east of Kabul, Afghanistan, Sept. 10, 2010.: AP Images



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