

Twenty Years After the Muhammad Cartoons: Europe Chose Surrender Over Freedom

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Twenty years after the Muhammad cartoons, Europe stands as proof that while its artists were silenced, exiled, and buried in secret, Islam's advance — and the West's cowardice — have only deepened, leaving freedom of expression dead in the land that once dared to defend it.

Few voices chronicled the fallout of the Muhammad cartoons with more precision and courage than Fjordman, the Norwegian essayist known for his unflinching analysis of Europe's cultural surrender. One of the earliest writers to document the crisis as it unfolded in 2005, Fjordman became a central chronicler of how a handful of drawings exposed the West's deepest fracture — between free speech and fear. His firsthand perspective, drawn from years of following the Jyllands-Posten affair and its global repercussions, makes him one of the most important witnesses to how Europe's elites chose submission over freedom.

Read the following article by [Fjordman](#) that has been [reprinted with permission](#)



The author Mark Steyn in Copenhagen at a conference on the Muhammad cartoons in September 2015. Photo: Peder Jensen

20 Years After the Muhammad Cartoons

On September 30, 2005, the newspaper Jyllands-Posten published twelve cartoons of Islam's founder Muhammad. The Danish cartoons were to spark fierce debate, attacks on embassies, riots, and Islamic terrorist threats.

I was one of the first outside Denmark to follow this story closely on my old [Fjordman](#) blog. Writers at some international websites, such as Paul Belien at [The Brussels Journal](#), Robert Spencer at Jihad Watch, and Ned May at [Gates of Vienna](#), got some of their early updates on the story via my English posts.^[1]



The cartoons did not lead to immediate riots. It took a few months, with some Muslim groups deliberately trying to stir things up, before it really became a major international issue in early 2006.

Then-Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen later referred to it as “[the biggest](#) foreign policy crisis Denmark has faced since the Second World War”.^[2] All because of some drawings of a man who may or may not have lived in the 7th century.

Would Jyllands-Posten have published similar Muhammad cartoons today? This is far from certain. In 2005, the newspaper was led by people such as culture editor Flemming Rose. Today’s editor-in-chief, Marchen Neel Gjertsen, is a politically correct woman. The paper has got rid of some of its most prominent conservative writers, such as Mikael Jalving and Morten Uhrskov Jensen.

Jyllands-Posten has even gone so far as to change old articles that were considered offensive to Islam. The Danish linguist Tina Magaard has studied the core texts of different religions. She found that Islamic religious texts contain far more direct incitement to violence, terror, and aggression than texts from other religions. An article about this in Jyllands-Posten on September 10, 2005 was entitled “Islam is the most warlike religion”.^[3] This title has since been changed on the grounds that there was no basis for it. Jyllands-Posten “regrets the error”.

Norway, too, experienced a crisis in connection with the Muhammad cartoons, albeit on a smaller scale. While Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen deserves some credit for how he handled the Muslim protests against the cartoons, the same cannot be

said for the Norwegian government.

Some media outlets republished the Muhammad cartoons. One of them was the small Christian newspaper Magazinet in Norway, with [Vebjørn Selbekk](#) as editor. While the death threats against Selbekk and his family poured in from militant Muslims, Prime Minister [Jens Stoltenberg](#) and Foreign Minister [Jonas Gahr Støre](#) threw him to the wolves.^[4]



In [September 2015](#), an international conference on the Danish Muhammad cartoons was held in Copenhagen under heavy police security. The conference was organized by the Danish Free Press Society. The Canadian-born writer and conservative commentator Mark Steyn was appalled at how few publications in the English-speaking world republished the Muhammad cartoons.^[5]

The conflict between Western freedom of expression and Islamic intolerance is by no means over. Several activists have burned or desecrated the Koran. On January 29, 2025, the Christian Iraqi refugee and Koran burner Salwan Momika was murdered in an apartment in Södertälje, Sweden. No one has yet been arrested for his murder.

The Danish-Swedish lawyer and politician Rasmus Paludan has burned copies of the Koran in both Denmark and Sweden. In [November 2024](#), the Malmö District Court in Sweden sentenced Paludan to four months' imprisonment for "incitement against an ethnic group".^[6]



Because of people such as Paludan, the Danish government coalition led by Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen and Foreign Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen introduced a new law making it illegal to desecrate religious texts.

On the basis of this new Danish law, Rasmus Paludan was punished in [May 2025](#) by the court on Bornholm with ten daily fines of DKK 1,000 for improper treatment of a religious text. A copy of the Koran had some pages torn out, and the book fell into a puddle. This is no longer legal in Denmark.^[7]



The Danish artist Kurt Westergaard drew perhaps the most famous of the Muhammad cartoons in Jyllands-Posten in 2005, with an explosive turban. For the rest of his life, he lived under very real death threats from Jihadists. When [he died](#) in 2021^[8], it was

revealed that even his grave will be [kept secret](#), to prevent it from being vandalized.^[9]

Unfortunately, he was not alone in this fate. In Sweden, the artist Lars Vilks also created his own cartoons of Muhammad. For the last few years of his life, he lived like a hunted animal, until he died together with two policemen in a very strange car crash in 2021. Vilks was also buried in a [secret grave](#) so that Muslims would not commit vandalism against him even after his death.^[10]



Lars Vilks tillsammans med sin Rondellhund. Foto: Scanpix.

Bakgrund: Publicerades två år efter Muhammedkarikatyterna

The ruling elites in Sweden [suddenly](#) began to pay tribute to Lars Vilks when he was [dead](#).^[11] While he was alive, many of them had either ignored him or actively hated him. Author Hege Storhaug wrote as recently as 2019 that “[In Sweden](#), he is treated as a pariah, as radioactive.”^[12] Unfortunately, Norway was not much better.

An [uncomfortably](#) large number of [Muslims](#), also in the Scandinavian countries, [celebrated](#) Vilks’ death, just as they did when Kurt Westergaard died a few months earlier.^[13] And we continue to import the people who threatened Vilks and Westergaard and who openly celebrate their deaths.

The death threats against Kurt Westergaard and Lars Vilks, as well as the attempted murders of William Nygaard and Lars Hedegaard, were carried out by militant Muslims while Sweden, Denmark and Norway still only had small Muslim minorities. None of these countries have previously been under Islamic rule. Nevertheless, many Muslims believe that these people deserve to die because they have done something perceived as blasphemous against Islam. Insulting Islam or its founder Muhammad is punishable by death. This applies to absolutely everyone, regardless of where they live in the world or whether they themselves are Muslims. Islam prohibits freedom of expression for all people on the planet.

Perhaps this is why so many in the Swedish ruling elite hated Lars Vilks. He was a reminder that they are losing their freedom and security and are no longer masters in their own house.

20 years after the Muhammad caricatures in Jyllands-Posten, the Islamization of Europe continues unabated. The ruling elites do not seem to be willing to do anything to stop, let alone reverse, this development.

See all notes/sources at Gates of Vienna [here](#)