

Media organizations shouldn't fall into extremists' trap

Media organizations that republished cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed validated terrorists' arguments that there is a war between the West and Islam, say two Ottawa-area imams.



Reading the new issue of Charlie Hebdo outside a newsstand in Nice, France, on Jan. 14, 2015. (LIONEL CIRONEAU / AP)

By **SIKANDER HASHMI**, and **AHMED LIMAME**

Wed., Jan. 14, 2015

Last week was a very difficult week. Making sense of bloodshed, violence, fear, hate, pain and suffering is never easy.

Since the [violence in Paris began with an attack on a publication](#), many journalists and media organizations found themselves in a difficult situation. Normally accustomed to shielding much of their work from their feelings, the initial analysis of what was happening demanded emotional attachment from them instead of the emotional detachment they're often accustomed to. An attack on freedom of the press was an attack on journalists and all media organizations.

Showing solidarity with their slain colleagues was the only option. How it was to be manifested is where they differed.

See also: [Star should have published Charlie Hebdo front cover: DiManno](#)

See also: [No Canadians should publish Charlie Hebdo cartoons: Mallick](#)

For some, solidarity meant adopting the style of the attacked publication, Charlie Hebdo. This meant republishing and creating new cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad (upon him be peace) to send a strong message of defiance to the attackers, who appeared to have been motivated by anger over previously published cartoons lampooning the Prophet.

Quebec's French dailies banded together to republish one of Charlie Hebdo's cartoons depicting the Prophet. A statement that ran alongside stated that the cartoon was being published in memory of the Paris attack victims and to demonstrate their support for "the fundamental principle of freedom of expression."

Unfortunately, in the process, they and other media organizations around the world that have responded in a similar manner have unnecessarily inflicted pain upon the millions of Muslims who had absolutely nothing to do with the attack on Charlie Hebdo and who believe it was wrong.

Others chose to express solidarity with their fallen colleagues through words. They did this not by publishing more cartoons of the Prophet but by reaffirming their right to free speech and by expressing opinions in a bolder fashion to prove it.

These journalists and media organizations should be commended for their courage. In such difficult times, when emotions are running high and outrage is deep, it is indeed very difficult to make unpopular decisions.

Most Muslims love God's prophets and in particular Prophet Muhammad dearly, even more so than their own parents or anyone else in the world. Coincidentally, many of these very same people are at the forefront, in their own individual way, in standing up against those who promote radicalization and violent extremism. Republishing the cartoons unfairly targets them and doesn't make their job any easier.

Clearly, there is much to be done within Muslim communities to confront the scourge of radicalization and violent extremism. Being in a just society that promotes tolerance,

understanding and respect certainly helps in this effort because it sends a defiant message against the radicals' hateful rhetoric and diminishes the appeal of their message.

Furthermore, the publishing of more cartoons, especially by mainstream media organizations, sends the message that journalists have agreed with and are validating the argument of the violent extremists that this is all part of a war between Islam and the west, which it really isn't. Rather, it's a struggle between those who desire peace, respect and compassion for everyone versus those who promote hate and like to inflict pain on others.

As Bruce Wayne's butler Alfred Pennyworth, as played by British actor Michael Caine, remarked in the 2008 Batman film *The Dark Knight*, "Some men just want to watch the world burn."

Unfortunately, many journalists have fallen into the extremists' trap. Instead of mocking Prophet Muhammad, had these journalists and media organizations mocked the failed attempt to divide peace-loving people of all faiths (or no faith), they would have sent a much stronger message. Not printing the cartoons, while having the full legal right to do so, shows greater strength and solidarity with millions of people around the world, including many Muslims, that are against all such acts of bloodshed and violence.

David Studer, CBC's director of journalistic standards and practices, got it right when responding to criticism of the public broadcaster's decision not to run the cartoons. "My view is that remaining civilized and sticking to our principles is what defeats bad guys, not giving in to the emotion of the moment," he said.

The media has immense power and with power comes responsibility. Every journalist and media organization should ask themselves: What are we doing to make this terrible situation better? What can we say or do that is constructive and positive, that can unite people and help them overcome fear and hatred? What can we do to promote peace, understanding and foster mutual respect?

Moving forward in this direction, while recognizing and reserving the right to publish whatever they like, will make many more people proud of the contributions of our journalists and will give them the satisfaction of knowing that they are helping build the better world that so many people desire.

Sikander Hashmi serves as imam at the Kanata Muslim Association. ***Ahmed Limame*** is imam at Centre Islamique de l'Outaouais in Gatineau, Que. Both are members of the Council of Imams of Ottawa-Gatineau and can be reached at www.sikander.ca and imam@cio-oic.ca.

Read more about: [Charlie Hebdo](#)