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Charlie Hebdo was Attacked by Islam, Not Islamism

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Photo credit: Yves Tennevin

Charlie Hebdo is a French satirical magazine with a strong record of satirizing many religious figures, and for years Islam's prophet Muhammad has been included among the subjects of the satirical cartoons. For the folks working there, death threats from people claiming to be Muslims were not unusual, and a firebomb destroyed its old offices in November 2011, the day after the magazine had announced that it had selected Muhammad as its editor-in-chief.

On January 7, 2015 two gunmen, brothers Said and Cherif Kouachi, went into the magazine's offices and gunned down eleven people, including a police officer. The gunmen then killed another police officer outside the offices. It seemed that within minutes of the massacre, pundits and members of the media went into overdrive trying to keep Islam out of the picture; we were assured that the "religion of peace" had nothing to do with this. This was in spite of the facts that the two gunmen were Muslims yelling *Allahu Akbar*, and were heard shouting in French, "We have killed Charlie Hebdo. We have avenged the Prophet Mohammad."

The disturbing reality is that Islam had everything to do with it. Satirizing and drawing pictures of Muhammad goes against 33:57 of the Koran, which states that those who "annoy" Muhammad would be cursed by Allah:

Verily, those who annoy Allah and His Messenger, Allah has cursed them in this world and in the Hereafter, and has prepared for them a humiliating torment.

The authoritative Muslim scholar Ibn Kathir explained this verse:

Here, Allah warns and threatens those who annoy Him by going against His commands and doing that which He has forbidden, and who persist in doing so, and those who annoy His Messenger by accusing him of having faults or shortcomings – Allah forbid. 'Ikrimah said that the Ayah [verse]: Verily, those who annoy Allah and His Messenger, was revealed concerning those who make pictures or images [my emphasis]...The Ayah appears to be general in meaning and to apply to all those who annoy him [Muhammad] in any way, because whoever annoys him annoys Allah, just as whoever obeys him obeys Allah.

So the satirical cartoons were not only "annoying" Muhammad, they were also "annoying" Allah. This was sheer blasphemy. What were the two brothers to do?

Said and Cherif apparently looked to the teachings and examples of Muhammad. Muhammad had personally ordered the killing of four specific individuals whose only crime was that they had criticized him and/or Islam ('Asma' Bint Marwan, Abu 'Afak, Ka'b bin Al-Ashraf, and Abu Rafi'). And Muhammad had even given retroactive approval to the separate killings by Muslims of three individuals who had criticized him and/or Islam. That the brothers had learned from Muhammad's example was shown in Cherif's January 9th statement to Igor Sahiri, a journalist for France's BFMTV:

We defend the prophet. If someone offends the prophet then there is no problem, we can kill him.

So the Muslim brothers were simply following the commands of Allah in the Koran, and the teachings and examples of Muhammad when they committed the massacre.

Some have claimed that Islam had nothing to do with the massacre because the gunmen also

killed two Muslims. The first was Moustapha Ourrad, a copy editor for the magazine. However, Ourrad's involvement in satirizing and creating pictures of Muhammad meant that he was going against the commands of Allah and the teachings of Muhammad; Ourrad had therefore left Islam and was an apostate. Islamic doctrine commands that apostates be killed. And this is even assuming the gunmen knew Ourrad was a Muslim, for which there is no evidence. The second Muslim killed by the gunmen was a police officer named Ahmed Merabet. He was executed outside the office building. However, there is no evidence that he had identified himself as a Muslim to the gunmen. So the claim that the gunmen knowingly shot two Muslims is baseless.

The Islamic teachings about being killed as a martyr and being rewarded in paradise for doing so were influential on the two gunmen. On January 9th, after they were surrounded by French security forces, the brothers reportedly said they wanted "to die as martyrs." In fact, a few years earlier, in December 2007, Cherif had stated in a court deposition that

"the wise leaders in Islam told him and his friends that if they die as martyrs in jihad they would go to heaven" and "that martyrs would be greeted by more than 60 virgins in a big palace in heaven."

These "wise leaders in Islam" had it right. Islamic doctrine teaches that the only guaranteed way for a Muslim to get into paradise is to die as a martyr fighting in the cause of Allah (*jihad*); this is based on 9:111 of the Koran:

Verily, Allah has purchased of the believers their lives and their properties for (the price) that theirs shall be Paradise. They fight in Allah's Cause, so they kill (others) and are killed...

But Cherif potentially shortchanged himself in the number of virgins, because Muhammad had promised 72 virgins to the Muslim who died fighting in Allah's Cause:

Al-Miqdam bin Ma'diykarib narrated that the Messenger of Allah said: "There are six things with Allah for the martyr: He is forgiven with the first flow of blood (he suffers), he is shown his place in Paradise, he is protected from punishment in the grave, secured from the greatest terror, the crown of dignity is placed upon his head - and its gems are better than the world and what is in it - he is married to seventy-two wives among Al-Huril-'Ayn of Paradise, and he may intercede for seventy of his close relatives."

The massacre at the *Charlie Hebdo* offices was not committed by *Islamists* following a belief system called *Islamism*; the massacre was carried out by two Muslim brothers who were following the teachings and examples of Muhammad, and the commands of Allah found in the Koran. Islam killed *Charlie Hebdo* and avenged Muhammad.

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