



## Intimidating the West, from Rushdie to Benedict

(Published in *New York Sun*, September 26, 2006)

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Colaboraciones n° 1247

October 3, 2006

The violence by Muslims responding to comments by the pope fit a pattern that has been building and accelerating since 1989. Six times since then, Westerners did or said something that triggered death threats and violence in the Muslim world. Looking at them in the aggregate offers useful insights.

- 1989 - [Salman Rushdie](#)'s novel, *The Satanic Verses* prompted Ayatollah Khomeini to issue a death edict against him and his publishers, on the grounds that the book "is against Islam, the Prophet, and the Koran." Subsequent rioting led to over 20 deaths, mostly in India.
- 1997 - The [U.S. Supreme Court](#) refused to remove a 1930s frieze showing Mu-

hammad as lawgiver that decorates the main court chamber; the [Council on American-Islamic Relations](#) made an issue of this, leading to riots and injuries in India.

- 2002 - The American evangelical leader [Jerry Falwell](#) calls Muhammad a "[terrorist](#)," leading to church burnings and at least 10 deaths in India.
- 2005 - An incorrect story in [Newsweek](#), reporting that American interrogators at Guantánamo Bay, "in an attempt to rattle suspects, flushed a Qur'an down a toilet," is picked up by the famous Pakistani cricketer, [Imran Khan](#), and prompts protests [around the Muslim world](#), leading to at least 15 deaths.

- February 2006 - The Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* publishes twelve cartoons of Muhammad, spurring a Palestinian Arab imam in Copenhagen, [Ahmed Abdel Rahman Abu Laban](#), to excite Muslim opinion against the Danish government. He succeeds so well, hundreds die, mostly in [Nigeria](#).
- September 2006 - [Pope Benedict XVI](#) quotes a Byzantine emperor's views that what is new in Islam is "evil and inhuman," prompting the firebombing of churches and the murder of several Christians.

These six rounds show a near-doubling in frequency: 8 years between the first and second rounds, then 5, then 3, 1, and ½.

The first instance - Ayatollah Khomeini's edict against Mr. Rushdie - came as a complete shock, for no one had hitherto imagined that a Muslim dictator could tell a British citizen living in London what he could not write about. Seventeen years later, calls for the execution of the pope (including one at the [Westminster Cathedral](#) in London) had acquired a too-familiar quality. The outrageous had become routine, almost predictable. As Muslim sensibilities grew more excited, Western ones became more phlegmatic.

Incidents started in Europe (Mr. Rushdie, Danish cartoons, Pope Benedict) have grown much larger than those based in the United States (Supreme Court, Rev. Falwell, Koran flushing), reflecting the greater

efficacy of Islamist aggression against Europeans than against Americans.

Islamists ignore subtleties. Mr. Rushdie's magical realism, the positive intent of the Supreme Court frieze, the falsehood of the Koran-flushing story (ever tried putting a book down the toilet?), the benign nature of the Danish cartoons, or the subtleties of Benedict's speech - none of these mattered.

What rouses Muslim crowds and what does not is somewhat unpredictable. *The Satanic Verses* was not nearly as offensive to Muslim sensibilities as a host of [other writings, medieval, modern, and contemporary](#). Other American Evangelists said worse things about Muhammad than Rev. Falwell did; the southern preacher [Jerry Vines](#) called the Muslim prophet "a demon-possessed pedophile who had 12 wives," without violence ensuing. Why did Norwegian preacher [Runar Søgård](#)'s deeming Muhammad "a confused pedophile" remain a local dispute while the Danish cartoons went global?

One answer is that Islamists with an international reach (Ayatollah Khomeini, CAIR, Mr. Khan, Abu Laban) usually play a key role in transforming a general sense of displeasure into an operational fury. If no Islamist agitates, the issue stays relatively quiet.

The extent of the violence is even more unpredictable - one could not anticipate the cartoons causing the most fatalities and the pope's quote

the fewest. And why so much violence in India?

These incidents also spotlight a total lack of reciprocity by Muslims. The [Saudi government](#) bans Bibles, crosses, and Stars of David, while Muslims routinely publish [disgusting cartoons of Jews](#).

No conspiracy lies behind these six rounds of inflammation and aggres-

sion, but examined in retrospect, they coalesce and form a single, prolonged campaign of intimidation, with surely more to come. The basic message - "You Westerners no longer have the privilege to say what you will about Islam, the Prophet, and the Qur'an, Islamic law rules you too" - will return again and again until Westerners either do submit or Muslims realize their effort has failed.