



Banned in Pakistan

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The government of Pakistan has banned my book [The Truth About Muhammad](#), confiscating all copies and translations. Why? Because it [contains "objectionable material"](#) about Muhammad, the prophet of Islam. [Said Shahid Ahmed](#), counselor of community affairs at the Pakistani Embassy in Washington: "The book is very, very damaging – let me tell you."

Objectionable material? Damaging? I confess it: they're right. There is plenty of objectionable material in this book. Here's a small sampling:

1. *The Truth About Muhammad* details the triple choice that Muhammad directed his followers to offer to non-Muslims: conversion to Islam, subjugation without equality of rights with Muslims under the rule of Islamic law, or war. Did I fabri-

cate this? No, it can be found in, among many other places, *Sahih Muslim*, a collection of hadith – traditions of Muhammad and the early Muslims – that Muslims generally consider reliable. In it, Muhammad says:

Fight in the name of Allah and in the way of Allah. Fight against those who disbelieve in Allah...When you meet your enemies who are polytheists, invite them to three courses of action. If they respond to any one of these, you also accept it and withhold yourself from doing them any harm. Invite them to (accept) Islam; if they respond to you, accept it from them and desist from fighting against them...If they refuse to accept Islam, demand from them the Jizya [a special tax levied on non-Muslims]. If they agree to pay, accept it from them and hold off your hands. If

they refuse to pay the tax, seek Allah's help and fight them. ([Sahih Muslim 4294](#))

Is *Sahih Muslim* banned in Pakistan?
Of course not.

2. In the book, I discuss how Muhammad's earlier biographer, Ibn Ishaq, explains the contexts of various verses of the Qur'an by saying that Muhammad received revelations about warfare in three stages: first, tolerance; then, defensive warfare; and finally, offensive warfare in order to convert the unbelievers to Islam or make them pay the jizya (see Qur'an 9:29). Qur'anic commentaries (*tafasir*) by Ibn Kathir, Ibn Juzayy, As-Suyuti and others also emphasize that the ninth chapter of the Qur'an, in which this call to offensive warfare appears, abrogates every peace treaty in the Qur'an.

I didn't just dig into old books to find this. In the modern age, this idea of stages of development in the Qur'an's teaching on jihad, culminating in offensive warfare to establish the hegemony of Islamic law, has been affirmed by the jihadist theorists Sayyid Qutb and Syed Abul Ala Maududi, as well as the Pakistani Brigadier S. K. Malik (author of *The Qur'anic Concept of War*), Saudi Chief Justice Sheikh Abdullah bin Muhammad bin Humaid (in his "[Jihad in the Qur'an and Sunnah](#)"), and others. It is, of course, an assertion of no little concern to non-Muslims, since it encapsulates a doctrine of warfare against non-Muslims and their ultimate subjugation under Sharia rules, with all that implies, and is being used by ji-

hadists today in the Islamic world to justify their actions and make new recruits.

Are the works of Ibn Kathir, Ibn Juzayy, As-Suyuti, Qutb, Maududi, Malik or Humaid banned in Pakistan? Of course not.

3. Also in *The Truth About Muhammad* I discuss Muhammad's marriage to little Aisha, which is specifically addressed in the hadith collection *Sahih Bukhari* (generally considered by Muslims to be the most reliable such collection). According to several traditions recorded by Bukhari, "the Prophet wrote the (marriage contract) with 'Aisha while she was six years old and consummated his marriage with her while she was nine years old and she remained with him for nine years (i.e. till his death)" (Bukhari [7.62.88](#); see also [7.62.65](#); [7.62.64](#); [5.58.236](#); [5.58.234](#)).

It is quite obvious that many Muslims take very seriously and act upon the material on which I depended to write the book. Imitating the Prophet of Islam, many Muslims even in modern times have taken child brides. In some places this even has the blessing of the law: article 1041 of the Civil Code of the Islamic Republic of Iran states that girls can be engaged before the age of nine, and married at nine: "Marriage before puberty (nine full lunar years for girls) is prohibited. Marriage contracted before reaching puberty with the permission of the guardian is valid provided that the interests of the ward are duly observed." [i]

The Ayatollah Khomeini himself married a ten-year-old girl when he was twenty-eight.^[ii] Khomeini called marriage to a prepubescent girl “a divine blessing,” and advised the faithful: “Do your best to ensure that your daughters do not see their first blood in your house.”^[iii]

Time magazine reported in 2001:

In Iran the legal age for marriage is nine for girls, fourteen for boys. The law has occasionally been exploited by pedophiles, who marry poor young girls from the provinces, use and then abandon them. In 2000 the Iranian Parliament voted to raise the minimum age for girls to fourteen, but this year, a legislative oversight body dominated by traditional clerics vetoed the move. An attempt by conservatives to abolish Yemen’s legal minimum age of fifteen for girls failed, but local experts say it is rarely enforced anyway. (The onset of puberty is considered an appropriate time for a marriage to be consummated.)^[iv]

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) reports that over half of the girls in Afghanistan and Bangladesh are married before they reach the age of eighteen.^[v] In early 2002, researchers in refugee camps in Afghanistan and Pakistan found half the girls married by age thirteen. In an Afghan refugee camp, more than two out of three second-grade girls were either married or engaged, and virtually all the girls who were beyond second grade were already married. One ten-year-old was engaged to a man of sixty.^[vi]

This is the price that women have paid throughout Islamic history, and continue to pay, for Muhammad’s status as “an excellent example of conduct” (Qur’an 33:21).

Of course, in this as with the other instances I have adduced, other Islamic authorities differ. Some claim that in repeating the traditions from Bukhari, I am perpetuating misunderstandings – despite the manifest fact that these “misunderstandings” are quite widespread in the Islamic world. If they are indeed misunderstandings, the problem lies with *Sahih Bukhari*, which is very ancient and essentially canonical, not with my book, which has been available for less than three months and will be forgotten before too long.

But is *Sahih Bukhari* banned in Pakistan? Of course not.

4. Finally, in my book I explain why it is today virtually impossible to prove rape in lands that follow the dictates of the Sharia. False adultery accusations against Aisha led ultimately to the requirement that four male Muslim witnesses must be produced in order to establish a crime of adultery or related indiscretions. In cases of sexual misbehavior, four male witnesses are required to establish the deed – in accord with a revelation that came to Muhammad to exonerate his youthful wife (Qur’an 24:13).^[vii] This requirement allows unscrupulous men to commit rape with impunity: as long as they deny the charge and there are no witnesses, they get off scot-free, because the victim’s account is inadmissible. Even worse, if

a woman accuses a man of rape, she may end up incriminating herself. If the required male witnesses can't be found, the victim's charge of rape becomes an admission of adultery.

That accounts for the grim fact that as many as seventy-five percent of the women in prison in Pakistan are, in fact, behind bars for the crime of being a victim of rape.^[viii] Several high-profile cases in Nigeria in recent years have also revolved around rape accusations being turned around by Islamic authorities into charges of fornication, resulting in death sentences that were only modified after international pressure.^[ix]

Because they're rooted in Qur'anic dictates, such abuses are extraordinarily resistant to criticism and reform. Witness the recent situation in Pakistan, the same country where my book has just been banned. The new Women's Protection Act has reclassified the crime of rape so that it can be prosecuted according to modern standards of evidence and testimony, without relying on the four male witnesses required by the Qur'an. But [Muslim hardliners have staged protests](#) against the new law, calling it "[un-Islamic, immoral and unconstitutional](#)." And they have a

case, based on Qur'an 24:13 and the story of Aisha's exoneration.

This is just one indication that what I wrote in *The Truth About Muhammad* about Muhammad is generally what Muslims believe about Muhammad – even in Pakistan. Since I based the book entirely on Islamic sources, the objection that Pakistani authorities have to it cannot reasonably be based on what I report about Muhammad, but only on the fact that I hold him to a moral standard different from the one he delineated for himself, and do not consider him to be an "excellent example of conduct." But in a society that is not pathologically insecure, this ought to be not an occasion for banning and confiscation, but for free and open debate. After all, the reform of Islam that is so needed today – in order to mitigate the elements of it that are giving rise to violence and extremism -- cannot possibly begin without acknowledgment of the fact that there are aspects of Islam that need reform. But the banning of *The Truth About Muhammad* in Pakistan is yet another indication that such reform, despite the immense hopes placed upon it by so many in the West, is not on the horizon.

Robert Spencer is a scholar of Islamic history, theology, and law and the director of [Jihad Watch](#). He is the author of five books, seven monographs, and hundreds of articles about jihad and Islamic terrorism, including [Islam Unveiled: Disturbing Questions About the World's Fastest Growing Faith](#) and [The Politically Incorrect Guide to Islam \(and the Crusades\)](#). He is also an Adjunct Fellow with the Free Congress Foundation.

Notes:

[i] Sarvnaz Chitsaz and Soona Samsami, "Iranian Women and Girls: Victims of Exploitation and Violence," in *Making the Harm Visible: Global Sexual Exploitation of Women and Girls*, Donna M. Hughes and Claire M. Roche, editors, The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, 1999. <http://www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/hughes/mhviran.htm>.

[ii] Amir Taheri, *The Spirit of Allah: Khomeini and the Islamic Revolution*, Adler and Adler, 1986, 90-91.

[iii] Taheri, 35.

[iv] Lisa Beyer, "The Women of Islam," *Time*, November 25, 2001. Reprinted at <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,185647,00.html>.

[v] "Child marriage 'violates rights,'" BBC News, March 7, 2001.

[vi] Andrew Bushell, "Child Marriage in Afghanistan and Pakistan," *America*, March 11, 2002, p. 12.

[vii] See also Bukhari, vol. 3, book 52, no. 2661.

[viii] See Sisters in Islam, "Rape, Zina, and Incest," April 6, 2000, <http://www.muslimtents.com/sistersinislam/resources/sdefini.htm>.

[ix] See Stephen Faris, "In Nigeria, A Mother Faces Execution," www.africana.com, January 7, 2002.