

Ayatollah Condemns Video But Iranian Protests Stay Calm

By: **Seyed Hossein Mousavian** Posted on **September 25**.

Compared to Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Pakistan, demonstrations in Iran in the wake of dissemination of an offensive video about the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) were relatively small affairs.

About This Article

Summary :

Compared to many elsewhere in the Middle East, Iranian demonstrations against the infamous anti-Islam video were as small and peaceful as the government's reaction was harsh. Seyed Hossein Mousavian writes that Washington should prioritize its image in the Islamic world and prohibit the defamation of religious beliefs.

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The Iranian government organized some of the demonstrations, such as the one outside the Swiss embassy in Tehran (Switzerland represents the US in Iran). The protest recalled similar events outside the Danish embassy in 2005 after the publication of offensive cartoons in a Danish newspaper.

Other protests included ordinary Iranians, students and academics who condemned the movie as not only blasphemous but aimed at deepening divisions between Muslims and Christians. No one was killed or injured and there was no damage to diplomatic property. Only a few hundred or, at maximum, a few thousand people took part in each demonstration.

The situation was quite different in other Muslim countries, where local populations showed extreme rage that was not always reflected by official statements. In Iran, in contrast, the government reaction was harsh.

In an official statement, the Iranian Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, [condemned the policies](#) of the US as the root cause of the production of the film.

“Behind this evil movie lie the antagonistic policies of the Zionists and the US and other heads of global arrogance, who in their vain delusions want to knock down the Islamic sanctities from their lofty position in the eyes of the young generations in the world of Islam and to extinguish their religious sentiments,” [Khamenei said](#). “If US politicians are honest in their claim of not being involved [in the production of this film], [they] must bring the perpetrators of this hideous crime and their financial backers, who have wrenched the hearts of Muslim nations, to face a punishment proportionate to this great crime.”

The discrepancy between the official and popular expression in Iran reflects in part the strained relations between the US and the Iranian governments. Arab and other Muslim countries are either closely allied with the West or have cordial relations they want to maintain, while the US and Iran appear to be on a collision course over demands that Iran curb its nuclear program.

Curiously, Iranian restraint was mirrored in Lebanon, where the pro-Iran Lebanese Hezbollah, listed by the US as a terror group, arranged one of the largest peaceful demonstrations in Beirut in response to the

blasphemous movie. Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah called for a [ban on defamation](#) of prophets and for anger not to be directed at Christians.

Fortunately there was no violence in Iran directed at diplomats and Westerners. One reason for the peaceful nature of the protests is the recent position Khamenei took following the attack last year on the British embassy in Tehran. While the incident — which included extensive damage to British property and followed Britain's decision to place sanctions on Iran's Central Bank — appeared to have official involvement, Khamenei [reprimanded those who took part](#) afterward. Close sources have informed me that in a private meeting, the Supreme Leader expressed extreme dismay at officials' failure to protect the British embassy. Britain severed diplomatic relations with Iran in the aftermath of the attack.

Another reason for the discrepancy in reactions to the blasphemous movie is that the primary dilemma facing Iran and Hezbollah at the current time is preparation for a broader confrontation with Israel that could ignite a regional war and drag in the United States. The chief of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, Gen. Mohammad Ali Jafari, [said recently](#) in reaction to Israeli threats to strike Iran that this would "only prove their [Israeli] enmity with Islam and the revolution is serious, and eventually this enmity will lead to physical conflict."

Despite the relative restraint in Iran and Lebanon, the US should be concerned about rising anti-American sentiment in the Muslim world. For decades, public-opinion polls in the Muslim world have shown that the US and Israel are seen as the [greatest threats](#) to peace and security. One does not have to look too deeply to see the reasons: The US has conducted overt and covert military, intelligence and espionage activities in multiple Muslim countries over the years and supported dictators ranging from the Shah of Iran (1953–1979) to Hosni Mubarak of Egypt (1981–2011) and Zine El Abidine Ben Ali of Tunisia (1987–2011). The US has also provided unabated support for Israel against oppressed Palestinians.

It is against this backdrop that the frequent Islamophobic assertions by some Americans — the insults and biased notions directed toward Muslim culture, symbols, holy texts and important figures — ignite such emotional upheaval in so many Muslim countries.

These sentiments will not disappear so long as the US does not acknowledge that there are deep-rooted scars in the hearts and minds of the Muslim world. It is thus unfortunate that US Ambassador to the United Nations [Susan Rice](#), in response to the anti-Islam film protests stated, "This is not an expression of hostility in the broadest sense toward the United States or US policy."

As a Muslim who studied in the US, I believe that Washington should recognize the reality of the US image in the Islamic world — an image of an aggressive and repressive superpower that tramples Muslim values and interests.

Muslim public opinion toward the US received a boost with the election of President Barack Obama; however, due to a mix of actions and inaction, the popularity of the US is, according to some [opinion polls](#), lower than when George W. Bush left office.

According to Islamic values, all prophets, including Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad (peace be upon them all) are messengers of God and require respect. In the Koran, for example, one finds the name of Moses appearing 136 times, Jesus 59 times, Mary 34 times and Muhammad five times. The level of respect bestowed on the prophets of God has ensured that no devout Muslim would ever insult Jesus or Moses.

In many Western countries, restrictions exist on hate speech and offending symbols, such as Nazi-related material and the denial of the Holocaust. Progressive legislation is also in place for the protection of gays and

transgender individuals — while no legal consequences exist for insulting the beliefs of one and a half billion Muslims.

The trend of anti-Islamic propaganda emanating from the West is a life giver to extremists and terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda and Salafist movements. Such material also alienates more moderate forces within the Islamic world. A worrying sign came in Tunisia, where protestors [chanted](#), "Obama, Obama, we are all Osamas," in a reference to the late al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden.

To secure US national security and reverse the negative image of the US in the Muslim world, the US Congress should enact legislation to prohibit defamation of religious values and beliefs and the perpetrators of such acts should be brought to justice and face appropriate punishment.

In the United States, you are not permitted to keep a rooster in your backyard because the noise may disturb the peace. Defamation of religious values and beliefs is far more offensive than the crow of a rooster.

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