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VIOLENCE AGAINST PERCEIVED BLASPHEMERS IN THE WEST: From Khomeini's Fatwa to the Present

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Violence Against Perceived Blasphemers in the West: From Khomeini's Fatwa to the Present

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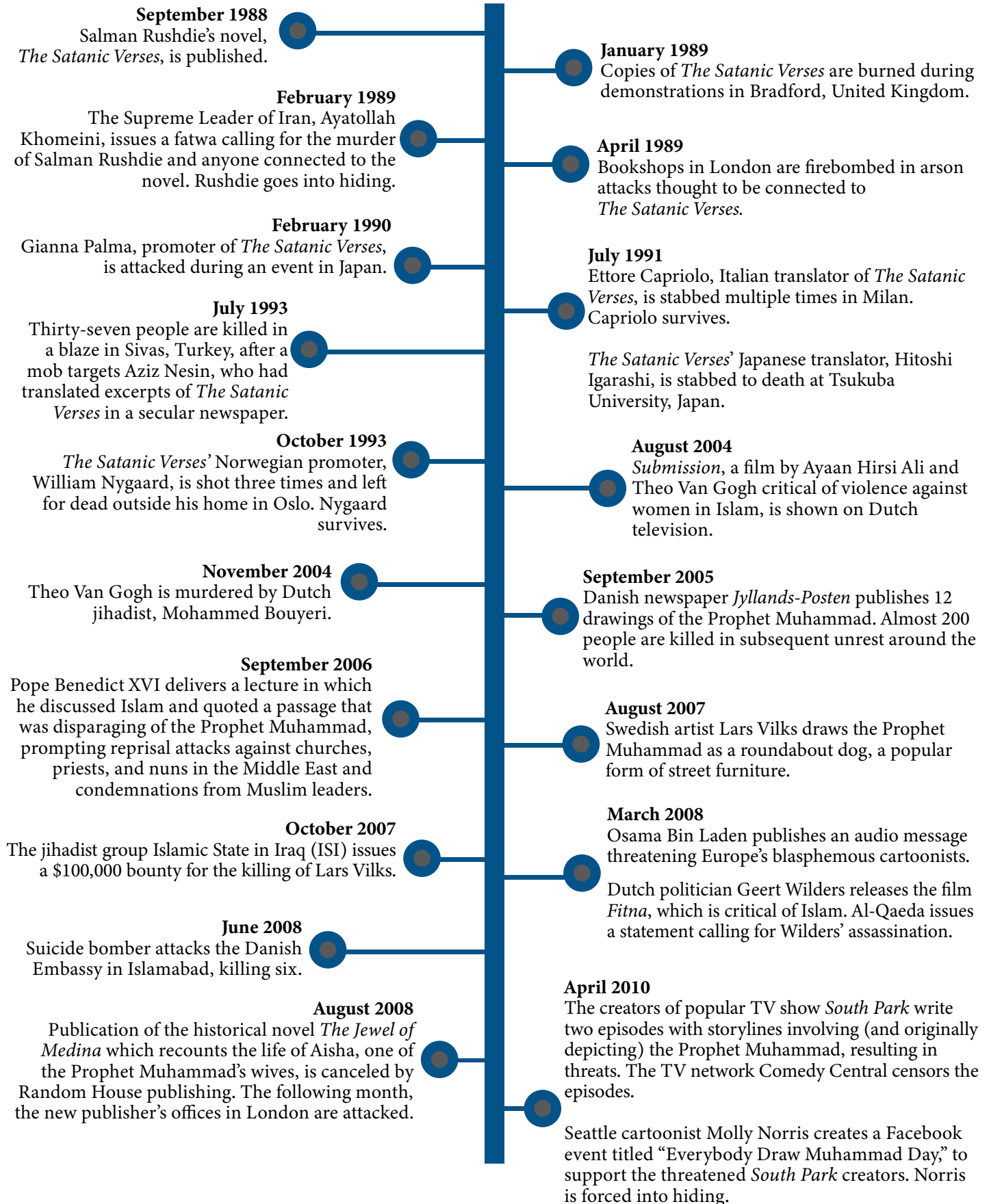
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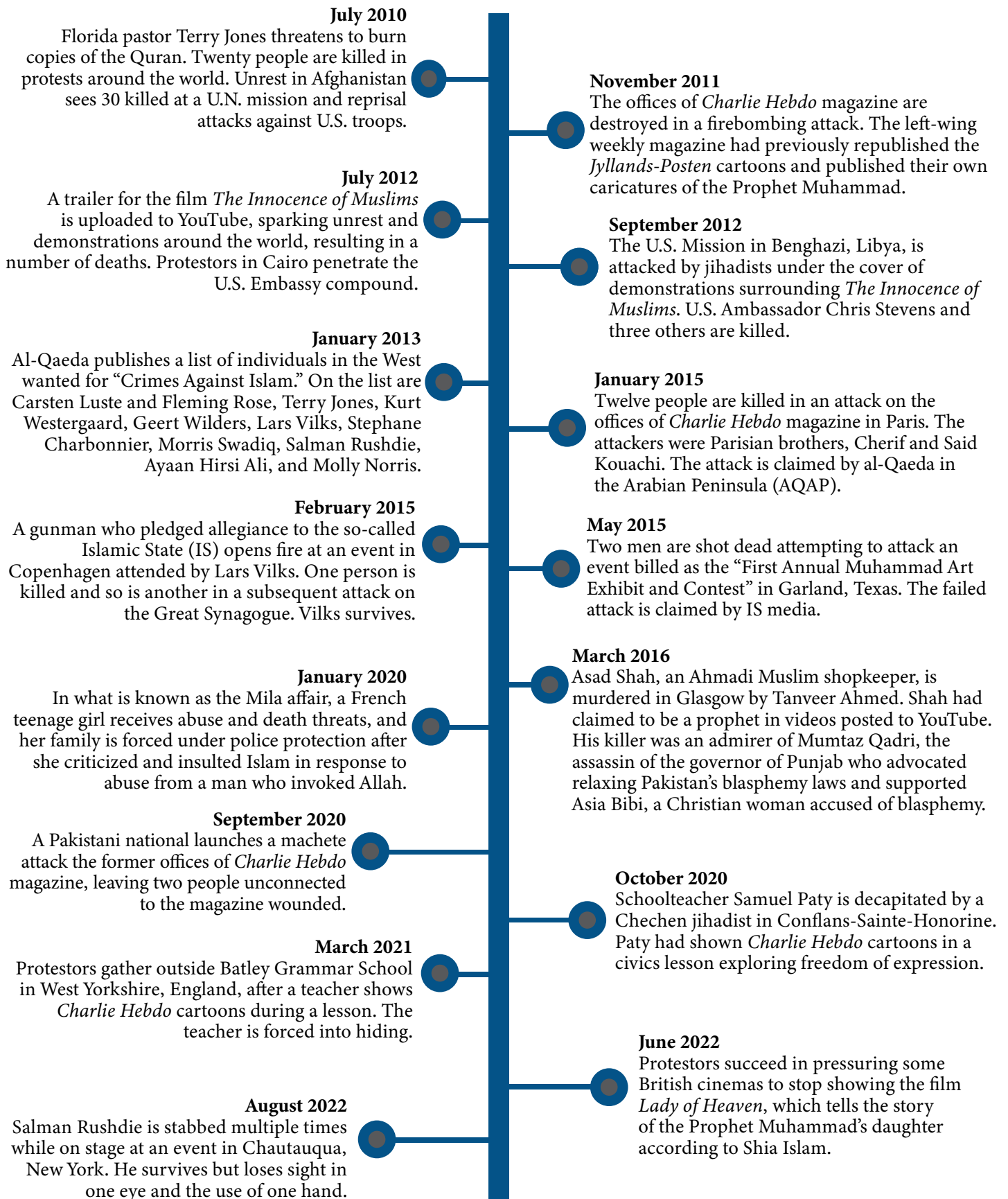
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A Timeline of Major Blasphemy Events





Violence Against Perceived Blasphemers in the West: From Khomeini's Fatwa to the Present

Introduction

Salman Rushdie finally sensed that normality was returning to his life, some 33 years after Ayatollah Khomeini's four paragraph fatwa called for his murder. "Nowadays my life is very normal again," he told German magazine *Stern* in an interview over the summer of 2022.¹

Just two weeks later, he was knifed multiple times on stage in Chautauqua, New York. Having evaded the fatwa's enforcers for so long, one had finally penetrated the layer of secrecy and security which had followed Rushdie for his own protection all those years. Rushdie survived, but has lost sight in one eye and the use of one of his hands.²

The story which led to this point is by now well known. On Valentine's Day 1989, Ayatollah Khomeini, the Supreme Leader of Iran, called for the British-Indian author's death in a *fatwa*, offering financial and spiritual reward to any Muslim willing to carry out the murder. The assassination order also extended to anyone connected to the publication and promotion of Rushdie's novel, *The Satanic Verses*.

There are various elements to the novel that were perceived to be insulting to Islam and the Prophet Muhammad. These will not be detailed at length here, save to say that the novel's title refers to verses in the Quran which were relayed to Muhammad as the word of God, but later revealed to be a deceptive ploy by the devil. In English, these verses were sometimes referred to as the Satanic verses. The novel itself recounts and reimagines episodes in the life of Muhammad.

Although the novel's publication was met with protest in various parts of the world (including the United Kingdom), it was Khomeini's *fatwa* that ignited the affair into a global controversy. It transformed not only Rushdie's life but the relationship between the West and the Muslim world, as well as between Western states and their growing Muslim populations.

As Kenan Malik put it in *From Fatwa to Jihad*: "With his four-paragraph pronouncement, the ayatollah had transcended the traditional frontiers of Islam and brought the whole world under his jurisdiction. At the same time, he helped relocate the confrontation between Islam and the West, which until then had been played out largely in the Middle East and south Asia, into the heart of western Europe. For the West, Islam was now a domestic issue."³

This is not to mention the impact on the individuals concerned. There were attempts on the lives of publishers, promoters, and translators in Japan, Italy, Turkey, and Norway. The first assassin to successfully complete his task murdered Hitoshi Igarashi, Japanese translator of *The Satanic Verses*, in a frenzied attack outside of his office at Tsukuba University in 1991. Like so many of these incidents, the perpetrator was able to slip away and never face justice.

The most tragic episode of the affair would unfold in Anatolia, Turkey, where a riled-up crowd would set the Madimak Hotel ablaze, targeting a secularist activist who had translated excerpts of *The Satanic Verses* in a newspaper. Their target, Aziz Nesin, would escape the inferno but 37 people would not.

Owing to the fatwa, Rushdie spent much of his life in hiding, always on the move, with his public appearances tightly controlled. But just as the fatwa was fading from memory, it remained every bit as valid—and lethal—as the day it was pronounced. As *The Atlantic's* Graeme Wood explains, "fatwas cannot be rescinded posthumously," and so the bounty still "hung in the air like a putrid smell, inhaled deeply for inspiration by devout followers of

1 Ed Pilkington and Philip Oltermann, "Salman Rushdie had started to believe his 'life was normal again,'" *The Observer*, August 13, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2022/aug/13/salman-rushdie-had-started-to-believe-his-life-was-normal-again#:~:text=The%20Iranians%20had%20send%20the,I%20no%20longer%20say%20that>.

2 "Salman Rushdie lives, but reportedly loses use of eye and hand," *Politico*, October 23, 2022, <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/10/23/salman-rushdie-eye-hand-attack-00063063>.

3 Kenan Malik, *From Fatwa to Jihad: The Satanic Verses to Charlie Hebdo* (London: Atlantic Books) p. 19.

Khomeini and his successors.”⁴

The fatwa also helped set the precedent for later blasphemy affairs and controversies. To Hassan Nasrallah, the secretary-general of Hezbollah, there was little doubt that later blasphemy affairs were connected. During the fallout from the 2005 *Jyllands-Posten* cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, he complained that “if any Muslim had carried out the fatwa of Imam Khomeini against the apostate Salman Rushdie, those despicable people would not have dared to insult the Prophet Muhammad.”⁵ The logic of the fatwa, and of the violence was not only punishment, but deterrence.

The fatwa would also cross the sectarian divide in Islam. Part of its logic was for the Shia regime in Tehran to assert itself over their Sunni rivals in Saudi Arabia for *de facto* leadership of global Islam. This did not stop the Shia regime’s power play from energizing Sunni Islamist movements the world over, including the indirect empowerment of legal, non-violent Islamist groups in the West. As Western governments scrambled for interlocutors with the suddenly vocal “Muslim community,” offshoots of organizations like the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood or Jamaat-e-Islami were happy to fill that hole. As will be returned to later in the discussion, on blasphemy too, one sees the ideological distance between jihadists and other Islamist movements reduce.

After the initial round of violence connected to *The Satanic Verses*, much of which bears the fingerprints of the regime in Tehran and its proxies, the Sunni jihadists of al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (IS) would later lead the bloodshed against blasphemers. Islamists of all stripes and from across the spectrum of non-violence to violent jihadists would, at various times, jostle to take the initiative on blasphemy disputes and position themselves as the true defenders of Islam. On some occasions and for political expediency, they would take the backseat in blasphemy affairs, waiting for the right moment to capitalize. This demonstrates that for all their professed zeal and the alleged offence taken, strategic thinking can in some cases take precedence, even when it comes to insulting Islam.

Allegations of insulting Islam and the Prophet Muhammad have often carried dire and bloody consequences globally. The *Jyllands-Posten* cartoons affair, for instance, sparked rioting and unrest around the world in which hundreds died. Other events have reverberated similarly, such as the demonstrations, violence, and internet blackouts which greeted the uploading of a trailer for the film *The Innocence of Muslims* to YouTube.

This report will focus on the bloody consequences of those allegations and accusations against individuals and institutions in the West, detailing both the plots and the successful attacks directed against those perceived to have insulted Islam and the Prophet. Also included are those plots where blasphemy has been cited as the motivation, but their target is not the alleged transgressor.

In the accompanying data, it is entirely possible (indeed likely) that some plots have been missed, although efforts were made to include as many as possible. There are also plots disrupted in Western countries on which details were never released to the public or for which charges were never pressed against the plotters.

Although the analysis presented here focuses on violence in Western countries, the inferno in Anatolia, Turkey and two separate incidents of violence in Japan connected to the Khomeini fatwa are included, because they are essential to understanding the initial wave of targeted violence that followed *The Satanic Verses* affair.

In contrast, the data does not include the several incidences where diplomatic or commercial outposts of Western states and businesses were attacked during a blasphemy controversy, such as the bombing of the Danish Embassy in Islamabad in 2006. Finally, there have been countless blasphemy affairs and killings in Muslim majority or ‘non-Western’ countries. These are beyond the scope of this discussion.

Why There is Violence Against Perceived Blasphemers

First, it is necessary to understand why instances of perceived blasphemy have prompted such visceral—and often violent—reactions. From the blaze in Anatolia to the global unrest which followed the *Jyllands-Posten* affair

4 Graeme Wood, “Salman Rushdie and the Cult of Offense,” *The Atlantic*, August 14, 2022, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/08/salman-rushdie-fatwa-attack/671139/>.

5 “Hizbullah Leader Nasrallah: Implementing Khomeini’s Fatwa against Salman Rushdie Would Have Prevented Current Insults to Prophet Muhammad; Great French Philosopher Garaudy Proved Holocaust a Myth,” *MEMRI*, February 7, 2006, <https://www.memri.org/reports/hizbullah-leader-nasrallah-implementing-khomeinis-fatwa-against-salman-rushdie-would-have>.

and beyond. This discussion will mostly avoid getting into the detail of the theological, as it is being written from a secular non-Muslim perspective. The term ‘blasphemy’ is used here to refer loosely to various offences in Islam for which there are separate terms, but can be broadly considered as mocking or insulting Islam, God, or the Prophet Muhammad.

So many of the blasphemy affairs in the West have centred around images, particularly cartoons and caricatures of Muhammad that are sometimes mocking and derisive. Often these affairs have occurred where the iconoclastic traditions of European cartoon-making, habitually targeting figures of religious and political authority, has collided with the deeply held religious convictions of growing Muslim populations in the continent. However, as this paper will detail, the actual instances of organized violence connected to the affairs that came after *The Satanic Verses* controversy have largely been perpetrated by followers of jihadist terror groups like al-Qaeda or the Islamic State, rather than spontaneous anger by the devout.

Beyond Europe, these cartoons which would have previously enjoyed a limited and culturally specific audience can be instantly transmitted around the world to millions by satellite television and later, via social media. In some cases, such as the fallout from the 2005 *Jyllands-Posten* cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, some of the offending cartoons transmitted around the world were fakes intended to inflame that were never actually published by the Danish newspaper. These very same communication channels could also be used by ideologues to drum up anger, by demonstrators to coordinate mass rallies, and even by terrorists to call for or plot retribution against the perceived provocations.

There is no outright prohibition on depicting the Prophet in the Quran, but certain verses are interpreted in this way, such as chapter 42, verse 11, which states that there is “nothing like a likeness” of God. This is interpreted by some to apply to his Messenger on earth. However, in Shia Islamic traditions there is an extensive history of depictions of the Prophet Muhammad, particularly in Persian art.

In the *hadiths*, the reported sayings and deeds of the Prophet, there is more to go on, such as the execution of poets for their perceived insults against Allah and the Prophet. As another brief example, the words of one of the Prophet’s companions, Ibn Abbas, are cited in legal rulings in jurisdictions around the world where blasphemy laws exist.

These hadiths served the foundation for the writings of the highly influential 12th century scholar, Ibn Taymiyyah, an integral figure to the modern-day Salafist movement. Ibn Taymiyyah is influential in both Salafi activist and quietist circles, but his appeal certainly transcends Salafist interpretations of Islam.

In *The Unsheathed Sword Against the One Who Insults the Messenger*, Ibn Taymiyyah’s verdict is unequivocal: “Whoever insults the Prophet is to be killed whether they are Muslim or Disbeliever.” This is something of a departure from previous interpretations, which had stated that Dhimmis (Jews or Christians living in Muslim territory) were not subject to the same blasphemy laws as believers—namely because their punishment for disbelief (the more serious crime) will arrive on the final day of judgement. Centuries later, Ibn Taymiyyah’s work was directly invoked by al-Qaeda’s leading propagandist, Anwar al-Awlaki, in his highly significant “The Dust Will Never Settle Down” lecture.

“If We Accept This, We May Get What Happened at Srebrenica”

Scholarly justifications aside, jihadist rhetoric has almost always couched insults against Islam, God, and his Prophet as tantamount to (if not much more severe than) real world violence against Muslim human beings. Addressing “the intelligent ones in Europe” on the matter of cartoons, Osama bin Laden himself made priorities clear: “Although our tragedy when you killed our women and children was very great, it paled when you passed all bounds in your unbelief and freed yourselves of the etiquettes of dispute and fighting, and went so far as to publish these insulting drawings. This is the greater and more serious tragedy, and the reckoning for it will be more severe.”⁶ Indeed, on another occasion, the very first issue of al-Qaeda’s official *Inspire* magazine stated that for any Muslim to kill one of the cartoonists who had mocked the Prophet Muhammad would be an even “greater cause than fighting for Palestine, Afghanistan or Iraq.”⁷

6 Transcript of Bin Laden’s audio recording quoted in: Nathan Lean, Jalil Roshandel (ed.), *The Moral Psychology of Terrorism: Implications for Security*, p.222.

7 *Inspire* Issue 1 (2010) pp.17, 28.

The leaders of al-Muhajiroun (ALM), Britain's most notorious radical Islamist group, adopted a similar tack. When *The Jewel of Medina*, a work of fiction on the life of the Prophet's wife Aisha, was published in 2008, the group led by Omar Bakri Muhammad and Anjem Choudary labeled the book "blasphemous," and said that it represented "yet another chapter in the continuing war against Islam and Muslims that reveals the burning hatred harboured in the hearts of the disbelievers."⁸ To ALM, the act of blasphemy was to be understood alongside an extensive list of present day grievances including the Iraq war, Guantanamo Bay, Palestine, and Kashmir, among others.

ALM, at the time were largely observant of a *covenant of security* with their host nation, but like other extremist milieus in continental Europe, acts of blasphemy were deemed sufficiently egregious to warrant acts of violence against the alleged perpetrator, or even later, to do away with the covenant altogether, as they were perceived as an act of aggression and warfare against Muslims.⁹

This rhetoric enjoys appeal beyond the Salafi-jihadists. For example, the Hamas-supporting Islamist preacher who transformed the accusations against schoolteacher Samuel Paty from a localized affair into a considerably greater controversy warned on social media that unless the showing of *Charlie Hebdo* cartoons was stopped, then French Muslims would meet the same fate as their co-religionists at Srebrenica—the genocidal massacre of Muslims at the hands of Serbian forces.¹⁰ Latching onto this online furore, a young jihadist took matters into his own hands and decapitated the schoolteacher in broad daylight.

Less than one year later, a U.K. registered charity similarly invoked the spectre of genocide in response to another schoolteacher's use of allegedly blasphemous cartoons in lessons. The organization, based locally to the school in question, published a letter on its website and social media openly naming the teacher mere months after the beheading of Paty. The letter also invoked the genocide of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar: "Currently we are working around the clock helping the Rohingya Muslims who have suffered again greatly with a mass fire, who initially suffered (murdered, raped, burnt alive) for purely being Muslim and this will only increase if we allow this kind of behaviour."¹¹

These examples demonstrate that the ongoing reverberations from various cartoon affairs are interpreted in some quarters as part of a deliberate campaign to humiliate and oppress Muslims—a campaign that ends with genocide and extermination unless Muslims resist. There is a risk that such a framing could inspire violence. To quote Kenan Malik: "once you start imagining that your neighbours are really SS guards in waiting, then it is but a small step to imagine that blowing them up on a bus might be a virtuous act."¹²

This interpretation of demeaning caricatures as intended to humiliate and oppress has even garnered sympathy among sections of the commentariat in some Western countries. However, this position overlooks both the rich history political cartoons in Europe as well as the anti-clerical traditions, which are the product of hard-fought freedoms from religious tyranny only recently secured. This is most evident in France, where *Charlie Hebdo* magazine sits firmly within the anti-clerical, religiously sceptical traditions of the French left in a way that evades understanding in the anglophone West, where *Charlie's* irreverence for religion has been interpreted as bigoted (when not targeting the church).

Some accused *Charlie Hebdo* of "punching down," of needlessly antagonizing an already embattled Muslim minority. But it was not random, angered members of French Muslim communities who took aim at *Charlie Hebdo*. Rather, it was a pair of al-Qaeda trained, committed adherents to Salafi-jihadist ideology wielding Kalashnikovs. As Ross Douthat wrote in the *New York Times*, "while power flows from pre-existing privilege, it

8 "The Jewel of Medina," *Islam4UK* (2008, Archived), <https://web.archive.org/web/20081208084107/http://www.islam4uk.com/current-affairs/world-news/45-world/198-the-jewel-of-medina>.

9 John Bingham, "Radical Islamic clerics warn of further attacks after publisher is firebombed," *The Telegraph*, September 28, 2008, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/3097350/Radical-Islamic-clerics-warn-of-further-attacks-after-publisher-is-fire-bombed.html>.

10 Étienne Girard, Paul Conge, "Frère musulman, pro-Hamas, Sefrioui, le prédicateur à l'origine de la fronde contre l'enseignant décapité," *Marianne*, October 17, 2020, <https://www.marianne.net/societe/laicite-et-religions/frere-musulman-pro-hamas-portrait-de-sefrioui-le-predicateur-a-lorigine-de-la-fronde-contre-lenseignant-decapite>.

11 "Campaign Groups and Muslim Organisations Respond to Events at Batley Grammar School," *Policy Exchange*, April 1, 2021, <https://policyexchange.org.uk/blogs/campaign-groups-and-muslim-organisations-respond-to-events-at-batley-grammar-school/>.

12 Malik, *From Fatwa to Jihad*, p.141.

also grows from the barrel of a gun... The terrorist's veto on portrayals of Islam is itself a very real form of power, and as long as journalists who challenge it end up dead, the idea that they are 'up' and their targets are 'down' reflects a denial of life-and-death-reality."¹³

This leads us to subsequent questions: who are the targets of anti-blasphemy violence and terror, as well as why or how did they commit the alleged act in the first place.

Who are the Targets of Blasphemy Violence?

Despite the role that cartoons play in the equation, the targets vary greatly, as do their motivations for their perceived acts of insulting Islam or the Prophet Muhammad.

Salman Rushdie, for example, suspected that his novel, with its critiques of Islam and its founding Prophet, would be controversial. However, he could not possibly have anticipated what would follow—not to mention the rallies and demonstrations, attended by countless who could not have read the book. While some Western intellectuals denounced the author and accused him of provocation, these same denouncers and equivocators were admonished by the Syrian intellectual Sadiq Jalal al-Azm, who argued that intellectuals failed to see Rushdie as a kind of Muslim dissident in his own right. The kind of dissident whom, should they have hailed from communist Eastern Europe, Western intellectuals would have been unerring in their support.¹⁴ Rushdie, after all, emerged from the very religious and cultural heritage which he critiqued and within which he hoped to spark debate and critical thought.

Other episodes included those who sought to comment on or defend free expression in the face of self-censorship and threats. This was the rationale behind the *Jyllands-Posten* cartoon affair, during which the Danish newspaper invited illustrators to submit drawings of the Prophet Muhammad up to their own interpretation. The professed intention was a semi-experimental commentary on self-censorship relating to Islam, after it became apparent that the author of a children's book on Islam could not find an illustrator.¹⁵

Similarly, the threats which forced Molly Norris into hiding were in response to the Seattle-based artist's creation of a Facebook event entitled "Everybody Draw Muhammad Day." Norris was motivated by the reported threats made against the creators of the animated satirical TV series *South Park* (which had included a Muhammad storyline). Norris posited that if enough people were to draw the Prophet, then the threats of Islamists would be diluted and impossible to follow through.¹⁶ A pattern can be observed where each major controversy or act of violence tends to snowball, as others come out to express solidarity or deliberately "transgress" blasphemy norms in protest, only to then themselves become the targets of threats or violence.

Charlie Hebdo magazine, its headquarters completely destroyed by a Molotov cocktail in 2011 but without injury or loss of life, was attacked again four years later. This time, the al-Qaeda linked Kouachi brothers gunned down 12 people with Kalashnikov rifles. *Charlie* had not only republished the *Jyllands-Posten* cartoons in solidarity but had on other occasions included their own cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad and some critical of Islamic practices (alongside other religions). A number of commentators in the West were quick to accuse *Charlie* of provocation, and of racism or Islamophobia. Though, as novelist and Northern Irish *Charlie Hebdo* journalist Robert McLiam Wilson has argued, few of these commentators spoke French nor understood the cultural context from which these cartoons emerged.¹⁷

Indeed, *Charlie Hebdo* is situated squarely within the anti-clerical traditions of the French left, spending most of its time attacking racism and the populist right in France, as well as the Catholic Church (which has taken

13 Ross Douthat, "Checking Charlie Hebdo's Privilege," *New York Times*, April 18, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/19/opinion/sunday/ross-douthat-checking-charlie-hebdos-privilege.html>.

14 Sadik J. Al-Azm, "The Importance of Being Earnest About Salman Rushdie," *International Journal for the Study of Modern Islam*, pp.1-49, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1570646>.

15 Simon Cottey, "Flemming Rose: The Reluctant Fundamentalist," *The Atlantic*, March 15, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/03/flemming-rose-danish-cartoons/473670/>.

16 Steve Almasy, "After four years, American cartoonist Molly Norris still in hiding after drawing Prophet Mohammed," *CNN*, January 14, 2015, <https://www.cnn.com/2015/01/13/us/cartoonist-still-in-hiding/index.html>.

17 Robert McLiam Wilson, "The scurrilous lies written about Charlie Hebdo," *The Observer*, January 3, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jan/03/charlie-hebdo-scurrilous-reports-by-non-french-speakers>.

Charlie to court on a number of occasions). Nonetheless, it was their caricatures of Muhammad which led to their violent targeting. The Kouachi brothers were heard to cry, “We have killed Charlie! We have avenged the Prophet!” as they left the scene of the slaughter, but not before shooting dead an arriving Muslim police officer.

Theo Van Gogh, shot, stabbed, and his corpse mutilated on the streets of Amsterdam in 2004 was similarly irreverent. A contrarian and polemical public figure, Van Gogh had criticized Islam and insulted Moroccan migrants, but his ultimate crime in the eyes of his killer was to co-create the film *Submission* alongside Somali-Dutch politician and public figure, Ayaan Hirsi Ali. The short film was critical of violence against women in Islam, depicting verses from the Quran on the naked bodies of women. For this perceived crime, a Dutch jihadist, Mohammed Bouyeri, sacrificially slaughtered Van Gogh in broad daylight in one of Western Europe’s first dealings with jihadist terror after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks against the United States (9/11). Other extremists in Bouyeri’s circle, who had not yet taken the leap of wishing to attack at home, nonetheless agreed the killing was legal according to their worldview, even if they disagreed with it on strategic grounds.¹⁸

Others who fell afoul of blasphemy allegations were much more incidental and unintentional. Schoolteacher Samuel Paty found himself at the center of an online furore after he showed *Charlie Hebdo*’s cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad in a civics lesson on freedom of expression. Of course, the *Charlie Hebdo* attack is one of the most significant events in French recent history. Paty had given students the option to leave the class before the discussion, and indeed his principal accuser was not even present in school on the day of the alleged crime and would later admit to lying about the incident.¹⁹

Latching onto the swirling online controversy, a would-be jihadist exacted his own vengeance, decapitating the teacher in the street in Conflans-Sainte-Honorine, to the northwest of Paris. In doing so, the killing and the French state’s response sparked an international storm and a global version of the localized uproar against Paty but directed against the entire nation of France, which is vilified in Islamist discourses for its secularism and allegedly Islamophobic policies. This vilification and delegitimization of the French social contract was then amplified by certain Muslim heads of state, such as President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of Turkey,²⁰ then-Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan, and even sections of the Anglo-American media.²¹ Both of these men had a vested interest in posing as defenders of Islam to domestic and international audiences.

There have also been threats and plots targeting figures on the right and far right of the political spectrum, who have at times deliberately transgressed prohibitions on the depictions of Muhammad, or who have denigrated Islam and Muslims.

For example, in 2012, six men from Birmingham were pulled over in a routine police stop on their way back from a failed attempt to attack a rally of the far-right street movement, the English Defence League (EDL). EDL protestors had frequently sported placards and shouted slogans mocking Islam and the Prophet Muhammad. In response, the men from the West Midlands created the plans for their attack, which they themselves titled, “Operation – In Defence of the Prophet Muhammad.”²² They planned to attack the protestors with various weapons and were found in possession of al-Qaeda literature on blasphemy, but they arrived hours late for the rally.

Another failed attack was directed at an event in Garland, Texas, in 2015, when two Islamic State supporters from Arizona sought to attack a gathering of right-wing and far-right commentators and critics of Islam at an event billed as the “First Annual Muhammad Art Exhibit and Contest.”²³ A number of the attendees were associated with what became known as the ‘counter jihad’ movement, which perceives a fundamental, civilizational clash between the West and Islam. The attackers were shot dead before they could harm anyone else.

18 Author interview with Jason Walters, former extremist and convicted terrorist in the Netherlands. January 2023.

19 “13-year-old girl lied about French teacher who was later beheaded, her lawyer says,” *CBS News*, March 9, 2021 <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/samuel-paty-beheading-france-girl-lied/>.

20 “France recalls Turkey envoy after Erdogan says Macron needs ‘mental check,’” *BBC News*, October 25, 2020 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-54678826>.

21 Liam Duffy, “Why is the Anglo Media Portraying France as the Villain?” *UnHerd*, October 25, 2020 <https://unherd.com/2020/10/why-is-the-anglo-media-portraying-france-as-the-villain/>.

22 Hannah Stuart, “Islamist Terrorism: Analysis Of Offences And Attacks In The UK (1998-2015),” 2017. p.565.

23 Alastair Jamieson, “‘Draw Muhammad’ Shooting in Garland: What We Know About Texas Attack,” *NBC News*, May 4, 2015 <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/draw-muhammad-shooting-who-was-behind-cartoon-contest-n353081>.

A full table of plots and acts of violence or terror attacks related to perceived blasphemy against Islam, from The Satanic Verses affair onwards, is a part of this report. The table shows how blasphemy controversies have evolved over time, how a precedent set by the Shia Iranian state was later picked up by Sunni jihadists of al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, as well as how the regions and countries which are the principal targets of anger over blasphemy change over time depending on the latest controversy. Not included in the table are other affairs which do not seem to have generated terror plots connected to them, such as the case of the schoolteacher in West Yorkshire forced into hiding after using the Charlie Hebdo cartoons in a lesson. These episodes are as important for grasping the overall effect of blasphemy violence in the West as the failed and successful terror plots.

“Denmark does not produce terrorists”

This remark, made in an interview to *Le Monde* by a former U.S. Special Envoy to the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, was noted in the work of scholar of jihadism Hugo Micheron.²⁴ Micheron draws attention to this quote in respect to the fact that Denmark was in fact a disproportionate contributor to the ranks of IS, relative to other European countries.

In discussion and debate of Europe’s radicalization problem over the years, it has become something of a cliché to point to the egalitarian Scandinavian countries as models of integrational success, as compared to the alienation and resentment that is associated with France’s *banlieues* or through Britain’s faltering multiculturalism and interventionist foreign policy (not to mention the colonial history of both). Contrary to intuition and relative to population, Denmark and neighboring Sweden were both affected by jihadist foreign fighter flows to a greater extent than either France or the United Kingdom.²⁵

However, even prior to the IS foreign fighter flows, the extent of Islamism and its jihadist offshoots began to reveal themselves in Scandinavia during the 2000s and into the early 2010s through a series of credible terror plots or failed attacks targeted at perceived blasphemers. Many of these plots appear to be targeting those connected to the 2005 *Jyllands-Posten* affair or later to Lars Vilks, who had drawn Muhammad as a roundabout dog in 2007.

Both Vilks and Kurt Westergaard (the latter of whom had drawn the most notorious of the *Jyllands-Posten* cartoons) featured in al-Qaeda propaganda during the 2000s and early 2010s, alongside Fleming Rose, the editor of *Jyllands-Posten*. Many of the plotters in Scandinavia during this period were either inspired by al-Qaeda or, in some cases, directed by one of the group’s affiliates or branches around the world. Some plotters were born and raised in Sweden, Norway, or Denmark, while others resided in Scandinavia but originally hailed from Muslim-majority countries. In other instances, both the plots and plotters originated overseas, such as in the case of Pakistani-American David Headley who sought to attack *Jyllands-Posten* newspaper after involvement in the devastating 2008 Mumbai attacks.²⁶ Another plot was rolled up by authorities in Ireland in the same year, 2010, targeting Vilks and involved various international connections including American woman, Colleen LaRose, otherwise known as Jihad Jane.²⁷

Emphasizing the extent to which Scandinavia was in jihadist crosshairs, according to Petter Nesser’s seminal study *Islamist Terrorism in Europe*, between 2008-13, some 15 percent of all plots identified by the author were targeted at *Jyllands-Posten* or against individuals like Westergaard and Vilks.²⁸ This is compared to just 10 percent targeting the entire United States during this period, showing just how much the cartoons affairs shifted attention away from Bin Laden and the global jihadist movement’s more traditional enemy. For al-Qaeda, while there is no reason to doubt that the group’s outrage was sincere, the cartoons affairs were strategically useful in that they provoked anger among Muslims well beyond existing extremist supporters of the group.

A flurry of plots into 2010 began to tail off into the mid-2010s, especially as the intensifying Syrian Civil War drew

24 Hugo Micheron, “Thinking About Jihadism Beyond Attacks” (translation from French provided by author).

25 According to Hugo Micheron’s research cited previously, Denmark provided 160 jihadists to ISIS.

26 “Tahawwur Rana and David Headley Indicted for Alleged Roles in India and Denmark Terrorism Conspiracies,” *The United States Department of Justice*, January 14, 2010 <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/tahawwur-rana-and-david-headley-indicted-alleged-roles-india-and-denmark-terrorism>.

27 Ed Pilkington, “‘Jihad Jane’ pleads guilty to murder attempt on Swedish cartoonist,” *The Guardian*, February 2, 2011 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/feb/02/jihad-jane-pleads-guilty-cartoonist-murder>.

28 Petter Nesser, *Islamist Terrorism In Europe* (London: C. Hurst & Co., revised ed. 2018) p. 64.

the attention of Europe's Islamists and jihadists away from cartoons. But, even as late as 2015, a jihadist got as close as any to Vilks, shooting at the Swedish artist during an event in Copenhagen. Unlike other plotters before him, this gunman pledged allegiance to IS rather than al-Qaeda, reflecting Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's group's near wholesale absorption of Western radicals who may have only recently favored Bin Laden's group. The shooting took place just one month after the *Charlie Hebdo* attack, and like that attack, it was Jews who were targeted after the alleged blasphemers. Vilks escaped the initial shooting unscathed, but filmmaker Finn Nørgaard was killed, while the life of Dan Uzan was later taken at Copenhagen's Great Synagogue.

Attention Turns Back to the United States

During the early to mid-2010s, various incidents of alleged blasphemy against Islam originating in the United States began to take some of the heat away from Northern Europe. Some of the furore originates with the satirical animated TV show *South Park*'s episodes 200 and 201, featuring a storyline involving the Prophet Muhammad and other religious figures.

South Park creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone sought to make a point about self-censorship relating to Islam compared to other major religions, a point that was vindicated by TV network Comedy Central's ultimate decision not to televise the episodes in full. Nonetheless, the U.S.-based pro-jihadist website, Revolution Muslim, published threats against Parker and Stone, including details of their address and images of Theo Van Gogh's corpse, alongside quotes from Awlaki calling for violent retribution against blasphemers.

These threats led to convictions against Virginians, Zachary Chesser and Jesse Morton, who later abandoned and fought against extremism. (Colleen LaRose, a.k.a. Jihad Jane, also allegedly consumed Revolution Muslim's propaganda.) The threats against *South Park* also led to Seattle-based cartoonist Molly Norris to create an event on Facebook titled, "Everybody Draw Muhammad Day." Shocked by the threats against Parker and Stone, Norris believed that if enough people drew pictures of the Prophet Muhammad then the threats would be diluted and impossible to follow through upon. For this, Norris was forced into hiding, and her name (but given her sex, not her photo) was found alongside the likes of Salman Rushdie, Fleming Rose, and others in al-Qaeda's 'Wanted' list for crimes against Islam.

Incidents like these, the unfolding blasphemy affairs in Europe, and general anti-Islamic sentiment among some figures in the United States prompted some to deliberately mock Islam and the Prophet, knowing they could provoke a reaction. Florida-based Pastor Terry Jones came to national and international attention in 2010, with his threat to burn copies of the Quran on the ninth anniversary of the 9/11 terror attacks. Although Jones canceled this burning, subsequent stunts in which he did follow through led to unrest around the world as well as reprisal attacks against U.N. personnel and coalition troops in Afghanistan. Radical Islamist groups put bounties on the Jones's head, while al-Qaeda also named him in their 'Wanted' list that appeared in *Inspire* magazine in 2013.²⁹

Jones was also involved in the promotion of the short film, *The Innocence of Muslims*, for which two trailers were posted to YouTube in July 2012. The film, produced by an Egyptian-American Coptic Christian, was hostile towards Islam and perceived to vilify the Prophet, sparking an enormous international backlash resulting in dozens of deaths in demonstrations around the world. The episode also prompted a number of states to crackdown on YouTube and social media, even resulting in large internet service blackouts in some regions.

In Egypt, protestors were able to penetrate the U.S. Embassy compound in Cairo. While under the cover of angry demonstrations, al-Qaeda linked extremists were able to do the same at the U.S. Mission in Benghazi, Libya, eventually killing the U.S. ambassador and three other American personnel. Again, the creator of the film's name was added to al-Qaeda's infamous 'Wanted' list.

Just as the war in Syria and the rise of IS took plotters' attention away from Northern Europe, it also re-energized anti-Islamic sentiment among sections of the American political right, leading to gatherings like the one at the Curtis Culwell Center in Garland, Texas, which held a display of depictions of the Prophet Muhammad. As previously mentioned, two IS supporters unsuccessfully attempted to attack the event after it was flagged on Twitter by the fake IS-supporting persona of the internet troll, Joshua Ryne Goldberg. One of the two IS

29 Dashiell Bennett, "Look Who's on Al Qaeda's Most-Wanted List," *The Atlantic*, March 1, 2013 <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/03/al-qaeda-most-wanted-list/317829/>.

supporting gunmen retweeted the post from Goldberg's fake persona on the morning of that attack.³⁰

France: The New Target of Rage

The blasphemy ire began to turn towards France in the 2010s, with the petrol-bombing of *Charlie Hebdo* magazine's offices by an unknown assailant in 2011. The offices were completely destroyed, but none of the magazine's staff were harmed. *Charlie* had reprinted the *Jyllands-Posten* cartoons in solidarity, but also depicted the Prophet Muhammad on a number of other occasions.

In 2013, *Charlie*'s editor, Stephane Charbonnier, was included on al-Qaeda's infamous 'Wanted' list alongside many of the other names in this discussion. By the end of morning on January 7, 2015, al-Qaeda was able to cross 'Charb' off their list—thanks to a volley of bullets from Chérif Kouachi and his brother Saïd.

The massacre at *Charlie Hebdo* prompted an enormous international reaction. More than a million people including an array of world leaders marched to the *Place de la République* in solidarity with the murdered cartoonists and journalists. In other quarters, however, the victims were quickly condemned as provocateurs and even racists, despite the magazine's historically anti-racist stance.

In the years ahead, France was to be struck again. By the time the body count from IS's assault on Paris in November 2015 became apparent (130 killed), the initial defiance which followed *Charlie Hebdo* had transformed to despair, horror, and fatigue. Between the massacre at *Charlie Hebdo* in 2015 and the assassination of Father Jacques Hamel in July 2016, some 239 people would be killed by jihadists in France.³¹ If the United States had been the target of jihadist rage during the early 2000s, it seemed that by 2015, France had fully inherited that mantle.

For jihadists and other Islamist movements, France represents something of a perfect enemy. Its colonial history in the Middle East and North Africa can be invoked for present day currency but so too can the ideas of secularism, universalism, and the Enlightenment, which are so diametrically opposed to the worldview of militant Islamists. In some European Islamist circles, France animates in a way that other countries do not.

For some, the objections to French culture are more a matter of taste. One jihadist returnee from Syria told the journalist David Thomson how he saw nothing in France but "moral decay and decadence," and that it was "libertine and morally corrupting." As evidence, he proffered the example of the mainstreaming of the French celebrity adult film stars, Jacque and Michel.³² Given this view, it is also not a coincidence that the targets of the November 2015 IS massacre were Friday night revellers, diners, and concertgoers.

The jihadist targeting of France has also followed a pattern of increased delegitimization and vilification of France by Islamist groups both inside and outside the country. This is not to mention some of the Western Islamists' principal sponsors in the Middle East, as the likes of Turkish President Erdoğan and Qatar-based media outlets have been at the forefront of some of the condemnation of France and its domestic and foreign policies.

To Islamist sensibilities, the continued support and defence of the right to blaspheme in France (as well as *Charlie Hebdo*'s continued cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad post-attack) is evidence of a wider campaign against Islam and Muslims that includes France's history, its social contract, as well as its present day domestic and foreign policies.

However, given the extraordinary steps taken to protect the surviving staff of *Charlie Hebdo*, for some time France has been in short in supply of blasphemers upon whom to exact vengeance. That is, until a young Chechen-born jihadist came across swirling online accusations surrounding the schoolteacher, Samuel Paty, who had used the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoons in a classroom discussion on free expression. The parent of a child who was not actually present during the lesson complained and helped to draw attention to the complaint among certain Islamist activist circles. The 19-year-old jihadist who eventually decapitated the innocent schoolteacher had scoured online Islamist controversies, in search of a suitable target.

30 "United States of America v. JOSHUA RYNE GOLDBERG," *U.S. Department of Justice*, September 10, 2015 <https://www.justice.gov/opa/file/769556/download>.

31 Giles Kepel, *Terror in France: The Rise of Jihad in the West*, (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015) p. ix.

32 David Thomson, *The Returned: They Left to Wage Jihad, Now They're Back*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018) p. 220.

The French state's response to the murder of Paty involved the dissolution of Islamist-leaning NGOs, which the government accused of playing a role in the online furore surrounding the teacher. In addition, a new law, which had been billed as measures to combat what President Emmanuel Macron's government termed "Islamist separatism," was thrust into the spotlight and placed under global scrutiny. The proposed law was characterized as a knee jerk reaction but had in fact been announced long before Paty's murder in response to the increased influence of Islamist thought and practice in certain parts of the republic.³³

The immediate aftermath of Paty's murder risked escalating into a repeat of the *Jyllands-Posten* affair, as various heads of state and media outlets took to denouncing France and President Macron's response to the murder, while calls for the boycott of French goods began gaining momentum in some Muslim-majority states.

Fortunately, the situation did not disintegrate to the point of rivalling the *Jyllands-Posten* or *Innocence of Muslims* unrest, but against the backdrop of global attention on France another jihadist chose his moment to act, killing three inside a basilica in Nice.

The effects of Paty's murder have manifested in other, lingering ways, as threats and campaigns against other educators have proliferated, not abated.³⁴ Paty's death now hangs over the classroom in France and other European countries, effectively holding the curriculum hostage to the assassin's veto. In one incident, a teacher was threatened with the same fate as Paty merely for mentioning the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoons, not actually showing them.³⁵

France's position as the object of rage across the Islamist spectrum looks unlikely to subside any time in the immediate future. Not only is the Islamists' list of grievances against France a long one, chipping away at the French social contract is seen as a path to possible victory by both jihadists and Islamists in Europe, and the confrontations over blasphemy and *liberté d'expression* are an integral part of this strategy.³⁶

Who is Behind Blasphemy Violence?

Blasphemy plots and attacks can be seen in three distinct phases, with emerging symptoms of a fourth type in more recent events. These phases are the plots linked to the Khomeini fatwa which followed *The Satanic Verses* affair, followed later by al-Qaeda, before IS was able to absorb much of the Western jihadist movement's energy and human resources. Most recently, the reverberations of increasing blasphemy fervor emanating from Barelvi extremists in Pakistan have been felt in Europe, firstly with the murder of an Ahmadi Muslim man in Glasgow in 2016, and later the attempted attack on the former offices of *Charlie Hebdo* in 2020 by a member of a Barelvi extremist network.

Iran

From 1989 into the early 1990s, a series of fire bombings against bookshops and publishers as well as stabbing and shooting attacks directed against individuals involved in *The Satanic Verses*, such as promoters, publishers, and translators, characterized the years to follow the Ayatollah's fatwa. Little information is known (or is at least publicly available) relating to the perpetrators of the violence during this period.

In some cases, the violence appears more spontaneous, such as the assault on Gianni Palma, at the time promoting

33 See for instance, Macron's speech discussing the measures to combat 'separatism,' delivered before Samuel Paty's murder: "France's Macron vows to fight 'Islamist separatism,'" *BBC News*, October 3, 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-54383173>.

34 "Essonne : un professeur sous protection après avoir reçu des menaces de mort," *Le Point*, October 13, 2022, https://www.lepoint.fr/societe/deux-ans-apres-samuel-paty-un-professeur-a-recu-des-menaces-de-mort-13-10-2022-2493644_23.php#xtor=CS1-32.

35 "Haut-Rhin : un prof menacé après avoir parlé des caricatures de Mahomet," *Le Point*, October 13, 2022, https://www.lepoint.fr/faits-divers/haut-rhin-un-prof-menace-de-mort-apres-avoir-montre-des-caricatures-13-10-2022-2493576_2627.php.

36 "Hugo Micheron : pour les djihadistes, «la France est l'usine à idées de l'Europe, un symbole à défier," *Radio France*, January 8, 2020, <https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceinter/podcasts/l-invite-de-8h20-le-grand-entretien/hugo-micheron-pour-les-djihadistes-la-france-est-l-usine-a-idees-de-l-europe-un-symbole-a-defier-1574598>.

the novel in Japan, by a Pakistani national.³⁷ In others, despite the frenzy of violence which characterizes the attacks, there appears to be a degree of sophistication and professionalism. This sophistication has in several cases allowed perpetrators to slip away from their crimes and evade justice. This was the case for the man who attempted to murder Ettore Capriolo, the novel's Italian translator in 1991,³⁸ as well as the individual who successfully stabbed Hitoshi Igarashi to death outside his office at Tsukuba University in Japan later that same month.³⁹

The methods may have been brutal, but the coordination and professionalism with which these operations were carried out is clear. In his memoir, *Joseph Anton*, Rushdie suggested there was evidence that the killer had entered and left Japan either side of the slaying of Hitoshi Igarashi, pointing to a level of competence and possibly outside support networks which is suggestive of much more than mere spontaneous anger.⁴⁰ The CIA was under no illusions about who was behind this flurry of violence, reporting in 1992 that "Iran has shifted from attacking organizations affiliated with the novel—publishing houses and bookstores—to individuals involved in its publication, as called for in the original fatwa."⁴¹

In August 1989, a man blew himself up in a London hotel preparing a bomb that is thought to have been intended for Rushdie. In Tehran, despite the failed bomber's Guinean-Lebanese nationality, there now stands a plaque in his name, close to a dedication to the Beirut barracks bombers of 1983: "Mustafa Mahmoud Mazeh, born Conakry, Guinea. Martyred in London, August 3, 1989. The first martyr to die on a mission to kill Salman Rushdie."⁴² Today, it is common for individuals to carry out attacks or killings on behalf of groups through mere inspiration rather than being under direct command and control, but this was much less heard of at the time.

In 1993, Rushdie's Norwegian publisher and one of his great public defenders, William Nygaard, was shot three times and left for dead near to his home in Oslo. The case was shrouded in mystery and no suspect ever charged until 2018, when Norway filed charges against two men whose identities were revealed in 2021 to be a Lebanese man named Khaled Moussawi and an unnamed former Iranian diplomat.⁴³

What's also notable is the proximity of Lebanese militant groups to these mostly unsolved cases. The double assassination of an imam and his librarian who had spoken out against the Ayatollah's fatwa at the Grand Mosque of Brussels was claimed by a Lebanese group, Jund al-Haqq (the Soldiers of the Right). It should be noted that some doubts still linger about this case's connection to *The Satanic Verses* affair. Likewise, the Guinean-Lebanese man who blew himself up in London was investigated for links to both the *Organization of the Strugglers of Islam* and to Hezbollah, an Iranian-sponsored internationally sanctioned terrorist group. Decades later, the suspect in the stabbing of Rushdie in New York is of Lebanese descent and had allegedly traveled to Yaroun, a Hezbollah stronghold in Lebanon.⁴⁴

Iranian reach into Lebanon has been well documented, as has the Iranian regime's use of proxies in terror attacks and assassinations around the region. The continued use of proxies to enforce the terms of the fatwa would make strategic sense, and it also gives the regime an air of plausible deniability surrounding the plots in order to avoid open confrontation with the West.

In *Mullahs Without Mercy*, Rushdie's former lawyer Geoffrey Robertson calculated that between 1989-1996 the Iranian state's overseas assassination campaign had killed more than 160 people, either through direct agents of

37 T.R. Reid, "'Satanic Verses' Translator Found Slain," *Washington Post*, July 13, 1991, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1991/07/13/satanic-verses-translator-found-slain/6ee67d24-9b02-4eaf-994e-107ff814f64f/>.

38 Brooke Goldstein, "The Ripple Effects of The Salman Rushdie Fatwa," *Newsweek*, August 25, 2022, <https://www.newsweek.com/ripple-effects-salman-rushdie-fatwa-opinion-1735765>.

39 T.R. Reid, "'Satanic Verses' Translator Found Slain".

40 Salman Rushdie, *Joseph Anton*, pp. 296-297.

41 "Iran: Enhanced Terrorist Capabilities and Expanding Target Selection," *Central Intelligence Agency*, April 1, 1992. As quoted in: Matthew Levitt, "Fighters Without Borders"—Forecasting New Trends in Iran Threat Network Foreign Operations Tradecraft," *CTC Sentinel*, February 2020, Vol 13, Issue 2, <https://ctc.usma.edu/fighters-without-borders-forecasting-new-trends-iran-threat-network-foreign-operations-tradecraft/>.

42 Anthony Loyd, "First Rushdie 'martyr' - Untold assassination plot revealed," *The Telegraph in India*, August 6, 2005, <https://www.telegraphindia.com/india/first-rushdie-martyr-untold-assassination-plot-revealed/cid/873683>.

43 Odd Isungset, Mohammed Alayoubi, "Her er mannen som er siktet for attentatet på William Nygaard," *NRK*, November 11, 2021, <https://www.nrk.no/dokumentar/her-er-mannen-som-er-siktet-for-attentatet-pa-william-nygaard-1.15720862>.

44 "Hadi Matar," *Counter Extremism Project*, <https://www.counterextremism.com/extremists/hadi-matar>.

the state or conducted by known proxies.⁴⁵ To this day, assassination plots against activists and dissidents in the West are not uncommon, with the director of Mi5 reporting that Iran had attempted to conduct 10 assassination plots against British residents in 2022 alone.⁴⁶

Iran has also been known to use its diplomatic infrastructure to conduct such operations, and so Capriolo's attempted murderer's claim to be connected to the Iranian Embassy in Rome may well have contained some truth. Not to mention that one of the men charged by Norway for Nygaard's attempted murder is a former diplomat.

The killings and plots during the initial years to follow *The Satanic Verses* fatwa are shrouded in mystery. Very little is known about the perpetrators, the Molotov cocktail throwers, the arsonists, the bombmakers, the knifemen, and the shooters. Claims of responsibility were rare other than the few that came through Lebanon-based extremist groups. This in itself may hint at Iranian involvement, so as to provide enough degrees of separation from the crimes as to avoid global outcry and open confrontation with Western states—something for which there was little appetite on either side.

This mystery is in stark contrast to the violence against blasphemers which characterized the 2000s and 2010s, as the global jihadist movement took up the mantle of defence of Islam and the Prophet, at first in the shape of al-Qaeda.

Al-Qaeda and the Global Jihadist Movement

One of Europe's first experiences with a successful jihadist terror attack after 9/11 happened to be a blasphemy attack, albeit one without any established links to al-Qaeda command and control.

Mohammed Bouyeri signaled the beginnings of the jihadist campaign against blasphemers in 2004, with his frenzied assault on Van Gogh, who had helped create the film *Submission* with Hirsi Ali. This film, which criticized violence against women in Islam and depicted verses from the Quran on the bodies of naked women, was deemed to have insulted Islam by Van Gogh's killer and other likeminded extremists in the Netherlands.

Bouyeri emerged from the *Hofstadgroep*, as they were named by Dutch intelligence services, a Salafi-jihadist activist network in the Netherlands. Jason Walters, who was a part of the radical network but has since recanted his views, told this author that prior to Bouyeri's act there were live debates within the network about the future of their activism. Should their energies be diverted towards *dawah* (proselytizing) or waging jihad? And if jihad, should that come in the form of terror attacks at home or towards foreign fighting overseas, such as joining the insurgency against the American coalition in Iraq?⁴⁷

Bouyeri essentially shut down that debate with his act of extreme violence against Van Gogh, leading to the arrests of several members of the *Hofstadgroep* (including Walters). Bouyeri professed no allegiance to al-Qaeda in his public statements surrounding the killing, but the *Hofstadgroep* adhered to the type of Salafi-jihadist worldview advocated by Bin Laden and his organization's affiliates.

Where more concrete connections to al-Qaeda and its allies and affiliates can be established are in the plots that arose from the *Jyllands-Posten* cartoons affair in 2005, and the subsequent depiction of Muhammad by Vilks. Behind some of these plots were relatively recent arrivals to Europe, while some were the work of individuals born and bred in Denmark or other Scandinavian countries.

Prior to the early 2000s, Europe's small but growing community that adhered to the worldview of Salafi-jihadism was largely observant of a covenant of security with their host nations, which forbade them from attacking at home. In Britain, some extremists deemed that the covenant was null and void due to their host's decision to invade Iraq in 2003, while in Scandinavia, the *Jyllands-Posten* cartoons affair helped to decide the matter.

As Petter Nesser outlines, "For many jihadis, the Muhammad cartoons were seen as the last straw, which in addition to military campaigns in Muslim lands and the arrests of Islamists, had invalidated the covenant of

45 Geoffrey Robertson, *Mullahs Without Mercy: Human Rights and Nuclear Weapons* (2012).

46 Robert Mendick, Dominic Nicholls, "Iran tried to assassinate British residents 10 times this year, MI5 chief reveals," *The Telegraph*, November 16, 2022, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/11/16/iran-tried-assassinate-british-residents-10-times-year-mi5-reveals/>.

47 Author interview with Jason Walters. January 2023.

security and legitimized attacks in Europe by European Muslims.”⁴⁸ Indeed, returning to the Van Gogh murder, Walters explains to this author that even those in the network who disagreed with Bouyeri’s killing for strategic reasons nonetheless deemed the killing legal in Islamic terms.⁴⁹

Even beyond Europe’s existing pool of extremists, the cartoons affair was extremely useful for al-Qaeda and jihadist networks in Europe. Nesser described the incident as the “perfect recruitment tool” for al-Qaeda, due to the widespread resentment and anger they provoked as well as the rulings of scholars who are respected even outside of their schools of thought, such as the influential 12th century writings of Ibn Taymiyyah.⁵⁰

In 2009, the Pakistani-American David Headley was arrested by the FBI on his return from a number of scouting missions for an attack against *Jyllands-Posten*. Headley’s plans were at first backed by the Pakistan-based and al-Qaeda-linked Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), for whom the 49-year-old had carried out reconnaissance ahead of the 2008 Mumbai attacks that killed over 160 people. Due to the increased pressure from authorities, it is believed that LeT backed out before another group linked to both al-Qaeda and the Taliban, *Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami*, stepped in.

A few months later, in January 2010, a man wielding an ax broke into the home of Westergaard, who had drawn the caricature of the Prophet Muhammad with a bomb in his turban for *Jyllands-Posten*. Westergaard was able to avoid harm by taking shelter in a reinforced panic room, while his attacker was shot in the leg by police arriving on the scene. The perpetrator, Mohamed Guele, was believed to have links to the Somali-based al-Qaeda affiliate, al-Shabaab.⁵¹

The year 2010 would see a number of serious plots and attempted attacks related to the cartoons affair, with a handful demonstrating tangible connections to al-Qaeda and affiliates. In July, a Chinese-Uighur named Mikael Davud, who is believed to have spent time in al-Qaeda training camps, was sentenced to seven and a half years for a plot to bomb *Jyllands-Posten* and to assassinate Westergaard.

In a separate incident later that year, two bombs detonated in Stockholm killing only the bomber. Although the targets were not cartoonists or other perceived blasphemers, the perpetrator sent letters stating that his motivation to attack were the *Jyllands-Posten* cartoons as well as the presence of Swedish troops in Afghanistan. At the time, evidence suggested this plot was commissioned by al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI).

Other plots lacked a clear connection to al-Qaeda but were nonetheless undertaken by committed adherents to Salafi-jihadist ideology whom, at the time, would have likely been influenced by al-Qaeda ideology and propaganda. An example of this can be found in the 2012 attempt to attack an EDL rally in Dewsbury in the North of England by six men from Birmingham. Billing their attack as “Operation – In Defence of the Prophet Muhammad,” the men sought revenge against the EDL for their insults against Islam and the Prophet Muhammad. The men were found in possession of al-Qaeda literature, including Awlaki’s sermons on the punishments for blasphemers.⁵²

Indeed, al-Qaeda’s official output broached the subject of insults against Islam and the Prophet frequently, including an audio message from Bin Laden himself. For Bin Laden, the publication and periodic republication of the *Jyllands-Posten* cartoons was just another front in the West’s ongoing war waged against Islam and Muslims. In fact, Bin Laden would go even further, denouncing the insulting imagery of Muhammad as a “graver offence” than the bombing of villages in Muslim lands and a “bigger catastrophe ... for which the punishment is graver” than the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan.⁵³ This positioning of insulting Islam and the Prophet as a graver sin than very real acts of violence against Muslim human beings has been a recurring theme of blasphemy affairs in the West.

Awlaki also sermonized on the issue of blasphemy on multiple occasions. Both he and Bin Laden invoked Ibn

48 Nesser, *Islamist Terrorism in Europe*. p. 202.

49 Author interview with Jason Walters January 2023.

50 Nesser, *Islamist Terrorism in Europe*. p. 201.

51 “Cartoon trial: Kurt Westergaard’s attacker convicted” *BBC News*, February 3, 2011, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-12353863>.

52 Hannah Stuart, “Islamist Terrorism” pp. 564-566.

53 Inal Ersan, “Bin Laden warns EU over Prophet cartoons,” *Reuters*, March 20, 2008, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-security-binladen-idUSN1933824120080320>.

Taymiyyah, who ruled that insults against the Prophet were the gravest sin punishable by death and that it was the obligation of every Muslim to avenge him.⁵⁴

However, according to Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens, it was Awlaki's 2008 "The Dust Will Never Settle Down" lecture, which "represented the most comprehensive effort by a Salafi-jihadist to provide a religious justification for the killing of those deemed to have insulted Muhammad. Today, it remains a popular reference point on the topic for Western jihadists and has been translated into multiple languages."⁵⁵

In "The Dust Will Never Settle Down," Awlaki lamented the lackluster response to Vilks' depictions of Muhammad, relative to the international storm in response to the *Jyllands-Posten* cartoons publication. "Our enemies have desensitized us," he complained.⁵⁶ Perhaps Awlaki's complaints didn't fall on deaf ears. The period between 2008 and 2010 saw an uptick in plots relating to *Jyllands-Posten* as well as assassination plots against individuals like Westergaard and Vilks.

In 2010, the first issue of al-Qaeda's English-language *Inspire* magazine also invoked the infamous "Dust Will Never Settle Down" lecture, with considerable column inches dedicated to the issue of insults against the Prophet Muhammad in the West, including an article penned by Awlaki himself. It was also in this issue that al-Qaeda's "Wanted: Dead or Alive for Crimes Against Islam" graphic was published, including names and photographs (except of the women) of various individuals deemed to have insulted Islam and the Prophet, instructing followers to "Defend the Prophet."⁵⁷

In his writing, Awlaki used the Muhammad cartoons to delegitimize the entire Western system and to encourage Muslims in the West to act. Awlaki stated that it was the responsibility of every Muslim to take action, not just the *mujahid*. This framing perhaps helps to explain several of the lone actor plots, where no formal links to terrorist organizations could be established, such as the case of the Chechen man who traveled from Belgium to Denmark to attack *Jyllands-Posten* in September 2010.⁵⁸

Addressing the West as an ideal, a system, he wrote, "If you have the right to slander the Messenger of Allah we have the right to defend him. If it is part of your freedom of speech to defame Muhammad, it is part of our religion to fight you."⁵⁹ He continued, "Because they are practicing a 'right' that is defended by the law, they have the backing of the entire Western political system. This would make the attacking of any Western target legal from an Islamic viewpoint. The entire Western system is staunchly protecting and promoting the defamation of Muhammad and therefore, it is the entire Western system that is at war with Islam. Assassinations, bombings, and acts of arson are all legitimate forms of revenge against a system that relishes the sacrilege of Islam in the name of freedom."⁶⁰ Awlaki's words were also invoked by the extremists behind the U.S.-based website Revolution Muslim in their threats against the creators of *South Park* and subsequently Molly Norris.

There appears to even be an operational link between Awlaki and the most infamous and bloody episode in the ongoing blasphemy disputes in Western Europe, the 2015 massacre at *Charlie Hebdo* magazine. While on the run one of the perpetrators, Chérif Kouachi spoke to a journalist from *BFMTV*: "We're telling you that we are the prophet's defenders peace and blessings be upon him, and that I, Chérif Kouachi, was sent by Yemen's Al-Qaeda. OK? ... I went there and it was Anwar Al-Awlaki who financed me."⁶¹ Notably, Kouachi attempts to bestow some honor on his and his brother's deed, insisting to the journalist that they had not killed any other civilians in the

54 Nesser. p. 201.

55 Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens, *Incitement: Anwar al-Awlaki's Western Jihad* (London: Harvard University Press, 2020) p.131.

56 Anwar al-Awlaki, "The Dust Will Never Settle Down," (2008).

57 *Inspire Magazine*. Issue no.1

58 "Bomb suspect 'targeted' Danish paper *Jyllands-Posten*," *BBC News*, September 17, 2010, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-11345887>.

59 *Inspire* no.1.

60 *Inspire* no.1.

61 "Paris Killer Chérif Kouachi Gave Interview to TV Channel Before He Died," *NBC News*, January 9 2015, <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/paris-magazine-attack/paris-killer-cherif-kouachi-gave-interview-tv-channel-he-died-n283206>.

two days on the run, and therefore their act was only about vengeance.⁶² Indeed, more discriminate killings such as those against blasphemers can help jihadists to secure greater legitimacy among potential sympathizers.

In the days following the attack, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)—the affiliate to which Awlaki belonged before he was killed by a U.S. drone in 2011—would claim the attack in an official statement: “As for the blessed Battle of Paris, we, the Organisation of al Qaeda al Jihad in the Arabian Peninsula, claim responsibility for this operation as vengeance for the Messenger of God.”⁶³

This so-called “Battle of Paris,” would (at the time of writing) be the last time al-Qaeda was able to conduct a successful terrorist attack in the West, before the leadership of global jihad was taken over by the breakaway brutality of IS, a descendant of al-Qaeda’s former affiliate in Iraq.

The Islamic State and the Defense of the Prophet

IS, in the form of its precursors AQI and Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) had previously waded into blasphemy affairs, including offering a bounty of \$100,000 dollars for the assassination of Vilks in 2007, the offer increasing by \$50,000 if he were to be “slaughtered like a lamb,” i.e., Vilks’ throat is slit.⁶⁴

Attacks in Europe came in 2010, when two bombs detonated in Stockholm killing only the bomber, Taimour Abdulwahab al-Abdaly. The 28-year-old Iraqi-Swede sent voice recordings to the police and the Swedish press stating that his motivation was linked to the publication of blasphemous cartoons and the presence of Swedish troops in Muslim lands. He also praised “the Islamic State” and asked Allah to protect it. The only group referring to itself in this way at the time was AQI, since rebranded as ISI.⁶⁵ ISI would go on to claim the attack, while months later an Iraqi security official would claim that al-Abdaly received training with the group inside Iraq. Al-Abdaly also claimed to have visited the Middle East “for jihad.”⁶⁶

By late 2013, ISI under its leader al-Baghdadi had fully entered the Syrian Civil War, leading to an acrimonious split with al-Qaeda. After the capture of Mosul, Iraq, in June 2014, the group would famously rename simply as the Islamic State and declare themselves a so-called caliphate. Subsequently, the plots and attacks in Europe begin to be recorded as IS-inspired attacks.

Although not strictly a “blasphemy attack” as considered in this paper, the IS-inspired Amedy Coulibaly would (according to his version of events) coordinate with the Kouachi brothers to attack a Kosher supermarket two days after their assault on *Charlie Hebdo*. Interestingly, despite the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks claiming by AQAP, this did not prevent IS from praising the attack in its official propaganda magazine, *Dabiq*, as well as naming and shaming Muslim leaders who had spoken out against the massacre.

The wait was not long until the first attack against a blasphemer was carried out in IS’s name. Just over a month after the *Charlie Hebdo* attack, Vilks was due to speak at an event on blasphemy and free speech at a cultural center in Copenhagen until a gunman, 22-year-old Omar Abdel Hamid El-Hussein, opened fire killing filmmaker Finn Nørgaard but missing Vilks. El-Hussein attacked Copenhagen’s Great Synagogue later that night. He had pledged allegiance to IS. The 2015 attack in Garland, Texas, was similarly carried out by two supporters of IS who were based in Arizona. The failed attack was also praised and claimed by IS’s propaganda organs.

Five years later, a young Chechen in contact with jihadists in Syria beheaded Paty in a suburb of Paris. The attacker, Abdoullakh Abouyedovich Anzorov, posted a photo of Paty’s severed head on social media with a

62 John Lichfield, “Paris attackers interview with French TV station: ‘We are defenders of the Prophet... We took vengeance,’ said Charlie Hebdo killer Cherif Kouachi,” *The Independent*, January 10, 2015, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/paris-attackers-gave-interview-to-french-tv-station-we-are-defenders-of-the-prophet-we-took-vengeance-said-cherif-kouachi-9969749.html>.

63 “Al Qaeda in Yemen claims Charlie Hebdo attack,” *France24*, January 14, 2015, <https://www.france24.com/en/20150114-al-qaeda-yemen-video-charlie-hebdo-attack>.

64 Christine Brouwer, “Al-Qaeda Offers Reward for Cartoonist’s Death,” *ABC News*, February 10, 2009, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/story?id=3607577&page=1>.

65 Ravi Somaiya, “Swedish Bombing Suspect’s Drift to Extremism,” *New York Times*, December 13, 2010, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/14/world/europe/14suspect.html>.

66 “DUBAI: Bungled Stockholm suicide bomber received training in Iraq, says top security official,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 9, 2011, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/blogs/babylon-beyond/story/2011-01-09/dubai-bungled-stockholm-suicide-bomber-received-training-in-iraq-says-top-security-official>.

message addressed to President Macron: “I executed one of your hellhounds who dared to belittle Muhammad.” In a video posted on Instagram, the killer made reference to IS. IS’s official newsletter al-Naba praised the killing but did not outright claim responsibility.⁶⁷

Although IS’s official and unofficial propaganda organs have been active on the issue of blasphemy, the increase in IS-linked plots is likely due to the group’s absorption of Salafi-jihadist energy and personnel on the global stage. A few years prior, individuals like El-Hussein or Anzorov would have likely acted on behalf of al-Qaeda given the opportunity. Nonetheless, unlike al-Qaeda, IS does not have any figures (and arguably never did) with the gravitas of Bin Laden or Awlaki, who both personally sermonized on the need to exact vengeance against blasphemers.

An Emerging Trend: Barelvism and Protection of the Prophet

Another current looks to be emerging in Western Europe, most notably in Britain, which is the direct result of a growing blasphemy fervor among Barelvi extremist currents in Pakistan. This has reached Britain through the Pakistani diaspora, in the form of visiting speakers, preachers, Facebook groups, WhatsApp groups and chain messages, TV stations, and more. It has manifested itself in violence only once, although death threats and other controversies have bubbled and seem to be increasing in frequency in recent years.

In March 2016, 32-year-old Tanveer Ahmed got into his car and drove some four hours from Bradford, West Yorkshire up to Scotland’s biggest city, Glasgow. There, he confronted Asad Shah, demanding the latter remove videos posted to YouTube in which the Ahmadi Muslim shopkeeper claimed to be a Prophet. When Shah refused, Ahmed launched into a brutal assault, stabbing and stomping his victim to death. When police arrived to arrest Ahmed, he allegedly told them, “I respect what you do and I have nothing against you and so I am not going to hurt you. I have broken the law and appreciate how you are treating me.”⁶⁸

In the aftermath, Ahmed was sometimes described in media coverage as an Islamist,⁶⁹ but, to say the least, an Islamist terrorist would be highly unlikely to express their respect for the manmade laws which they violated to commit a murder.

To add to the confusion surrounding this case, there was something of an outpouring of support for the killer. Some religious bodies in Britain remained silent, others failed to attend events in response to the killing,⁷⁰ while the killer’s supporters railed in the public gallery of the court during the trial. Crowds also rallied in Pakistan, and a Pakistani cleric influential among British Muslims expressed vocal support for the Bradfordian killer.⁷¹

Neither Ahmed nor his supporters are Islamist, at least not in the way is conventionally understood. Ahmed and many of his supporters in both Pakistan and Britain belong to the Barelvism, an Islamic movement founded in the Indian subcontinent in the 18th century. In recent years, currents within the movement have become increasingly animated on the question of blasphemy, taking to the streets of Pakistan in colossal numbers and accusing other Islamic sects of not sufficiently respecting the Prophet.

It emerged that Ahmed was a supporter of Mumtaz Qadri, who in 2011 murdered the governor of Punjab, Salman Taseer, for criticizing Pakistan’s blasphemy laws and supporting the Christian woman, Asia Bibi, who had been condemned to death for blasphemy.⁷² Taseer himself was never accused of blasphemy, as he only argued for relaxing Pakistan’s strict blasphemy laws, yet his killing has garnered a considerable base of support in both Pakistan and Britain.

67 Islamic State’s *al-Naba* newsletter accessed via: <https://jihadology.net/2020/10/22/new-issue-of-the-islamic-states-newsletter-al-naba-257/>.

68 Libby Brooks, “Man admits murder of Glasgow shopkeeper Asad Shah,” *The Guardian*, July 7, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/jul/07/man-admits-murder-of-glasgow-shopkeeper-asad-shah-shawlands>.

69 See for example: Graham Mann, “HIGH RISK Extremist hate killer Tanveer Ahmed who murdered Glasgow shopkeeper branded terror threat 2 years after switching jails,” *The Scottish Sun*, July 12, 2022, <https://www.thescottishsun.co.uk/news/9150142/tanveer-ahmed-branded-terror-threat-switching-jails/>.

70 Libby Brooks, “Scottish Muslim groups fail to attend Ahmadi anti-extremism event,” *The Guardian*, April 18, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/apr/18/scottish-muslim-groups-ahmadi-anti-extremism-campaign-launch-glasgow>.

71 Secunder Kermani and Sajid Iqbal, “Murderer Tanveer Ahmed inspires Pakistani hardliners from Scottish jail,” *BBC News*, March 1, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-39112840>.

72 *Ibid.*

Indeed, Ahmed was far from alone in his support for Qadri, as a number of figures in institutions expressed sympathy or even outright support, particularly upon the assassin's execution in Pakistan in early 2016.⁷³ Connecting Ahmed, Qadri, and the religious figures that support them is the increasingly animated anti-blasphemy current within Barelvism.

Similarly, in 2020, just a month before Paty's killing, two office workers were wounded in Paris at the former premises of *Charlie Hebdo* magazine, just as the trial for co-conspirators for that attack got underway in France. The attacker was apparently unaware that *Charlie Hebdo*'s offices had moved since the 2015 attack.

The event itself was largely overshadowed by the killing of Paty, and it was thought that the attacker fell into the recent trend of amateurish and low casualty jihadist attacks. However, the attacker was part of a Barelvi extremist network operating in Europe called *Gabar*.⁷⁴ Gabar is influenced by the Pakistani political party Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), which has been at the forefront of blasphemy controversies in Pakistan.⁷⁵ A supporter of the group in Britain was recently found to have posted threatening messages online, including photos of Paty's severed head.⁷⁶

These undercurrents within Barelvism have also manifested in affairs which have not (yet) ended with violence, such as the protests against the screening of *The Lady of Heaven* film in the United Kingdom, as well as the 2021 protests against the schoolteacher who showed *Charlie Hebdo* cartoons in a lesson in Batley, West Yorkshire.⁷⁷

One of the most influential figures in the Batley schoolteacher controversy was a local religious leader who has expressed support for Khadim Rizvi, who founded the TLP in Pakistan to uphold blasphemy laws.⁷⁸ Rizvi has openly supported both Qadri and Ahmed, and the likeness of both men can be found at TLP rallies.

The following year in 2022, demonstrators turned up at Cineworld cinemas in various towns and cities across Britain, demanding that screenings of the film *The Lady of Heaven*—a historical epic written from the perspective of Shia Islamic traditions—be discontinued. A number of the cinema branches caved and ceased showings of the film. Again, some of the key figures in the protests appear to be supporters of Rizvi's anti-blasphemy politics, which extends to the lionizing of religious killers Qadri and Ahmed.⁷⁹

In Britain, Barelvi religious leaders have proven valuable partners in countering extremism and terrorism, as Barelvis are often critical of Islamists and Salafists. But "latterly," as Ed Husain writes in *The Spectator*, some subcultures within Barelvism have become less and less moderate "accusing other Muslim sects – Shiite, Deobandi and Wahhabi – of not loving the Prophet sufficiently."⁸⁰ Of course, like any school or movement within Islam (and like Islam itself), Barelvism is not a monolithic block. There are, however, currents within British and Pakistani Barelvism taking a more active role in the defence of the Prophet and which seem to be increasingly violent in pursuit of this self-appointed role. This trend has been developing largely out of sight, as it involves languages, sectarianism, and terminology that is incredibly complex and tricky to grasp. But doing so will be absolutely crucial to preventing the next round of violence.

73 Secunder Kermani, "How Pakistan inspired the Glasgow shopkeeper killer," *BBC News*, August 10, 2016, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-37032419>.

74 Giovanni Giacalone, "The Barelvi Transnational Terrorist Network Behind the September 2020 Charlie Hebdo Attack: A New and Dynamic Threat Reaches Europe," *European Eye on Radicalization*, September 27, 2022, <https://eeradicalization.com/the-barelvi-transnational-terrorist-network-behind-the-september-2020-charlie-hebdo-attack-a-new-and-dynamic-threat-reaches-europe/>.

75 *Ibid.*

76 George Torr & PA news agency, "Man who praised Samuel Paty murder found guilty of terrorism offences," *BBC News*, March 27, 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-nottinghamshire-65086949>.

77 "130 imams and scholars urge PM to condemn Batley school teacher," *5Pillars*, April 2, 2021, <https://5pillarsuk.com/2021/04/02/130-imams-and-scholars-urge-pm-to-condemn-batley-school-teacher/>.

78 Tweet from @Habibi_UK https://twitter.com/habibi_uk/status/1376477874627182593?s=20&t=cTJvnXAc9eKfDzt-uIz0w.

79 Tweet from @Habibi_UK https://twitter.com/habibi_uk/status/1538966902223306752?s=20&t=cTJvnXAc9eKfDzt-uIz0w.

80 Ed Husain, "The Lady of Heaven protestors don't represent British Muslims," *The Spectator*, June 18, 2022, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/who-speaks-for-britains-modest-muslims/>.

The Nature of Blasphemy Violence

“Terrorism,” according to Brian Jenkins, “is theatre.” But do blasphemy killings fit neatly into this configuration? There are characteristics to many of the episodes of violence which suggest a specific and sacrificial quality that goes beyond mere publicity for the cause. In some cases, the killings take the shape of ritualistic slaughter, with a particular ferocity which stands out even against the excessive standards of violent Islamists.

What’s more, the frenzied nature of the attacks, often characterized by multiple stabbings, shootings, throat-slitting, and either attempted or successful decapitations, seem remarkably consistent whether carried out by Salafi-Jihadists or by supporters and agents of the Iranian regime.

“Surely We Can Talk About This?”

As a case study, take the murder of Van Gogh in the streets of Amsterdam in 2004 by Bouyeri. As previously discussed, this was one of Europe’s first experiences with ‘homegrown’ jihadist terror after 9/11 and signaled the beginning of jihadist retaliation for insults against Islam and the Prophet, taking over from the Iranian regime.

Van Gogh, no stranger to controversy, was already known as an outspoken critic of Islam and multiculturalism. Indeed, he had previously referred to Muslims as a “fifth column” in the Netherlands.⁸¹ It was the film *Submission*, though, which earned both him and Hirsi Ali death threats upon its first showings in the summer of 2004. With characteristic swagger, Van Gogh declined police protection.⁸²

On the morning of November 2 of that year, several months after the film’s release, Van Gogh was leaving his Amsterdam home when he was approached by Bouyeri. Witnesses noted the calm with which Bouyeri proceeded to shoot Van Gogh, first in the stomach, before squeezing the trigger again and again and again, pounding a volley of eight bullets into his victim’s body.⁸³

Again with unsettling composure, Bouyeri drew a large knife with which he sliced Van Gogh’s neck. He then buried the same blade into his victim’s chest, before stabbing a five-page letter to Van Gogh’s lifeless body. In the letter, the killer promised Hirsi Ali a similar fate.

Picking up on the brutal and ritualistic quality of the murder, Ian Buruma described how Van Gogh’s body lay in the street, “slaughtered like a sacrificial animal.”⁸⁴ When his work was done, Bouyeri kicked Van Gogh’s corpse before walking to a nearby park where he awaited police and, presumably, his own martyrdom (something he was denied by taking a bullet to the leg before being arrested).

In their discussion of the murder, Edien Bartels and Martijn de Koning came to the same conclusion as Buruma: “The way the murder was committed suggests that the mode of the assassination mattered to the perpetrator: it was to be a ritual killing.”⁸⁵

From Bouyeri’s apartment, a variety of militant Islamist literature was recovered, much of it relating to the oppression of Muslims worldwide as well as videos of the killings of various supposed enemies of Islam. Bouyeri’s multimedia stash included the filmed beheading of the *Wall Street Journal*’s Daniel Pearl, who was kidnapped and killed in Pakistan in 2002.⁸⁶

Bouyeri targeted Van Gogh for his perceived insults against Islam, but his belief in militant Islamist ideology extended to justifying violence against an array of enemies. Like the *Charlie Hebdo* attackers over a decade later, Bouyeri was not a random angered believer spontaneously lashing out in response to an offensive provocation. Both of these attacks were perpetrated by committed adherents to a Salafi-Jihadist worldview.

81 Ian Buruma, *Murder in Amsterdam: The Death of Theo Van Gogh and the Limits of Tolerance* (London: Atlantic Books) p.2.

82 Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *Infidel* (Atria, 2008) p. 314.

83 Ian Buruma, *Murder in Amsterdam* p.2.

84 Ian Buruma, *Murder in Amsterdam* p. 1-3.

85 Martijn de Koning, “Submission and a Ritual Murder: The Transnational Aspects of a Local Conflict and Protest,” *Local Battles, Global Stakes: The Globalization of Local Conflicts and the Localization of Global Interests*. Salman and De Theije (eds.) 2008. https://www.academia.edu/2403769/Submission_and_a_Ritual_Murder_The_Transnational_Aspects_of_a_Local_Conflict_and_Protest.

86 *Ibid* p.3.

Bouyeri's letter was saturated in religious fury. The discourse would have been completely alien and incomprehensible to most Dutchmen and women of the time, but here was a Dutchman, born and raised, writing screeds like the below:

Death, Miss Hirshi [sic] Ali, is the common theme of all that exists. You, me and the rest of creation cannot disconnect from this truth. There shall be a Day where one soul cannot help another soul. A Day with terrible tortures and torments. A Day where the unjust shall force from their tongues horrible screams. Screams, Miss Hirshi Ali, that will cause shivers to roll down one's spine; that will make hairs stand up from heads. People will be seen drunk with fear while they are not drunk. FEAR shall fill the atmosphere on that Great Day.⁸⁷

Bouyeri's justifications for the murder of Van Gogh and his threats against Hirsi Ali are noteworthy not just for the blood-soaked rage, but also because they mostly eschew the broader political narratives which Salafijihadists (and particularly Bin Laden's al-Qaeda) had sought to popularize in order to justify their campaign of terror against civilians. These narratives are notably absent despite the fact that the materials seized from Bouyeri's home suggest he was immersed in this rhetoric. In other screeds, Bouyeri described the "dark Satanic forces" closing in on the Muslim world. He warned of powerful Jewish cabals and Muslim leaders who had "sold themselves as cheap whores for the West and allow the spirits and souls of Muslim youth to be poisoned by the poison of kufr (unbelief)."⁸⁸ Bouyeri can be found situated more squarely in the worldview of Bin Laden and his followers when he wrote that: "The death and torture of our brothers and sisters must be redeemed with your own blood. You have become targets everywhere. ... Life will become Hell for you and you will not find rest until our brothers and sisters have it."⁸⁹

None of this, though, made it to the letter Bouyeri stabbed to his victim's body, nor to his courtroom antics and rants. Bouyeri, it would seem, wanted to leave absolutely no confusion as to why Van Gogh was murdered and why Hirsi Ali was deserving of the same fate. They had insulted Islam.

At trial, Bouyeri told the court how he had no intention of giving a political speech before directly addressing Van Gogh's mother, Anneke Van Gogh: "the story that I felt insulted as a Moroccan, or because he called me a goat fucker, that is all nonsense. I acted out of faith. And I made it clear that if it had been my own father, or my little brother, I would have done the same thing."

Bouyeri continued: "You can send all your psychologists and all your psychiatrists, and all your experts, but I'm telling you, you will never understand. You cannot understand. And I'm telling you, if I had the chance to be freed and the chance to repeat what I did on the second of November, wallahi [by Allah] I'm telling you, I would do exactly the same." Bouyeri also explained his religious obligation to "cut off the heads of all those who insult Allah and his prophet."⁹⁰

Even against the backdrop of 9/11 and the 2004 Madrid train bombings, there was something almost uniquely callous about Bouyeri's actions, unfolding in broad daylight in the streets of a major European capital. What sets apart Bouyeri's ritualistic slaughter of Van Gogh was described by criminologist, Simon Cottee: "...[Bouyeri's] actions can scarcely be described as rational or instrumental, since they were not designed to further Bouyeri's material interests, nor were they intended to strategically further a wider cause. Bouyeri's chief intention was not to inspire fear or to coerce anyone into doing anything; his intention, rather, was to punish Van Gogh—for gratuitously insulting and dishonoring Islam and its Prophet. His actions, then, were not instrumental, but expressive, and were carried out for their own sake."⁹¹

As Cottee argues, a close inspection of Van Gogh's murder challenges some of the presumptions which abound

87 Parts of Bouyeri's letter reproduced in, (the extra 'H' in "Ayaan Hirshi Ali" appears in the original text.) <https://www.andrewstuttaford.com/archive/2004/11/12/how-enlightenment-dies-dialogue-reason%E2%80%94and-in-response-savagery>.

88 Simon Cottee, "We Need to Talk About Mohammad: Criminology, Theistic Violence and the Murder of Theo Van Gogh," *The British Journal of Criminology*, Volume 54, Issue 6, November 2014, pp. 981–1001 <https://academic.oup.com/bjc/article/54/6/981/392247>.

89 Quoted in *Ibid*.

90 Quoted in Ian Buruma, *Murder in Amsterdam*. pp.188-90.

91 Simon Cottee, "Mind slaughter: The neutralizations of jihadi Salafism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 33 (4). (2010) pp. 330-352, <https://kar.kent.ac.uk/35748/1/Cottee%20S%20Mind%20Slaughter%20The%20Neutralizations%20of%20Jihadi%20Salafism.pdf>

in response to jihadist terror. Is religious extremism merely a camouflage for more personal or material motives? This refrain made a comeback with the emergence of IS, which was at times characterized as little more than a band of criminals and thugs who were simply “using” religion to justify their violent criminal ambition.⁹²

Sixteen Years Later: The Murder of Samuel Paty

Similarly ferocious and ritualistic characteristics can be observed in Paty’s killing, 16 years later. The murder by decapitation was perpetrated by a Chechen jihadist, Abdoullakh Abouyedovich Anzorov, who had arrived in France with his family as a young child.

Again, Anzorov’s attack was almost ceremonial and highly targeted against the individual transgressor. The perpetrator, still a teenager, appears—like Bouyeri before him—to have conducted the killing with a degree of calm and precision. Gilles Kepel has speculated that Anzorov’s proficiency in the act of beheading was owed to the rite-of-passage decapitation of sheep sometimes carried out by young Chechen men.⁹³

When the deed was done and the teacher’s remains lay in the street, Anzorov calmly texted jihadists in the Levant with whom he was in contact before being shot by police, achieving the martyrdom that had evaded Bouyeri.⁹⁴ Anzorov also posted a photograph of the newly severed head to social media, bragging that he had executed one of the French President’s “dogs of hell” who dared to insult Muhammad.⁹⁵ Of course, all of this is in itself highly theatrical, but the precisely targeted, cold, and callous nature of the killing is worthy of remark.

In Kepel’s words, Anzorov “nurtured his own plan to avenge the Prophet” and in fact appears to have actively scoured the internet and Islamist online networks on the hunt for potential enemies of Islam as targets. He eventually stumbled upon an online controversy swirling around Paty.⁹⁶ Initially localized, the furore had started to reach wider audiences online when certain Islamist actors became involved, including a known pro-Hamas agitator.⁹⁷ Despite fancying himself as a jihadist, Anzorov was in tune to the controversies and *cause célèbres* of the domestic French Islamist scene. He was a killer in search of a target, something which the Islamists’ singling out and naming of the schoolteacher dutifully provided.

In his last days, Paty reportedly feared for his life and carried a hammer in his bag, acutely aware of the mortal risks associated with being at the center of blasphemy allegations.⁹⁸ Despite the efforts taken to protect himself, Anzorov identified his target by bribing local students with cash. With the 37-year-old father of one and lifelong teacher in his sights, Anzorov exacted his grisly retribution.

“Holy Rage”

Other attacks connected to the fallout from *The Satanic Verses* and Khomeini’s fatwa share some of the same characteristics, even if they appear to have been perpetrated by agents or proxies of the Iranian state.

In July 1991, *The Satanic Verses*’ Italian translator was stabbed and struck repeatedly in a frenzied assault in Milan. The assailant—according to the victim’s account—claimed a connection to the Iranian embassy in Rome. Although severely injured, the 61-year-old Capriolo survived. Just days later, the novel’s Japanese translator was not so lucky. Subjected to a similarly vicious assault and suffering stab wounds to the neck, face and hands, Igarashi was murdered outside his office at Tsukuba University.

92 As just one example, a Canadian government minister asserted that ISIS was “in fact, basically a criminal organization with a religious veneer on it.” Chris Hall, “Criminal organization, religious extremists? Words matter when it comes to ISIS,” CBC, February 4, 2016, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/isis-chris-hall-1.3432664>.

93 Gilles Kepel, “The Murder of Samuel Paty,” *Liberties Journal* (Volume 1, Number 3, 2021), <https://libertiesjournal.com/articles/issue/volume-01-number-03/>.

94 *Ibid.*

95 Zamira Rahim, Pierre Bairin and Melissa Bell, “A teacher is beheaded, and France’s war over secularism, freedom of speech and religious equality reignites,” *CNN*, October 21, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/10/21/europe/france-secularism-ma-cron-samuel-paty-intl/index.html>.

96 Gilles Kepel, *Liberties Journal*, p.20.

97 Laurence Bindner and Raphael Gluck, “Social Media and the Murder of Samuel Paty,” *Global Network on Extremism and Technology Research*, November 6, 2020, <https://gnet-research.org/2020/11/06/social-media-and-the-murder-of-samuel-paty/>.

98 Jérémie Pham-Lê, Vincent Gautronneau, “«Il avait clairement peur» : les derniers jours de Samuel Paty, professeur traqué,” *Le Parisien*, November 20, 2022, <https://www.leparisien.fr/faits-divers/samuel-paty-craignait-pour-sa-vie-les-derniers-jours-angoissants-dun-professeur-traque-20-11-2022-3J266WYFGZFBDK2UWM5GD3TCRU.php>.

It is possible there was some coordination on the part of the Iranian state, especially when considering the regime's long and well-documented use of terrorist proxies and even its diplomatic infrastructure to conduct assassinations. Nonetheless, again these are frenzied attacks with blades and little effort to appeal to some wider cause or motive. Neither perpetrator was ever caught, no statement of responsibility ever made, and no message left at the site of the attacks.

This kind of righteous, frenzied violence would eventually catch up with *The Satanic Verses*' author himself over three decades later, as Rushdie was subjected to a brutal stabbing assault while on stage in New York, during which he sustained permanent and life-changing injuries.

Even for the violence not necessarily directed or inspired by either the jihadists or the Iranian state, similar characteristics can be observed. Tanveer Ahmed launched into a furious assault of the shopkeeper, Asad Shah, for the latter's claims to be a Prophet in videos uploaded to YouTube. Ahmed stabbed his victim repeatedly leading him to collapse to the floor, before the attacker finished the job by stomping on Shah's head. Upon sentencing, the murderer cried to cheers from his supporters in the public gallery: "Muhammad is the Prophet. He is the only one."⁹⁹

There have also been other unsuccessful plots that are much more befitting of the style of attack associated with al-Qaeda, such as the 2009 Mickey Mouse plot against *Jyllands-Posten*. Headley had wished to take hostages inside the newspaper and to throw their severed heads out of the windows into the streets below, combining the visceral cruelty meted out against perceived blasphemers with the theater of al-Qaeda "spectaculars."

Nonetheless, the killings detailed in this section take on a markedly different character to the mass casualty bombings and shootings which most people have come to associate with jihadist terror. The killings of Van Gogh, Shah, Paty, and the violence against individuals connected to *The Satanic Verses* stand out as a form of ritualized punishment and revenge. Where decapitation has been attempted or successful, this act serves as a form of degradation and humiliation which goes well beyond the taking of the individual's life. Walters, Bouyeri's contemporary, described Bouyeri's act as a kind of "Holy rage."¹⁰⁰

Just after committing his attack, with Van Gogh's mutilated body lying in the street, Bouyeri told a bystander: "Now you know what you people can expect in the future."¹⁰¹

The Enemies of Islam

In May 2010, the British MP Stephen Timms was stabbed twice in the stomach by Roshonara Choudhry at a constituency surgery in East London. Choudhry was influenced by al-Qaeda and the sermons of Awlaki. In Choudhry's eyes, Timms had not blasphemed but was a legitimate target thanks to his parliamentary vote for the Iraq war.¹⁰² The Revolution Muslim website praised the attack and labeled Timms an "enemy of Islam"—another type of target subject to discriminate jihadist violence.

In 2013, three years after Timms's stabbing, a man posing as a postman tried to assassinate the Danish commentator Lars Hedegaard, who was an outspoken critic of Islam and Islamism.¹⁰³ There is some evidence the attacker was Basil Hassan, a well-known Danish Salafi-jihadist who would go on to assume a senior role among IS foreign fighters as well as taking a Yazidi slave for himself.¹⁰⁴ Hedegaard's case is interesting in that it's unclear if any specific charges of insulting the Prophet were ever directed his way. Rather, he was seen as an enemy of Islam for

99 Nazia Parveen, "Glasgow murder of Asad Shah spurred by sectarianism in Pakistan," *The Guardian*, August 9, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/aug/09/glasgow-of-asad-shah-spurred-by-sectarianism-in-pakistan>.

100 Author correspondence with Jason Walters. January 2023.

101 Bryan Appleyard, "A shock to the system" *The Times*, October 8, 2006, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/a-shock-to-the-system-2sw8sswnfjr>.

102 "MP Stephen Timms stabbed 'in revenge for Iraq war,'" *BBC News*, November 1, 2010, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-11667620>.

103 "Denmark shooting: Gunman targets Islam critic Hedegaard," *BBC News*, February 5, 2013, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-21341878>.

104 Mette Mayli Albæk, Puk Damsgård, Mahmoud Shiekh Ibrahim, Troels Kingo, Jens Vithner, "The Controller: How Basil Hassan Launched Islamic State Terror into the Skies," *CTC Sentinel*, May 2020, Volume 13, Issue 5, <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/the-controller-how-basil-hassan-launched-islamic-state-terror-into-the-skies/>.

his outspoken criticism of the faith, and thus, he was deemed to have insulted Islam.

Other plots fit this ambiguous trend. In 2022, it was reported that a man had been arrested in connection with a surprisingly sophisticated IS-linked plot to assassinate the 43rd President of the United States, George W. Bush.¹⁰⁵

Unfortunately, there have been successful assassinations as well. In October 2021, British MP Sir David Amess was stabbed to death during a constituency surgery by the 25-year-old Ali Harbi Ali, who had looked up the following list online: “523 MPs who carried out a vote to carry out airstrikes in Syria.”¹⁰⁶

The possibility that the targeting of public figures perceived to be hostile to Islam and Muslims without specific charges such as blasphemy should not be discounted. These may include journalists, politicians, prominent ex-Muslims, and even Muslim critics of Islamism and liberal Muslims. For example, in the aftermath of the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, IS’s official propaganda eagerly listed Muslim leaders to have condemned the massacre.¹⁰⁷

Additionally, there is the previously discussed phenomenon of individuals potentially latching on to the latest *cause célèbre* of non-violent Islamists in the West, as was the case with Paty’s killer. A later incident which involved the taking of hostages at a synagogue in Texas by a man from Blackburn in the North of England looks to be a similar case. The hostage taker demanded the release of Aafia Siddiqui, the Pakistani woman nicknamed “Lady al-Qaeda” by the press, who is currently serving an 86-year prison sentence in Fort Worth, Texas. Siddiqui’s case has been a long held and highly animating cause for legal Islamist groups in both Pakistan and the United Kingdom.

This incident and others point to the potential for some individuals to take matters into their own hands based on the agitation and campaigning of legal and ostensibly non-violent Islamist groups. Laurence Bindner and Raphael Gluck described the dynamic in Paty’s case as a supply and demand issue, whereby a jihadist in demand of a target was provided one by the naming and shaming of local Islamists and other actors.¹⁰⁸

There is little to indicate that the Blackburn hostage taker was a jihadist but was nonetheless sufficiently moved by the perceived injustice of Siddiqui’s case to take violent action. Given that Islamist groups in the West can frequently be found naming and shaming perceived Islamophobes, there is a risk of providing the supply to the demand of violent individuals looking to take the defense of Islam and Muslims into their own hands. Kepel has proposed a similar idea in the form of “djihadisme d’atmosphère,” or “atmospheric jihadism,” in which “there are first entrepreneurs of anger who designate targets,” before “other people will decide to take action.”¹⁰⁹

Conclusion

The Logic of Blasphemy Killings

More blood will likely be spilled in Western countries for transgressing the Islamic blasphemy taboos put in place by the assassins of the Iranian regime, al-Qaeda, or IS.

Despite the fact that the attack was claimed by AQAP, IS official propaganda lauded the 2015 massacre at *Charlie Hebdo* as part of its infamous “eliminating the grey zone” of coexistence strategy.¹¹⁰ This strategy roughly follows the writing of jihadi theorist Abu Musab al-Suri, who advocated for a turn away from the Bin Ladenist strategy of attacking the ‘far enemy’ in the United States and towards transforming European streets into the new theatres of jihad. The objective was to provoke a backlash from both the state and from the non-Muslim majority populations

105 Seamus Hughes, “A human smuggling ring, a plot to assassinate George W. Bush and an evolving threat,” *NBC News*, June 3, 2022, <https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/fbi-uncovers-plot-assassinate-president-george-w-bush-evolving-threat-rc-na31632>.

106 “Sir David Amess MP murder trial hears accused targeted Michael Gove,” *BBC News*, March 21, 2022, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-essex-60822935>.

107 *Dabiq* Issue 7 (2015).

108 Bindner and Gluck, “Social Media and the Murder of Samuel Paty,” *Global Network on Extremism and Technology*, <https://gnet-research.org/2020/11/06/social-media-and-the-murder-of-samuel-paty/>.

109 Rémi Monti, “Djihadisme d’atmosphère : « Des cibles sont désignées et d’autres personnes passent à l’acte » explique Gilles Kepel,” *Radio Classique*, February 12, 2021, <https://www.radioclassique.fr/societe/djihadisme-datmosphere-des-cibles-sont-designees-et-dautres-personnes-passent-a-lacte-explique-gilles-kepel/>.

110 *Dabiq* Issue 7.

of Europe, forcing Muslims into the arms of jihadists.

Arguably, IS's bloodiest atrocities, such as the November 2015 Paris attacks, the Nice 2016 truck attack, and the Manchester Arena bombing proved just the opposite. Western states did not turn to draconian repression of their Muslim citizens, nor was there large-scale backlash against ordinary Muslims from the non-Muslim populous, and of course, Muslims were not driven into the arms of jihadists. On the contrary, the large attacks which struck Europe between 2014-17 demonstrated just how pitifully small the constituency for indiscriminate mass slaughter really is. One could say they *eliminated the grey zone*, but only insofar as they exposed the jihadists and united the overwhelming majority in condemnation of the bloodshed.

In contrast, more discriminate attacks, especially those linked to blasphemy, tend to attract many more shades of sympathy, support, relativism, and apologia—including among sections of academia and the press. Away from the 'commentariat,' there is impact at the grassroots too. The aftermath of the *Charlie Hebdo* attack saw world leaders and over a million people march through the streets of Paris, wielding pens and placards adorned with "*Je Suis Charlie*." But away from the cameras at Place de la Republique, reports emerged of teachers struggling to maintain control as moments of respect and solidarity were disrupted by students.¹¹¹ These students may not have identified with the terrorists, but whether through their faith or scepticism towards *liberté d'expression*, felt just as unable to identify as *Charlie*.

Europe's non-violent Islamists too, are quick to mobilize and move into the rhetorical terrain opened up by jihadist attacks. The more moderate and PR-savvy will of course offer condemnation, even if mealy-mouthed, while others will take to the airwaves, to social media and newspaper columns to offer obfuscation and relativism, advocating for some compromise on freedom of expression in order to stem the violence. Where Islamists are quick to condemn and distance themselves from the latest round of jihadist mass casualty violence (and often sincerely), on blasphemy, the ideological distance between non-violent Islamists and jihadists is reduced. And, as discussed, similar patterns of tacit or explicit support for killers can be observed among followers of the growing anti-blasphemy movement within Barelvi extremist circles.

Europe's jihadists are currently recalibrating. Some have already come to the conclusion that the mass casualty, indiscriminate slaughter of 2014-17 did not serve their objectives.¹¹² As the movement recalibrates and strategizes for their next phase, it will not have escaped notice that highly targeted acts of righteous violence against blasphemers and perceived enemies of Islam allow Salafi-jihadists to pose as defenders of the faith and to attract much more sympathy and support than some their other operations.

For example, while such polling must be taken with a pinch of salt, over a quarter of young French Muslims surveyed said they would not condemn the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks,¹¹³ while a similar share of British Muslims said they sympathized with the motives of the killers.¹¹⁴ These polls do not automatically equal a large reservoir of terrorist supporters, and they still represent the minority opinion, but they do show that support and sympathy is considerably higher in the case of blasphemy violence. (It must also be said at this point that support for violence in response to speech has also gained traction among non-Muslims in the West in recent years.)¹¹⁵

It is also not outside the realm of possibility that such targeted violence is expanded beyond just accused blasphemers to include perceived Islamophobic politicians or commentators or even to outspoken Muslim critics of Islamism. As previously mentioned, in the wake of the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, IS's official propaganda named and shamed a range of other figures as well as Muslim leaders who had condemned the murder of cartoonists

111 Henri Astier, "Charlie Hebdo attack: French values challenged in schools," *BBC News*, January 30, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-31027152>

112 Jihadists interviewed by Hugo Micheron criticised the attacks against France as counter-productive. Hugo Micheron, *Le jihadisme français: Quartiers, Syrie, Prisons* (Gallimard)

113 "Droit Au Blasphème, Caricatures, Liberté D'expression... Les Français Sont Ils Encore « Charlie » ?" *IFOP*, September 1, 2020, <https://www.ifop.com/publication/droit-au-blaspheme-caricatures-liberte-dexpression-les-francais-sont-ils-encore-charlie/>

114 "27 per cent UK Muslims sympathise with motives of Charlie Hebdo killers, poll reveals," *The Jewish Chronicle*, February 25, 2015, <https://www.thejc.com/news/uk/27-per-cent-uk-muslims-sympathise-with-motives-of-charlie-hebdo-killers-poll-reveals-1.65295>

115 Catherine Rampell, "A chilling study shows how hostile college students are toward free speech," *Washington Post*, September 18, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/a-chilling-study-shows-how-hostile-college-students-are-toward-free-speech/2017/09/18/cbb1a234-9ca8-11e7-9083-fbdfdf6804c2_story.html

and journalists.¹¹⁶

If Europe and the West's jihadists—many of whom are due to be released from prison in the months and years ahead—move away from indiscriminate violence, this does not automatically mean a philosophical renunciation of violence. The non-violence, like some other Islamist movements, is strategic and contextual. Acts of violence against perceived blasphemers and other enemies of Islam would be both theologically legitimate and potentially strategically useful for the movement.

In fact, the indiscriminate attacks of the early 2000s and during the IS period may even be something of an anomaly. More discriminate attacks against Jewish targets and symbols, agents of the state, soldiers, or perceived blasphemers have if anything been a more consistent feature of jihadism in the West. One possible scenario for the future sees Europe's (and the West's) population of Salafi-jihadists expend their energies on dawah rather than mass casualty attacks and efforts to spark civil conflict, but which will remain willing to lash out in bursts of righteous violence against individuals or groups deemed to have insulted Islam.

The Paradoxes of Blasphemy Violence

On the other hand, blasphemy violence is full of paradoxes. One of the most obvious paradoxes is that, aside from the highly targeted, highly discriminate, and often brutally dehumanizing violence targeted against individuals, there are undoubtedly episodes and elements of collective blame during these controversies. One need only recall the flag burning and boycotts directed at Denmark and France, respectively, following the *Jyllands-Posten* affair and in the aftermath of Paty's murder. Awlaki has also legitimized attacking *any* Western targets in response to blasphemous cartoons of Muhammad, as it was the entire Western system that was responsible.

Another paradox arrives in the sincere feelings of hurt and rage which perceived insults against Islam, Allah, and the Prophet can inspire. Apparently, such sincere hurt does not stop many actors who would flex their own religious credentials from exploiting the affairs for political gain. This cynicism can be traced all the way to the original fatwa from Ayatollah Khomeini, who was in desperate need of a distraction following the catastrophe of the Iran-Iraq War and who was jostling for leadership of the Muslim world with the Saudis. Similarly, in an episode detailed in Klausen's book *The Cartoons that Shook the World*¹¹⁷ and Lorenzo Vidino's work on the organization,¹¹⁸ the Muslim Brotherhood largely elected to stay on the sidelines of the initial furore surrounding the *Jyllands-Posten* cartoons, mostly out of strategic considerations. For some of the Brothers, politics—at least temporarily—trumped belief.

Later, President Erdoğan of Turkey has been at the forefront of grievance-mongering against his rival, France, as well as Sweden, for a new, unfolding blasphemy controversy in 2023. We see the principle of collective blame: a far-right provocateur burned the Quran, and so Swedish flags are burned in the Middle East and Erdoğan uses the opportunity to impede Sweden's efforts to join NATO. In all of these affairs, the difference between private individuals or institutions and the wider state and society are either deliberately or ignorantly erased.

Winning the Battle, Losing the War

The data collected and the discussion in this report focuses on the attacks and acts of violence, but this phenomenon cannot be reduced to the attacks—successful or not.

The true story of the violence against perceived blasphemers since *The Satanic Verses* affair is all that is never said. Critics will not mourn the loss of vulgar cartoons or offensive placards, but the violence against the individuals behind acts like these are only the most visible and visceral reminders of the terms of enforcement. The real story of blasphemy violence is every book never written, every painting never painted, every critique of religion never voiced, and every historical inquiry never made.

Historian Tom Holland did not intend to provoke or offend with his documentary investigating the origins of Islam, a religion followed by nearly two billion people, yet he received death threats for his work. *The Lady of Heaven* was a film made by Muslims for Muslims, yet its showing was stopped in cinemas. Or consider the art

116 *Dabiq* Issue 7.

117 Jytte Klausen, *The Cartoons that Shook the World*. (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2009).

118 Lorenzo Vidino, *The Closed Circle: Joining and Leaving the Muslim Brotherhood* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020).

history professor who lost her job for showing a 14th century masterpiece of Persian art, because it depicts the Prophet Muhammad¹¹⁹—just like many other works of art from Shia traditions.

Fewer and fewer people will wish to touch these subjects for fear of violent retribution. Conversely, this makes transgressing the norms enforced by blasphemy assassins more likely, as the bar for transgression is lowered further and further with each new controversy or episode of violence.

The impact of *The Satanic Verses* fatwa has been felt in other ways more broadly, too. Kenan Malik wrote that many Western liberals had internalized the logic of the fatwa, “Nearly two decades on from *The Satanic Verses*, Western liberals had become much more attuned to Islamist sensitivities and less willing to challenge them. They had, in the post-Rushdie world, effectively internalized the fatwa.”¹²⁰ Malik continues to outline how free speech prior to *The Satanic Verses* affair was seen as a foundational value, an inherent good, in Western countries, but that post-fatwa, freedom of speech became to be viewed as more and more problematic, “because it could offend as well as harm.”¹²¹

Since Malik wrote his book *From Fatwa to Jihad*, the trend he observed has arguably accelerated. Free speech itself is sometimes framed as a far-right talking point rather than the “bulwark of liberty” that it is. Since the fatwa, many Western states have abolished blasphemy laws but have introduced secularized versions under hate speech legislation.

Despite the fatwa, *The Satanic Verses* continues to be published, sold, and read. But the impact of the fatwa has been deeper and longer lasting. Christopher Hitchens described knowledge of its presence as a “hidden partner in our cultural and academic and publishing and broadcasting world: a shadowy figure that has, uninvited, drawn up a chair to the table,” resulting in extensive self-censorship on matters relating to Islam, even that which is far from provocative or insulting.¹²² But more than that, as Malik has argued, many in our own societies have “internalised the logic of the fatwa,” and this has led to a severe narrowing of acceptable speech, sanctions, and even increased acceptance of violence in response to speech. Yes, *The Satanic Verses* continued to be published, but the fatwa still casts its shadow over the West and over dissenters in Muslim majority countries. The impact of the fatwa and the subsequent terror in the name of defending Islam and the Prophet has been deeper, more pervasive, and more internalized in our own minds and our own societies. In other words, the fatwa *worked*.

119 Christiane Gruber, “An Academic Is Fired Over a Medieval Painting of the Prophet Muhammad,” *New Lines Magazine*, December 22, 2022, <https://newlinesmag.com/argument/academic-is-fired-over-a-medieval-painting-of-the-prophet-muhammad/>.

120 Malik, *From Fatwa to Jihad*. P. 145.

121 *Ibid.* p. 151.

122 Christopher Hitchens, “Assassins of the Mind,” *Vanity Fair*, January 5, 2009, <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2009/02/hitchens200902>.

Blasphemy Plots and Attacks in the West*

Using open-source information and data provided by the Western Jihadism Project at Brandeis University, this table compiles information relating to threats, plots and acts of violence and terrorism against individuals and institutions accused of blasphemy against Islam in Western countries, or here blasphemy has been cited by perpetrators/suspects as the motive for their act. “Blasphemy” is a catch all term to refer to various offences in Islam, usually referring to insults against Islam and/or the Prophet Muhammad.

The information is limited to attacks in Western Europe, North America and Australasia (plus Japan and Turkey), and therefore does not include unrest or attacks against embassies and diplomatic posts of Western countries around the world – of which there have been several in the wake of blasphemy controversies.

Terminology

Actualized = refers to those plots which came to the point of a violent act without intervention by authorities. **Successful** = an act of violence was carried out, irrespective of whether Fatalities were inflicted. **Failed** = the plotter or perpetrator failed to launch their attack or harmed only themselves. **Vague** = unclear that the plot or threat was developed to the point of capability to carry out. **Foiled** = plots where authorities intervened to prevent potential attack. **Threats** = refers to threats of violence rather than concrete plot.

The terms ‘plots’ is used despite its imperfections, such as in the case of threats of violence or possibly spontaneous acts of violence which are included.

DATE	EVENT	PLOT TYPE/ FATALITIES	LOCATION	PERPETRATOR(S)	MOTIVE	PERPETRATOR AFFILIA- TION OR GROUP	OUTCOME
February 1, 1989	Bookshop Firebombing in California Two bookshops selling <i>The Satanic Verses</i> in Berkeley, California and one newspaper in New York are targeted with firebombs. A pipe bomb is found inside Cody's bookstore in California.	Plot Type: Actualized, Successful 0 Fatalities	Berkeley, California, USA	Unknown	The bookshops publicly announced their intention to stock <i>The Satanic Verses</i> following the fatwa announced by Ayatollah Khomeini, the Supreme Leader of Iran.	Unknown	None
February 1, 1989	Newspaper firebombing in New York	Plot Type: Actualized, Successful 0 Fatalities	New York, New York, USA	Unknown	The newspaper defended Salman Rushdie following the fatwa announced by Ayatollah Khomeini.	Unknown	None
March 29, 1989	Double assassination at Grand Mosque of Brussels Saudi-born Imam Abdullah al-Ahdal and his Tunisian deputy, Salem el-Beher, are shot dead inside the Grand Mosque of Brussels.	Plot Type: Actualized, Successful 2 Fatalities	Brussels, Belgium	Unknown	Imam Abdullah al-Ahdal had previously spoken leniently about Rushdie and criticized Ayatollah Khomeini's fatwa as illegitimate. However, some have expressed doubt that the killings were connected to the fatwa.	Double killing is claimed by Lebanese group, 'Soldiers of the Right.'	Unknown
April 1, 1989	Two London bookshops firebombed Dillon's and Collet's Penguin bookshops are damaged in bombings.	Plot Type: Actualized, Successful 0 Fatalities	London, United Kingdom	Unknown	Ayatollah Khomeini fatwa against <i>The Satanic Verses</i>	Unknown	None

DATE	EVENT	PLOT TYPE/ FATALITIES	LOCATION	PERPETRATOR(S)	MOTIVE	PERPETRATOR AFFILIA- TION OR GROUP	OUTCOME
July 6, 1989	Collet's bookshop bombed	Plot Type: Actual- ized, Successful 0 Fatalities	London, United Kingdom	Unknown	Ayatollah Khomeini fatwa against <i>The Satanic Verses</i>	Unknown	Unknown
August 3, 1989	Man dies in London hotel preparing bomb intended for Salman Rushdie	Plot Type: Actual- ized, Failed 0 Fatalities, 1 Perpetrator killed	London, United Kingdom	Mustafa Mahmoud Mazeh, 21 Guinean-Lebanese	Ayatollah Khomeini fatwa against <i>The Satanic Verses</i>	Police investigated links to Leb- anese terror group Organization of the Strugglers of Islam. There are possible connections to Hezbollah. A plaque is dedicated to the bomber's martyrdom in Tehran.	Perpetrator dies preparing explosives and is honored with plaque in Tehran.
September 3, 1989	Liberty's department store bombing One woman is injured by bomb outside famous Liberty's store in Central London.	Plot Type: Actual- ized, Successful 0 Fatalities	London, United Kingdom	Unknown	Ayatollah Khomeini fatwa against <i>The Satanic Verses</i> . A note was left connecting the bombing to <i>The Satanic Verses</i> .	Unknown	Unknown
September 1, 1989	Penguin bookshop bombs Bomb detonated outside Penguin bookshop in York, England, while a caller tipped off police about bombs outside Penguin book- shops in three other locations.	Plot Type: Actual- ized, Successful 0 Fatalities	York Peterborough Guildford Nottingham, United Kingdom	Unknown	Ayatollah Khomeini fatwa against <i>The Satanic Verses</i>	Unknown	Unknown
February 1, 1990	Promoter of <i>The Satanic Verses</i> is attacked at an event in Japan	Plot Type: Actual- ized, Successful 0 Fatalities Victim, Gianni Pal- ma, is wounded.	Japan	Pakistani national	Ayatollah Khomeini fatwa against <i>The Satanic Verses</i>	Unknown	Unknown
July 3, 1991	<i>The Satanic Verses</i> ' Italian translator is stabbed Ettore Capriolo is attacked by a man who requested a meeting and claimed connection to the Iranian Embassy in Rome.	Plot Type: Actual- ized, Successful 0 Fatalities Victim, Ettore Cap- riolo, is wounded.	Milan, Italy	Unknown assailant, possibly Iranian	Ayatollah Khomeini fatwa against <i>The Satanic Verses</i>	Assailant claimed to have a con- nection to the Iranian Embassy.	Suspect was never caught.

DATE	EVENT	PLOT TYPE/ FATALITIES	LOCATION	PERPETRATOR(S)	MOTIVE	PERPETRATOR AFFILIA- TION OR GROUP	OUTCOME
July 12, 1991	The Satanic Verses' Japanese translator stabbed to death Hitoshi Igarashi is stabbed multiple times and killed outside his office at Tsukuba University.	Plot Type: Actualized, Successful 1 Fatality	Tsukuba University, Japan	Unknown assailant	Ayatollah Khomeini fatwa against <i>The Satanic Verses</i>	Unknown	Suspect evades capture and leaves Japan after the attack.
July 2, 1993	The Sivas massacre in Turkey Aziz Nesin, secularist and translator of <i>The Satanic Verses</i> , is targeted by blasphemy mob. The event venue is set alight.	Plot Type: Actualized, Successful 37 Fatalities Target Aziz Nesin survives.	Sivas, Turkey	Demonstrators, Turkish	The mob's target, Aziz Nesin, had translated and published parts of <i>The Satanic Verses</i> in a newspaper.	No known group affiliation	Initially, 190 suspects were detained, with 124 charged with "attempting to establish a religious state by changing the constitutional order." 124 suspects were handed sentences ranging from 15 to 2.5 years. In 1997, 33 defendants were sentenced to death, although Turkey removed the death penalty in 2002.
October 11, 1993	Norwegian publisher of The Satanic Verses shot William Nygaard, an outspoken advocate for free speech, is shot multiple times outside his home in Oslo and left for dead.	Plot Type: Actualized, Successful 0 Fatalities Victim, William Nygaard, is seriously wounded.	Oslo, Norway	Unknown In 2018, charges are filed against one Lebanese citizen, Khaled Moussawi, and one Iranian.	Ayatollah Khomeini fatwa against <i>The Satanic Verses</i>	Later, charges suggest that there is a connection to the Iranian regime.	In 2018, charges are filed against two men. In 2021, they are identified as an unknown Iranian diplomat and Lebanese citizen, Khaled Moussawi.
June 1, 2002	Bologna fresco plot Italian police intercept a plot to blow up the Basilica di San Petronio in Bologna.	Plot Type: Foiled 0 Fatalities	Bologna, Italy	Libyan al-Qaeda operative is suspected of involvement. Four Moroccan men and one Italian are arrested.	A 15 th century fresco at the Basilica of San Petronio in Bologna based on Dante's <i>Inferno</i> shows Muhammad in hell. The site is the target of another plot in 2006.	Possible directive from al-Qaeda leadership in Afghanistan and Iran as well as connections to the Algeria-based Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC)	Five men (four Moroccan, one Italian) were later released by police due to insufficient evidence.
June 1, 2004	Death threats against "anti-Muslim" Dutch public figures Teenage extremist, Yehya Kaddouri, issues online threats against Pim Fortuyn, Geert Wilders, Theo Van Gogh, and Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Police find bomb making instructions as well as maps of the Hague and addresses of embassies.	Plot Type: Vague, Threats, Foiled 0 Fatalities	Amsterdam, Netherlands	Yehya Kaddouri, 17 Dutch-Moroccan	Kaddouri ascribed to Salafi-jihadist and takfirist ideology. He deemed the public figures he threatened to be anti-Muslim.	Online connections to the Hofstadgroep	Kaddouri is sentenced in 2005 to two years in juvenile detention. He later wrote a book about his radicalization and subsequent deradicalization.

DATE	EVENT	PLOT TYPE/ FATALITIES	LOCATION	PERPETRATOR(S)	MOTIVE	PERPETRATOR AFFILIA- TION OR GROUP	OUTCOME
November 2, 2004	Murder of Theo Van Gogh Filmmaker and public figure Theo Van Gogh is shot, stabbed, and nearly decapitated near his home in Amsterdam. The perpetrator leaves a note stabbed to Van Gogh threatening Ayaan Hirsi Ali.	Plot Type: Actualized, Successful 1 Fatality	Amsterdam, Netherlands	Mohammed Bouyeri, 26 Dutch-Moroccan	Theo Van Gogh worked with Ayaan Hirsi Ali on <i>Submission</i> , a short film critical of violence against women in Islam. The film depicted verses from the Quran onto women's naked bodies.	Radical Islamist network known to Dutch intelligence as the Hofstadgroep	Bouyeri is sentenced to life imprisonment with no possibility of parole.
February 3, 2006	Terror threats at Danish cartoons protests London	Plot Type: Vague, Threats 0 Fatalities	London, United Kingdom	Yassir Sirri Umran Javed Anjem Choudary Abdul Muhid Mizanur Rahman Omar Zaheer Abdul Rahman Saleem	London protests are part of global wave of unrest following <i>Jyllands-Posten</i> newspaper's publication of cartoons of Prophet Muhammad. The men praised Osama Bin Laden and urged the bombing of Denmark and the United States. One man attended the protests dressed as a suicide bomber.	Al-Muhajiroun	Several men are charged with offences ranging from incitement to murder, to stirring up religious and racial hatred as well as disorderly behavior.
March 20, 2006	Die Welt editor targeted by knifeman Man attempts to gain access to offices of German newspaper <i>Die Welt</i> and targets editor Roger Köppel.	Plot Type: Actualized, Successful 0 Fatalities	Berlin, Germany	Amir Cheema, 28 Pakistani student in Germany	<i>Die Welt</i> reprinted the <i>Jyllands-Posten</i> cartoons in solidarity.	Affiliations unknown	Cheema is found dead in cell while awaiting trial. Thousands rally in Pakistan to honor the death.
March 1, 2006	Second Bologna fresco plot Two cells are broken up by Italian authorities. Both had been planning to target the San Petronio basilica in Bologna and the Milan metro system.	Plot Type: Foiled	Bologna, Italy Milan, Italy	Seven individuals arrested of Moroccan and Tunisian nationality	The 15 th century fresco at the Basilica of San Petronio in Bologna based on Dante's <i>Inferno</i> shows the Prophet Muhammad in hell.	Linked to both the GSPC and al-Qaeda	The seven arrested are expelled from Italy.

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July 31, 2006	Attempted Deutsche Bahn train bombing Two unexploded improvised explosive devices are discovered on Deutsche Bahn regional trains in Germany.	Plot Type: Actualized, Failed 0 Fatalities	Cologne, Germany Explosives planted on trains bound for Dortmund and Koblenz	Yusef Mohammed al-Hajj Dib, 22-23 Jihad Hamad, 22-23 Both Lebanese	Perpetrators cited the <i>Jyllands-Posten</i> cartoons as motivation for their attempted attack.	Fatah al-Islam, militant Islamist group influenced by al-Qaeda and based in Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon	Multiple co-conspirators are arrested in Lebanon.
September 5, 2006	Vollsmose terror plot Danish police arrest nine men in Vollsmose neighborhood of Odense after gathering large amounts of TATP and planning attacks in Denmark, including against Flemming Rose, editor of <i>Jyllands-Posten</i> and Danish MP Naser Khader.	Plot Type: Foiled 0 Fatalities	Odense, Denmark	Five perpetrators are aged between 17-35, including: Ahmad Khaldahi Muhammad Zaher Abdallah Andersen	The cell was considering attacks against Flemming Rose, editor of <i>Jyllands-Posten</i> , and Naser Khader, a Syrian-Danish MP who defended the right to publish the cartoons and founded the organization Moderate Muslims in response to the cartoon crisis.	Salafi-jihadist ideology	Ahmad Khaldahi and Muhammad Zaher are handed 11-year prison sentences. Abdallah Andersen sentenced to four years in prison.
February 12, 2008	Plot to kill Kurt Westergaard Danish authorities arrest three in plot to kill Kurt Westergaard.	Plot Type: Foiled 0 Fatalities	Aarhus, Denmark	Danish male, 40 Tunisian male	Kurt Westergaard contributed the most notorious of the <i>Jyllands-Posten</i> cartoons.	Plotters are adherents to Salafi-jihadist ideology but group affiliations are unknown.	There is insufficient evidence for terrorism charges. Tunisian suspects are expelled from Denmark.
September 28, 2008	Arson attack on London publisher of <i>The Jewel of Medina</i> Three men associated with al-Muhajiroun attempted to petrol-bomb the North London home of Martin Rynja, who is due to publish the historical novel <i>The Jewel of Medina</i> in the U.K.	Plot Type: Actualized, Successful 0 Fatalities	London, United Kingdom	Ali Beheshti, 40; British Abrar Mirza, 22, British Abbas Taj, 30. Somali-born British	Historical novel <i>The Jewel of Medina</i> , about the Prophet Muhammad's wife, Aisha, is labeled blasphemous by some groups, including leadership of al-Muhajiroun. The leader of the attack, Beheshti, had previously engaged in activism against the Danish cartoons.	Perpetrators belonged to al-Muhajiroun, a U.K.-based radical Islamist network founded by Omar Bakri Muhammad and Anjem Choudary.	Three perpetrators sentenced to four and a half years imprisonment for conspiracy to commit arson.

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August 1, 2009	The Mickey Mouse plot against <i>Jyllands-Posten</i> The FBI arrests American David Headley, who is at the center of a plot to conduct a Mumbai style attack against <i>Jyllands-Posten</i> newspaper, taking hostages and throwing journalists' severed heads out of the windows.	Plot Type: Foiled 0 Fatalities	Arrest made in Atlanta, Georgia, USA Targets in Denmark Headley had traveled extensively to Pakistan, the U.K., and Denmark to raise funds and perform reconnaissance for the plot.	David Headley, 49, Pakistani-American Tahawwur Hussain Rana, 48, Pakistani	The <i>Jyllands-Posten</i> cartoons.	David Headley was assigned to scout targets in Denmark by Pakistani terrorist group Lashkar-e-Taiba before sponsorship of the plot was taken over by another Pakistani group, Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami, linked to al-Qaeda and the Taliban.	In 2013, Headley is sentenced to 35 years for his involvement in the 2008 Mumbai attacks, perpetrated by Lashkar-e-Taiba.
January 1, 2010	Ax attacker breaks into Kurt Westergaard's home Westergaard survives by hiding in reinforced panic room.	Plot Outcome: Actualized, Failed 0 Fatalities Westergaard and daughter survive in panic room.	Aarhus, Denmark	Mohamed Geele, 29 Somalian	Westergaard drew what was considered the most offensive of the <i>Jyllands-Posten</i> cartoons.	Al-Shabaab praised the attempted attack, and Geele is believed to have spent time with the group in Somalia. Possible link to al-Qaeda.	Geele is shot and wounded by police on arrival at Westergaard's home. Geele is later convicted for attempted murder and terrorism charges.
March 1, 2010	Ireland-based plot to assassinate Lars Vilks Irish authorities arrest three women and four men in relation to an international plot to kill Lars Vilks.	Plot Type: Foiled 0 Fatalities	Waterford, Tramore, Dungarvan, Thomastown, Ireland Swedish target	Ali Charafe Damache, 44, Algerian (Irish citizen) Abdul-Salam Mansour al-Jehani, 32; Libyan Colleen LaRose (Jihad Jane), 46; American Others that were arrested were Palestinian, Croatian, Libyan, Algerian ages 20s-40s	Lars Vilks' drawing of the Prophet Muhammad. Vilks is identified in al-Qaeda propaganda as a target with a bounty on his head.	No link to al-Qaeda publicly disclosed	Mohammed Khalid, 15, is convicted for terrorism offenses in the U.S. and sentenced to five years imprisonment. Colleen LaRose is convicted for terrorism offenses in the U.S. and sentenced to 10 years in 2010. Ali Charafe Damache is extradited to the U.S. and sentenced to 15 years on terrorism offenses.
April 1, 2010	Revolution Muslim threatens <i>South Park</i> creators Radicals associated with U.S.-based pro-jihadist website Revolution Muslim makes threats against creators of <i>South Park</i> and later, Seattle-based cartoonist, Molly Norris, creator of the "Everybody Draw Muhammad Day" Facebook event.	Plot Type: Vague, Threats, Foiled 0 Fatalities	Virginia, USA Detroit, Michigan, USA	Zachary Chesser, American Jesse Morton, American	<i>South Park</i> storyline involves the Prophet Muhammad who is also depicted in the cartoon. The depiction of Muhammad is never aired.	Revolution Muslim, a pro-al-Qaeda propaganda website based in the United States Chesser and Morton were associated with a wider network of Virginia-based radicals.	In 2010, Chesser is found guilty for communicating threats against <i>South Park</i> creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone, among other terrorism offenses. In 2011, Chesser is sentenced to 25 years imprisonment. Morton is found guilty of soliciting the murder of <i>South Park</i> creators and Norris, among other terrorism charges. He is sentenced to 11.5 years.

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May 11, 2010	Lars Vilks assaulted during talk at Upsalla University A group of around 15-20 protesters disrupt a lecture delivered by Lars Vilks at Upsalla University during which police officers and Vilks are assaulted.	Plot Type: Actualized, Successful 0 Fatalities	Uppsala University, Sweden	15-20 protestors, identities unknown	Lars Vilks' drawing of the Prophet Muhammad.	Unknown	Unknown
May 14, 2010	Arson attack against Lars Vilks' home Two men are arrested attempting to set fire to Lars Vilks' home in southern Sweden.	Plot Type: Actualized, Successful 0 Fatalities	Nyhamnsläge, Sweden	19-year-old Swedish male 21-year-old Swedish male of Kosovan origin	Lars Vilks' drawing of the Prophet Muhammad.	Unknown	Two men are found guilty of arson.
MAY-JULY 2010	Alaska-based couple draw up hitlist of targets who "desecrated Islam"	Plot Type: Vague, Threats, Foiled	Port Salmon, Alaska, USA	Paul Rockwood Nadia Rockwood	According to the FBI, Paul Rockwood was a "strict adherent to the violent jihad-promoting ideology of cleric Anwar Al-Awlaki," who "held a personal conviction that it was his religious responsibility to exact revenge by death on anyone who desecrated Islam and, while residing in Virginia, he began researching possible targets for execution."	Influenced by al-Qaeda propagandist, Anwar al-Awlaki	Paul Rockwood is sentenced to eight years imprisonment for making false statements during investigation. His spouse, Nadia Rockwood, is sentenced to five years probation for making false statements to the FBI.
July 8, 2010	Norway-based bomb plot against Jyllands-Posten One plotter later admitted to plans to kill Kurt Westergaard.	Plot Type: Foiled 0 Fatalities	Oslo, Norway	Mikael Davud, 39; Norwegian (of Chinese Uighur origin) Shawan Sadek Saeed Bujak, 37; Iraqi-Kurd	The <i>Jyllands-Posten</i> cartoons.	Plotters are linked to al-Qaeda. Davud is alleged to have trained with al-Qaeda in Pakistan. He also claims to have trained in Turkey and China.	Davud is sentenced to seven and a half years in prison. Bujak is sentenced to three and a half years. A third plotter, David Jakobsen, 31, is acquitted of terror charges but receives a conviction for explosives.
September 10, 2010	Chechen Man injured preparing bomb intended for Jyllands-Posten Lors Dukayev accidentally causes minor explosion inside Hotel Jørgensen in Copenhagen.	Plot Type: Actualized, Failed 0 Fatalities, perpetrator injured	Arhus, Denmark; Copenhagen, Denmark	Lors Dukayev, 24, Chechen (living in Belgium)	The <i>Jyllands-Posten</i> cartoons.	Associated with al-Qaeda sympathizers in Europe	Sentenced to 12 years in prison for acts of terrorism and illegal weapons possession

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December 29, 2010	Mumbai-style plot against <i>Jyllands-Posten</i> foiled Danish and Swedish authorities arrest five men planning a Mumbai-style armed assault on the offices of <i>Jyllands-Posten</i> newspaper. Weapons and plastic handcuffs are recovered, indicating plans to launch a hostage-taking at the offices. The attack was due to take place three days after the date of arrests.	Plot Type: Foiled 0 Fatalities	Copenhagen, Denmark	Munir Awad, 29, Swedish-Lebanese Omar Abdalla Aboelazm, 30, Swedish-Egyptian Mounir Dhari, 44, Tunisian Sahbi Zalouti, 37, Swedish-Tunisian Iraqi male, 26, released without charge	The <i>Jyllands-Posten</i> cartoons.	Perpetrators associated with Islamists in Sweden and Denmark	Convicted and sentenced to 12 years in prison for attempted terrorism and weapons charges
December 1, 2010	Two bombs detonate in Stockholm Attacker cites Lars Vilks' depiction of Muhammad and the presence of Swedish troops in Afghanistan.	Plot Type: Actualized, Failed 0 Fatalities, 1 Perpetrator Killed	Stockholm, Sweden	Taimour Abdulwahab al-Abdaly, 28, Iraqi-Swedish	Attacker wrote letters citing the Lars Vilks' drawing and presence of Swedish troops in Afghanistan.	Attack is thought to be commissioned by al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), and it is possible the attacker trained with AQI. Attacker expressed support for al-Qaeda and possibly associated with al-Muhajiroun in Luton, U.K.	Perpetrator is killed.
September 11, 2011	Röda Sten gallery plot Four are arrested in Gothenburg planning to assassinate Lars Vilks at a visit to an exhibition in Aarhus, Denmark.	Plot Type: Foiled 0 Fatalities	Gothenburg, Sweden	Four men aged 23, 24, 25 and 26	Lars Vilks' drawing of the Prophet Muhammad.	Unknown	Four suspects acquitted of terrorism charges
September 13, 2011	Assassination plot against Kurt Westergaard Kurt Westergaard is advised to cancel a public appearance by police in Oslo due to an assassination plot.	Plot Type: Vague, Threats 0 Fatalities	Oslo, Norway	The suspect is Arfan Bhatti, a Norwegian-Pakistani radical who was arrested with weapons cache coinciding with plot against Westergaard.	Kurt Westergaard's drawing of Muhammad in <i>Jyllands-Posten</i> cartoons.	Arfan Bhatti was at the center of Norwegian Islamist activist circles.	No charges
November 1, 2011	Charlie Hebdo is petrol-bombed The inside of <i>Charlie Hebdo's</i> office is destroyed by a suspected Molotov cocktail attack.	Plot Type: Actualized, Successful 0 Fatalities	Paris, France	Unknown	<i>Charlie Hebdo</i> magazine republished <i>Jyllands-Posten</i> cartoons and published several cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad. The magazine's editor later appears on al-Qaeda 'wanted list.'	Unknown	No information available

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May 27, 2012	Sharia4Holland threats against Geert Wilders	Plot Type: Vague, Threats	Amsterdam, Netherlands	Jassem Abdellaoui	In a speech, Abdellaoui says, “to deal with Wilders, this dog of the Romans, as the kingdom of Islam has dealt with this kind of person in the past. So learn from the case of Theo van Gogh.” Wilders is a high-profile critic of Islam and then-leader of the Freedom Party in the Netherlands.	Abdellaoui was a leader of the Sharia4Holland group, an extremist activist network set up to follow the model of al-Muhajiroun in the United Kingdom.	Abdellaoui is convicted for making threats.
May 29, 2012	Danish-Somali brothers plot to avenge <i>Jyllands-Posten</i> cartoons	Plot Type: Foiled 0 Fatalities	Copenhagen, Denmark Aarhus, Denmark	Danish-Somali brothers aged 18, 23	One of the brothers had trained with al-Shabaab and Somalia. The two were planning attacks to avenge the <i>Jyllands-Posten</i> cartoons.	Al-Shabaab in Somalia	[Unknown]
June 30, 2012	Failed attack against English Defence League (EDL) rally Six men from Birmingham traveled to an EDL rally, planning to kill those in attendance with knives, swords, guns, and a bomb. The perpetrators arrived too late for the rally and were discovered by police in a routine traffic stop.	Plot Type: Actualized, Failed 0 Fatalities	Attempted attack in Dewsbury, United Kingdom Perpetrators are mainly from Birmingham, United Kingdom.	Omar Khan, 31 Jewel Uddin, 27 Zohaib Ahmed, 22 Mohammed Saud, 23, Anzal Hussain, 25 Mohammed Hasseen, 23 All British	The plotters were motivated by extremist Islamist ideology, although they cited blasphemy specifically in their motivations to attack the EDL. This included traveling with leaflets justifying their planned attack, entitled “Operation – In Defence of the Prophet Muhammad,” as well as the stated motivation, “The penalty for blasphemy (of ALLAH and HIS Messenger Muhammad) is death ... what we did today was a direct retaliation of your insulting of the Prophet Muhammad.”	The group was found in possession of al-Qaeda literature, although no direct link to al-Qaeda or any affiliates was discovered.	Three plotters are sentenced to 19.5 years imprisonment, and the other three are sentenced to 18.5 imprisonment.
September 1, 2012	Threats to “butcher” <i>Charlie Hebdo</i> cartoonists	Plot Type: Vague, Threats, Foiled	Toulon, France	Mustapha Mokeddem, 17	<i>Charlie Hebdo</i> magazine caricatures of Prophet Muhammad.	Mokeddem later traveled to Syria to join the Islamic State (IS).	Mustapha Mokeddem arrested and charged for making threats. Two blades are found at his home. He is sentenced to 1.5 years imprisonment and travels to Syria to join ISIS upon his release from prison.

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September 15, 2012	Protests against the short film, <i>Innocence of Muslims</i>, in Sydney, Australia Protests turn violent.	Plot Type: Actualized Violent Protest, Threats, Foiled	Sydney, Australia	Ahmed Elomar Mohamed Zubhi Khaled Sharrouf	A trailer for the short film <i>Innocence of Muslims</i> perceived to denigrate the Prophet Muhammad is uploaded to YouTube, sparking worldwide protests and unrest. Protestors in Sydney carried placards reading "Behead those who insult Islam."	The three men were active in extremist networks in Australia, later traveling to Syria to join IS.	Unknown
September 15, 2012	Borgerhout film demonstrations Unauthorized demonstration against the <i>Innocence of Muslims</i> film trailer turns violent.	Plot Type: Actualized Violent Protest, Incitement, Threats 0 Fatalities	Antwerp, Belgium	Hicham Chaib Belgian	Violence broke out at the demonstrations against the film trailer, <i>Innocence of Muslims</i> , uploaded to YouTube sparking unrest in multiple countries. 28 arrests were made, and Chaib who was prosecuted for incitement to riot.	Senior figure in Shariah4Belgium group, an offshoot of al-Muhajiroun Chaib would go on to join IS and be killed in Syria.	Chaib sentenced to one year in prison.
September 17, 2012	University of Texas Brownsville threats Bomb threats are made at University of Texas Brownsville after a student is perceived to make derogatory remarks about Islam.	Plot Type: Vague, Threats, Foiled 0 Fatalities	Brownsville, Texas, USA	Henry Dewitt McFarland III, 25 American	Student Henry Dewitt McFarland III makes bomb threats in response to perceived derogatory comments about Islam from another student.	No known affiliations	Unknown
September 22, 2012	Beheading threats against <i>Charlie Hebdo</i> editor	Plot Type: Vague, Threats 0 Fatalities	La Rochelle, France	Unknown	<i>Charlie Hebdo</i> magazine caricatures of Prophet Muhammad.	Unknown	Unknown
March 1, 2013	Plot against Markus Beisicht and Pro-NRW party members	Plot Type: Foiled 0 Fatalities	Bonn, Leverkusen, and Essen, Germany	Marco G., German Unnamed Albanian man Unnamed German-Turkish man Unnamed German man	Markus Beisicht is the leader of the Pro-NRW far-right political party, who showed cartoons of Prophet Muhammad during his election campaign.	Members of Islamist extremist networks in Germany Marco G. was also convicted for a failed Bonn train bombing this same year.	The four men received sentences of between 9.5-12 years imprisonment.
November 1, 2013	Poet and critic of Islam, Yahya Hassan, attacked in Copenhagen	Plot Type: Actualized, Successful 0 Fatalities	Copenhagen, Denmark	Isaac Meyer / Abdul Basit Abu-Lifa, 24 Danish	Meyer, an extremist previously involved in a 2005 terror plot, assaulted Hassan. Meyer shouted that Hassan was an infidel during the attack.	Meyer was involved in al-Qaeda inspired terror plot. He also traveled to London to visit al-Muhajiroun leadership.	[Unknown]

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October 1, 2014	IS Bologna fresco plot Moroccan authorities claim to dismantle cell plotting to attack San Petronio basilica in Bologna, Italy. The cell was in contact with individuals on mainland Italy.	Plot Type: Foiled	Unknown location, Morocco Unknown location, Italy	Unidentified Moroccan individuals	The 15 th century fresco at the Basilica of San Petronio in Bologna based on Dante's <i>Inferno</i> shows the Prophet Muhammad in hell.	The plot is linked to IS, according to Moroccan authorities.	Unknown
January 7, 2015	The <i>Charlie Hebdo</i> attack Two masked gunmen wielding Kalashnikovs enter the offices of <i>Charlie Hebdo</i> magazine, killing 11 as well as a police officer outside. They are heard to have shouted, "We have avenged the Prophet."	Plot Type: Actualized, Successful 12 Fatalities + 2 Perpetrators killed	Paris, France	Chérif Kouachi, 34 Saïd Kouachi, 32 French	<i>Charlie Hebdo</i> magazine republished <i>Jyllands-Posten</i> cartoons and published several cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad. The magazine's editor appeared on al-Qaeda 'wanted list.'	Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) claimed responsibility for the attack. The older Kouachi brother is believed to have spent time with AQAP. Both Kouachi brothers are associated with senior al-Qaeda recruiter Djamal Beghal.	The Kouachis are killed in a police shootout. The Kouachi brothers' childhood friend Amedy Coulibaly launches an attack on behalf of IS in the days following the <i>Charlie Hebdo</i> attack, demanding safe passage for the Kouachis. In 2020, an additional 15 individuals are found guilty in connection with the January 7, 2015 attack.
January 9, 2015	HyperCacher kosher supermarket siege	Plot Type: Actualized, Successful 4 Killed, 1 Perpetrator Killed	Paris, France	Amedy Coulibaly, 32 Malian-French	While the attack did not necessarily target perceived blasphemers (i.e., Jews were targeted), the perpetrator coordinated with the Kouachi brothers, his childhood friends, who had attacked <i>Charlie Hebdo</i> in the days prior and were the targets of a nationwide manhunt at the time.	The attacker pledged allegiance to IS. A friend of the Kouachi brothers, who conducted their attack on <i>Charlie Hebdo</i> on behalf of AQAP.	Coulibaly is shot dead by police.
January 11, 2015	Firebombing of <i>Hamburger Morgenpost</i> newspaper	Plot Type: Actualized, Successful 0 Fatalities	Hamburg, Germany	Two men arrested, aged 32 and 39	The <i>Hamburger Morgenpost</i> newspaper reprinted the <i>Charlie Hebdo</i> cartoons of Muhammad on its front page following the attack.	Unknown	Unknown
JANUARY 15-16, 2015	Verviers plotters killed by police Two suspected IS returnees are shot dead in raids by Belgian authorities following <i>Charlie Hebdo</i> attacks.	Plot Type: Foiled 0 Fatalities 2 Perpetrators Killed	Verviers, Belgium	Redouane Hagaoui Tarik Jadaoun	The men were suspected of plotting a "second Paris" attack in the days following the <i>Charlie Hebdo</i> attacks. Hagaoui threatened sellers stocking <i>Charlie Hebdo</i> magazine.	Both men are suspected of recently returning from IS territory prior to the raids. Hagaoui posted photos to Facebook from IS territory.	The two men are shot dead by police.

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JANUARY 17-22, 2015	Bookshop stocking <i>Charlie Hebdo</i> threatened in Kensington, London	Plot Type: Vague, Threats 0 Fatalities	London, United Kingdom	Shamim Ahmed, 22	Ahmed sent threats to The French Bookshop in South Kensington for stocking copies of the <i>Charlie Hebdo</i> magazine following the recent attacks.	Ahmed would go on to travel to Syria in an attempt to join IS.	Ahmed is found guilty of sending malicious communications in November 2015. In January 2016, Ahmed was apprehended on the Syrian border trying to join IS.
FEBRUARY 14-15, 2015	Copenhagen shootings Lars Vilks is targeted by a gunman in Copenhagen during the "Art, Blasphemy and Freedom of Expression" event held at Krudttønden cultural center. One person killed, and Vilks is unharmed. The following day, the gunman attacks the Great Synagogue, killing one.	Plot Type: Actualized, Successful 2 Killed; 1 Perpetrator killed	Copenhagen, Denmark	Omar Abdel Hamid El-Hussein, 22 Danish	Lars Vilks appeared on al-Qaeda 'wanted list.'	Attacker pledged allegiance to IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.	Hussein is shot dead by police.
May 3, 2015	Curtis Culwell Center attack Two American IS supporters are shot dead trying to attack the "First Annual Muhammad Art Exhibit and Contest" held in Garland, Texas.	Plot Type: Actualized, Failed 0 Fatalities, 2 Perpetrators killed	Garland, Texas, USA	Nadir Soofi, 33, American Elton Simpson, 30, American Abdul Malik Abdul Kareem, 45, Pakistani	The event included depictions of the Prophet Muhammad, and multiple high-profile critics of Islam were in attendance. Details of the event and a call to attack it were tweeted out by a fake IS-supporting account created by American internet troll Joshua Ryne Goldberg.	IS claimed responsibility for the attack. Officials stated the attack was inspired by IS but not directly coordinated by the group.	Attackers are shot at by an off-duty policeman before being shot dead by a S.W.A.T. team.
February 16, 2016	Murder of Jalal Uddin Former Imam, Jalal Uddin, is bludgeoned to death in a children's playground in Rochdale, northwest England.	Plot Type: Actualized, Successful 1 Fatality	Rochdale, United Kingdom	Mohammed Kadir, 24, British Mohammed Hussain Syeedy, 21, British	Uddin practiced a form of healing using amulets, which his killers considered to be a form of "black magic" prohibited in Islam.	Uddin's killers were inspired by ISIS ideology. Syeedy had previously traveled to Syria ostensibly as part of an aid convoy.	Syeedy is sentenced to life in prison for the murder. Kadir flees the U.K. after the killing and is suspected of having traveled to Syria.
March 24, 2016	Murder of Asad Shah Tanveer Ahmed, from Bradford in northern England, drives to Glasgow to stab and stomp Ahmadi shopkeeper Asad Shah to death.	Plot Type: Actualized, Successful 1 Fatality	Glasgow, United Kingdom	Tanveer Ahmed, 32 British	Victim Asad Shah, an Ahmadi Muslim, posted videos on YouTube in which he claimed to be a Prophet. For most Muslims, Muhammad is considered the final Prophet, so Shah's claims were deemed blasphemous by his killer.	Ahmed belonged to the Barelvi movement of which a subset is highly animated on the issue of defence of the Prophet.	Ahmed is sentenced to life imprisonment. Supporters rallied in the public gallery during his trial.
August 1, 2018	Assassination plot against Geert Wilders Pakistani man Junaid I. traveled from France after posting a video online claiming he wished to send Dutch politician Geert Wilders "to hell."	Plot Type: Foiled, Threats 0 Fatalities	The Hague, Netherlands	Junaid I, 27 Pakistani	The perpetrator traveled from France in response to a "Draw Muhammad" competition announced by Wilders. Wilders has also featured prominently in jihadist propaganda, including the infamous al-Qaeda 'wanted list' of blasphemers.	No known affiliation	Perpetrator is sentenced to 10 years in prison for planning a murder with a terrorist motive and incitement to commit a terrorist deed.

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August 31, 2018	Amsterdam Centraal Station knife attack A 19-year-old Afghan resident in Germany stabs two American tourists.	Plot Type: Actualized, Successful 0 Fatalities	Amsterdam, The Netherlands	Jawed S., 19 Afghan (German resident)	The perpetrator cited perceived insults against Islam in the Netherlands, including naming Dutch politician, Geert Wilders, who had recently organized a "Draw Muhammed" competition.	No known affiliation	Jawed S. is sentenced to 26 years imprisonment for attempted murders.
January 18, 2020	French teenager Mila receives death threats Teenage singer Mila receives thousands of abusive messages including some death threats and is forced under police protection.	Plot Type: Vague, Threats 0 Fatalities	Isère, France and nationwide	Unnamed 23-year-old	Mila posted a story (available for 24 hours) to social media criticizing Islam and described it as a "shit religion," after receiving abuse from a man identifying as Muslim.	No known affiliation	One 23-year-old is sentenced to three years imprisonment for sending death threats. Ten other individuals are sentenced for harassment.
September 25, 2020	Stabbing attack at <i>Charlie Hebdo</i>'s former offices A man launches a machete attack at the former offices of <i>Charlie Hebdo</i> , wounding two with no connections to the magazine.	Plot Type: Actualized, Successful 0 Fatalities, 2 Wounded	Paris, France	Hassan Zaheer Mahmood, 25-27 (conflicting information) Pakistani	<i>Charlie Hebdo</i> magazine caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad.	The attacker is connected to Bareilvi extremist Gabar network. Follower of Islamist group, Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP)	Shortly following the attack, six arrests were made in France and four in Italy of individuals known to the attacker who may have had prior knowledge of (and even encouraged) the attack. In 2022, Italian police made several arrests related to the Gabar network to which Mahmood belonged.
OCTOBER 2016, 2020	Murder of Samuel Paty Schoolteacher Samuel Paty is beheaded following an online campaign.	Plot Type: Actualized, Successful 1 Killed, 1 Perpetrator Killed	Conflans-Sainte-Honorine, France	Abdoullakh Abouyedovich Anzorov, 18 Chechen-born, French	An online campaign was launched against Samuel Paty after he showed <i>Charlie Hebdo</i> 's images of the Prophet Muhammad in a lesson on freedom of expression.	Attacker in contact with IS jihadists in Syria	The attacker is killed by police. French government dissolves organizations involved in the online accusations against Paty.
October 29, 2020	Basilica attack in Nice, France	Plot Type: Actualized, Successful 3 Fatalities	Nice, France	Brahim Aouissaoui, 21 Tunisian	The attack came in the days following the beheading of Samuel Paty in Conflans-Sainte-Honorine. The perpetrator had a photograph of Paty's killer on his phone. Al-Mahdi in Tunisia claimed responsibility stating the attack was retaliation for caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed.	The perpetrator had pro-IS content on his devices. Possible links to al-Mahdi organization in southern Tunisia	Perpetrator is shot by police and is awaiting trial at the time of writing.

DATE	EVENT	PLOT TYPE/ FATALITIES	LOCATION	PERPETRATOR(S)	MOTIVE	PERPETRATOR AFFILIA- TION OR GROUP	OUTCOME
November 6, 2020	Threats against teacher in Rotterdam	Plot Type: Vague, Threats 0 Fatalities	Rotterdam, The Netherlands	18-year-old woman	The teacher in question had displayed a cartoon in support of <i>Charlie Hebdo</i> magazine. The threats followed the recent murder of Samuel Paty in France. The cartoon did not depict the Prophet Muhammad and was drawn by a Dutch artist to support <i>Charlie Hebdo</i> after the 2015 attacks. The teacher had displayed it in the classroom since. The 18-year-old woman who sent the threats accused the teacher of blasphemy.	Unknown affiliation	Unknown
July 25, 2021	Christian preacher Hatun Tash stabbed at Speakers' Corner wearing a <i>Charlie Hebdo</i> t-shirt	Plot Type: Actualized, Successful 0 Fatalities (Hatun Rash wounded)	London, United Kingdom	Unknown	Hatun Tash regularly appears at the Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park, London, on behalf of her DCCI (Defend Christ Critique Islam) group, which is outspoken in its criticism of Islam. At the time of the attack, she was wearing a t-shirt displaying a controversial <i>Charlie Hebdo</i> cartoon.	Unknown	No suspects are arrested and the investigation is ongoing at the time of writing.
August 12, 2022	Salman Rushdie is stabbed in New York Salman Rushdie is stabbed multiple times onstage during an event at the Chautauqua Institution in New York.	Plot Type: Actualized, Successful 0 Fatalities (Salman Rushdie severely wounded)	Chautauqua, New York, USA	Suspect is Hadi Matar, 24, American	Ayatollah Khomeini fatwa against Salman Rushdie and <i>The Satanic Verses</i> .	Suspect's social media accounts and other activity indicated support for the Iranian regime's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)	Investigation is ongoing at the time of writing.
September 23, 2022	Speakers' Corner plot against Hatun Tash Edward Little, 21, is apprehended on the way to purchase a firearm to target Christian preacher, Hatun Tash, at the Speakers' Corner.	Plot Type: Failed	London, United Kingdom	Edward Little, 21	Hatun Tash regularly appears at the Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park, London, on behalf of her DCCI (Defend Christ Critique Islam) group. Tash was previously attacked wearing a t-shirt displaying a controversial <i>Charlie Hebdo</i> cartoon at the Speakers' Corner.	Unknown	Perpetrator is due for sentencing July 2023.

DATE	EVENT	PLOT TYPE/ FATALITIES	LOCATION	PERPETRATOR(S)	MOTIVE	PERPETRATOR AFFILIA- TION OR GROUP	OUTCOME
October 1, 2022	Teachers threatened in France	Plot Type: Vague, Threats 0 Fatalities	Thann, France Essonne, France	Student's uncle	A student's uncle threatened a teacher with the same fate as Samuel Paty, after the teacher discussed caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad in class (but did not show caricatures). During the same period, another teacher in Essonne, France, was forced into hiding after being sent antisemitic death threats invoking Samuel Paty's fate.	No known affiliation	A man is charged with "death threats against a person in charge of a public service mission."
March 1, 2023	British man threatens perceived blasphemers Ajmal Shahpal, a 41-year-old from Nottingham, posted various messages online between 2020-2021 celebrating attacks on the <i>Charlie Hebdo</i> offices and Samuel Paty, including a photo of Paty's severed head, and calling for deaths of perceived blasphemers.	Plot Type: Threats, Foiled 0 Fatalities	Nottingham, United Kingdom	Ajmal Shahpal, 41	Shahpal's threats did not appear directed at any one individual. Rather, he was calling for violence against generally perceived blasphemers.	Shahpal was a supporter of Pakistani political party, Tehreek-e-Labbaik (TLP), which calls for violence against blasphemers and glorifies those who commit violence.	Shahpal is found guilty of encouraging terrorism.
April 4, 2023	Plot linked to Quran burning foiled Security services announce the arrests of five men with "international links to violent Islamist extremism," who were in the planning phase of an attack.	Plot Type: Foiled	Sweden	Five arrested	The Chief Prosecutor was quoted in the media linking to the plot to the recent Quran burning by far-right Danish-Swedish activist, Rasmus Paludan.	Linked by security services to unnamed international Islamist extremism	Unknown

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