

# CONFLICT IN THE GLOBAL AGE: THE CASE OF DANISH CARTOON CRISIS

*Ayhan Akbulut, PhD*  
Turkish National Police, Turkey

---

## Abstract

This paper attempts to understand the new forms of international conflicts and the global forces having an impact on that in the last decade. For this sake it examines the global crisis known as Danish Cartoon Crisis, its background features, actors, the impacts of these actors and the effects of globalization trends on the process. Findings show that the background of the cartoon case is composed by the civilization identity. Whereas people from different cultures have become closer to each other with the accelerating pace of globalization, the differences come to the fore and put them further in mind in the new small world. Increasing communication availability also increased the tension between people from different civilizational identities and the result has been more systemic hatred among them as a negative side of globalization.

---

**Keywords:** International conflict, globalization, cartoon crisis

## Introduction

This paper tries to understand the changing nature of international conflicts in the last decade. For this purpose it examines the international crisis, known as Danish Cartoon Crisis, and lived between Islamic countries and Western Europe in late 2005 and 2006. The main global background features and the actors of the crisis, the influences of the actors and the global sources of those influences form the subject of the paper. Firstly, a brief overview is made about international conflicts and its changing patterns in the history. After giving the meaning of the conflict in the global age, the story of the Danish Cartoon Crisis is recorded. Subsequently the prominent actors, their roles and influences and the global sources of those influences are discussed more substantially with in the context of global developments.

## Overview of International Conflicts in the History

International conflicts have always been existed in the history. However, the pattern and the features of conflict have changed in the time.

One of the changing features of conflict in the history has been the source. And, in the last phase of conflict, the source turned to be primarily cultural but not primarily ideological or primarily economical (Huntington, 1993).

In the modern times, the actors shaping the international politics were western countries. So, the conflict was primarily among the westerners. For a century, a half after the emergence of modern international system with the peace of Westphalia, conflicts were largely among the princes and emperors within the western world. The main source was concerns of princes and emperors to increase their strength from all the aspects of strength of their time, bureaucracy, army, economy and of course territory. After the emergence of nation states the conflict turned to be between nations rather than princess. This trend started with French revolution and ended with the end of the World War I. After the World War I, ideologies came to the fore. The conflict between ideologies replaced the conflict between nations. This trend started among the communism, fascism-Nazism and liberal democracy, and lasted between communism and liberal democracy. Two superpowers of the world, USA and USSR were main rivals of the latter one during the cold war era (Huntington, 1993).

However, with the coming of global age, the role of non-western countries has begun to change. They gained active roles as being the actors of international politics as far as westerners. Thus, the international politics no longer went on to be shaped within the western world, but among the civilizations of the world without reference to be a westerner. Interaction among civilizations has been the most effective piece of international politics. Increasing interactions between different civilizations in the last few decades intensified the civilization consciousness; with the weakening of nation state, religion has replaced the nation state as the source of identity. The economic and social developments of global age enhanced this trend. So, people, defining their identities with reference to religious and ethnic terms, begun to see an “us” versus “them” relation between themselves and other groups. Thus, with all these fundamental changes in international politics, conflict between ideologies yielded to the conflict between civilizations which refers to the highest cultural identity of people which involves language, history, religion, customs, institutions, and the subjective self-identification of the people (Huntington, 1993).

### **Danish Cartoon Crisis**

Danish cartoon crisis is the last chain of a series of clashes between West and Muslims in recent years, over banning of wearing headscarves in school in France, the murder of Dutch filmmaker because of his film criticizing Muslim treatment of women and reports, never verified, that US

military staff in Guantanamo threw a copy of Qur'an to the toilet (USATODAY, 2006).

### **Self-Censorship Debate in Denmark**

On September 17, 2005, an article, under the headline of “Profound fear of criticism of Islam” was run by the Danish newspaper ‘Politiken’. The article was about the difficulties encountered by the writer of the children’s book ‘The Qur’an and the life of Prophet Muhammad’. According to the article, Kare Bluitgen, the writer of the book, unable to find an illustrator for the book. First three artists that she offered to be the illustrator of the book declined her with reference to the murder of the film director Theo van Gogh by Muslims because of his film and the attack on the lecturer at the Carsten Niebuhr Institute in Copenhagen because of his reading the Qur’an to non-Muslims during a lecture. Finally, the fourth artist accepted her offer. However, this situation was seen an evidence of self-censorship. And the debate of self-censorship started with the publication of this article (Wikipedia, 2014).

### **Breaking of self-censorship**

On September 30, 2005, another article, under the headline of ‘The face of Muhammad’ was published by the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten. The article consisted of twelve cartoons. Three of the twelve cartoons depicted Muhammad. One of them depicted him in a turban, shaped as a bomb with a burning fuse, and the other one portrayed him telling suicide bombers, arriving in heaven that he’d run out of virgins with which to reward them. There was also an explanatory text,

*“The modern, secular society is rejected by some Muslims. They demand a special position, insisting on special consideration of their own religious feelings. It is incompatible with contemporary democracy and freedom of speech, where you must be ready to put up with insults, mockery and ridicule. It is certainly not always attractive and nice to look at, and it does not mean that religious feelings should be made fun of at any price, but that is of minor importance in the present context. [...] we are on our way to a slippery slope where no-one can tell how the self-censorship will end. That is why Morgenavisen Jyllands-Posten has invited members of the Danish editorial cartoonists union to draw Muhammad as they see him” (Rose, 2005).*

### **The crisis is starting**

On October 12, 2005 eleven ambassadors of Muslim population consisted of the imams in Denmark, asked a meeting with Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen to discuss about the situation. However,

Mr. Rasmussen answered the demand of the Muslim ambassadors with a letter, telling briefly the article is a product of the freedom of speech and the government has no means of influencing the press. But, if they think there is something wrong with publication, they can go to court (Wikipedia, 2014).

The ambassadors explained that they had never demanded that Jyllands-Posten to be prosecuted, what they had demanded was “an official statement underlining the need for and obligation of respecting all religions and desisting from offending their devotees to prevent an escalation which would have serious and far reaching consequences. But, Rasmussen repeated his rejection in the same way. At this level, Egypt Minister of Foreign Affairs involved in the debate by writing several letters to Rasmussen and United Nations Secretary General, expressing the same wishes with the Muslim ambassadors. This didn't change the flow of the incidents (Laciner,2006).

On October, 27, 2005, after the refusal of Rasmussen, the Muslim ambassadors took the case to the court. On January, 6, 2006, the court concluded that it there was no evidence for concluding that the cartoons were a part of a criminal offence. According to the Danish laws the cartoons were within the limits of freedom of speech (Laciner,2006)..

### **The crisis is spreading to the globe**

On November, 2005 the ambassadors prepared a dossier under the headline of “Dossier about Championing the Prophet Muhammad”. The dossier consisted of the cartoons of Prophet Muhammad; some other pictures which they told much more offensive than original twelve and, were published by another newspaper in Denmark Weekendavisen; hate-mail pictures sent to Muslims; a television interview discussing Islam and three additional images that the authors of the dossier alleged were sent to the Muslims participating an online debate. One of them was a pig-squealing contestant with the caption of “Here is the real image of Muhammad”, the other one depicted a Muslim being mounted by a dog while praying and, the last one portrayed Muhammad as a demonic pedophile (Gudmundson, Leanen and Belien, 2006).

The imams started a tour in the Middle East with the dossier to get support from religious and political leaders of the Muslim countries. This tour resulted in the involvement of numerous actors, ranging from individuals to international organizations around the globe, into the crisis.

### **Global Reactions from Opposing Parties**

The reactions of the cartoon affair were in several different ways for both parties.

On one side, World Muslims perceived the cartoons as an insulting attack to their most respected religious virtues. So, the reaction was much greater than expected. Not only, in diplomatic ways, but also democratic, fundamentalist and economic way.

Arab-League, OIC (Organization of Islamic Conference) and most of the Muslim States demanded an apology from Denmark and called for sanction to Jyllands-Posten. However the Danish government refused those demands. Therefore, some Muslim states withdrew their ambassadors from Denmark and OIC demanded sanction to Denmark from the UN and EU. There have been numerous protests in Islamic countries in democratic way (Belien, 2005).

Tens of people died in the riots and attacks to the embassies of European countries and churches. In Tehran, protestors stormed the Danish Embassy, attacking the compound with a barrage of stones and firebombs. That was the second of its kind outside the Danish Embassy in two days. In Pakistani city of Peshawar thousands of people attended a rally to demonstrate against the cartoons, in Karachi the number of people attending the rally was about 50.000. In Faryab province of Afghanistan, four protestors were killed and about 20 others injured in a clash with Afghan police and NATO forces (english.people.com.2006). In Niger's capital Niamey, tens of thousands of Muslims also rallied protest against the cartoons. Some Muslims in Niger attacked Christians and churches, killing at least 15 people (Jorgensen, 2006).

A consumer boycott against Danish products was started in Saudi Arabia and spread other Muslim countries as the response of Muslims in the economic way.

On the other side, European response to the reaction of Muslims was on one side triggering, on the other side calming.

Republication of the cartoons in several European countries was the indicator of the former side. First, a Norway newspaper printed cartoons and then the newspapers in France, Germany, Britain, Spain, Iceland, Italy, Belgium, Portugal, Switzerland, Bulgaria and Hungary reprinted the cartoons. Only, in United Kingdom the story was told in the newspapers without including the cartoons (Jorgensen, 2006).

On the latter side; Jyllands-Posten published two open letters on its website explaining that the cartoons were published in the name of freedom of speech. According to these letters, their intention was not to offend the Muslims. They were misunderstood and apologized for that. However the apologize was for offending the Muslims but not publishing the cartoons.

Denmark withdrawn it's ambassadors from Syria, Indonesia and Iran. Danish Prime Minister hold a meeting with ambassadors and diplomats from

more than 70 countries to calm down the crisis (Jorgensen, 2006). However, those efforts were not enough to stop mutual reactions.

In that course UN and EU were involved in the crisis. These two international organizations first demanded for the safety of the Christian population in Islamic countries and looked for the way of calming down the crisis in diplomatic way.

### **The Bill of the Crisis**

The outcome of the crisis was really terrifying. Hundreds of thousands of people rallied to protest cartoons and European reaction to the cartoons. Christians, embassies of European countries and some symbols of Europe were attacked in Islamic countries. At least, 139 people were killed in the attacks and demonstrations which lasted for weeks mainly in Nigeria, Libya, Pakistan and Afghanistan (Jorgensen, 2006).

As the result of consumer boycott against Danish goods in Islamic countries, the export of Danish goods reduced 15%, which cost about 134 million Euro (Wikipedia, 2014).

The tension between West and Islamic countries tremendously increased. The diplomatic relations between Denmark and most of the Muslim countries were almost cut off. Whereas US were blaming Iran and Syria of organizing many of the demonstrations in Iran, Syria and Lebanon, Iran blamed Zionists of backing the crisis and US and Europe of backing the Zionists (Karimi,2006).

Although, the efforts of international organizations like UN, OIC and EU were successful to relieve the diplomatic tension and set up relations again, those efforts couldn't be enough to prevent the increasing hatred between two parties.

### **Prominent Actors Shaping The Crisis**

Several International Organizations, almost one hundred states, big numbers of institutions and groups, and millions of people were involved in the Danish Cartoon crisis. However, some of them were most prominent of all, in terms of starting, shaping and calming down the crisis.

### **Carsten Juste (The editor-in-chief of the Jyllands Posten)**

Carsten Juste is a Danish Journalist who started his career in 1979 as a trainee with Jyllands-Posten and became the editor-in-chief of the same newspaper on January, 2003 (Wikipedia, 2014).

His decision of the publication of the cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, for the sake of breaking self-censorship was the starting point of the coming global crisis. He explained the aim of his decision of breaking self-censorship in Denmark against Muslims. During the course of the crisis,

he published two open letters to apologize for offending the virtues of Muslims but not publishing the cartoons of Prophet Muhammad. He defended that the cartoons were in the limits of self-censorship and no need to apologize for the cartoons (Juste, 2006).

He was accused of attacking the virtues of Muslims and insulting them. He received numerous threats after the publication of the cartoons.

### **Ahmed Akkari (Spokesman of the Imams, representing Danish Muslims)**

Ahmed Akkari was the spokesman of the eleven imams, representing Danish Muslims at the beginning of the crisis and former spokesman of the Islamic Society in Denmark. He was born in Lebanon, in 1978. His family moved to Denmark in 1985, where they obtained asylum. But, they returned to Lebanon in 1990. After staying for one year in Lebanon, the family returned to Denmark. However, this time because the Lebanese Civil War was over, they couldn't obtain asylum from Denmark. Ahmed Akkari and his family with the support of some Danish media were granted a humanitarian residency permit in 1994. He trained as a teacher in Denmark and he became a Danish Citizen in 2005 (Wikipedia, 2014).

Ahmed Akkari and other ten imams demanded a meeting with Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen to talk about the cartoons. They didn't satisfied with the response of the prime minister and not only took the case to the court but also prepared a dossier including some proofs of the attacks to the Muslims rights in Denmark and visited Muslim states and religious leaders in the Middle East to get international support. Their tour which started the protests in the Muslim Countries took the Cartoon Case to international area and resulted in a global crisis of West and Muslims.

### **Danish Government**

Danish government remained ineffective especially at the beginning of the crisis. Prime Minister didn't meet the ambassadors of the Muslim population and put the same argument with the Jyllands-Posten. The ambassadors didn't satisfy with the reaction of Danish government and conveyed the case to international area. And then the same thing also happened to the Muslim states and they protested the response of Danish Government to their calls and tried to solve the problem with UN and EU via OIC. After crisis turned to be a global one Danish government tried to finish the crisis and called for peace but, those efforts remained fruitless.

### **Muslims and Muslim states, protesting the cartoons**

Of course, the response of the millions of Muslim people to the cartoons created and shaped the crisis. Those responses were not only in

diplomatic, democratic and economic way but also with fundamentalism and terror which resulted in the clash of West and Muslims.

### **International Organizations UN, OIC, and EU**

These three international organizations were the most effective of the actors trying to calm down the crisis.

Main concern of the international organizations during the crisis was keeping secure and calming down the crisis. UN, OIC and EU pressed on the states from both parties to take the control and ease the situation.

The four day trip of EU foreign policy Chief Javier Solana in the Middle East was a remarkable effort to reduce the tension and to show the EU's position in the crisis. That trip included Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, the Palestinian and Israel. Solana met with OIC Secretary-General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, King Abdullah and some other Islamic leaders and denounced the publication of the cartoons on behalf of the EU (eubusiness, 2006).

The joint statement of UN, OIC and EU, released on February, 7, 2006, was another remarkable effort to keep peace. In the statement, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, OIC Secretary-General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, and EU foreign policy Chief Javier Solana denounced the publication of cartoons defaming the Prophet Muhammad by some European newspapers. They also pointed out that the violent acts surpassed the limits of peaceful protest and condemned the attacks on the diplomatic missions elsewhere. They added that "aggression against life and property can only damage the image of a peaceful Islam" (english.people.com. 2006).

### **Global Sources; Fostering the Influences of the Actors**

Globalization itself, with its several dimensions and outcomes, is the main source, fostering the influences of actors. However, some features and outcomes of globalization are more effective than the others in this case.

### **Global Communication Systems**

The global communication system, consisting of the combination of telephone, orbiting satellites and computers systems, was beneficiary for the individual rather than the states. States lost their control on the communication means in global age (Langhorne, 2001).

*“Many previously important, even formerly vital, systems of administration –political, economic and social – have been rendered increasingly redundant as a result. It may well also turn out that future historians will attribute the end of the cold war, at least in part, to the emergence of a self-propelling and universal communication system”* (Langhorne, 2001. p. 14).

Because the last phase tremendously increased the pace of change in favor of individuals, some of the individual interactions, without any reference to nationality and territory, crossed the vertical divisions of the past. So, vertical relations have been replaced by the relations on a horizontal basis (Langhorne, 2001).

In relation to the Danish Cartoon crisis, the horizontal relations provided individuals to learn the events and react them without control of the state authority. This situation let the crisis to spread all over the world immediately, and made it very difficult for the states to take over the control back.

### **Religion; as the source of identity and conflict**

Accelerated globalization of recent times has enabled individuals and institutions, within the same religion, to have direct contact with one another (Scholte, 2005). Weakening of nation state and increasing strength of individual led religion to replace the nation state as the source of identity. Civilization consciousness was intensified by the increasing number of interactions between different civilizations, and economic and social developments of global age enhanced this trend. People began to define themselves with reference to their religion and culture rather than the nation state. This situation changed the people's perception of 'us' and 'them'. So, cultural and religious differences composed the main source of conflict in the global age (Huntington, 1993).

### **Systemic Hatred**

Hatred is perceived as systemic, if it passes along person by person and family by family in historical way. It makes the sense that the roots of hatred shared within a culture, community or society as the consequence of historical experiences (Rosenau, 2003).

Part and parcel of systemic hatred, moreover, is the evolution of institutions that support and reinforce the hatred, according it legitimacy and righteousness that are sustained by official policies as well as by word of mouth. As a result, the hatred can come to be felt so intensely that it feeds on itself and encompasses all those who are becomes deeply rooted as a systemic trait, the more vulnerable does it become to justifying a resort to violence (Rosenau,2003, pg:337).

The growing hatred between West and Islamic world reached its peak in recent years. Whereas, Western policies in the Middle East, ongoing war in Iraq, Israel's situation with Palestine and other Muslim countries have been the western side of the reasons escalating the hatred, the responses of Muslims to those policies, in terrorist way, in September 11, 2003 Istanbul, 2005 Madrid and London attacks have been the Muslim side reasons.

## Conclusion

The Danish Cartoon Crisis has been an important indicator of global conflict among civilizations, in terms of its background, development, actors and outcomes.

The changing nature of international conflict has composed the background of the cartoon case. On the one hand, societies from different cultures have got closer to each other with the accelerating pace of globalization. On the other hand, as a result of getting closer, the differences come to the fore and put them further in mind, in the new small world.

Solidarity increased within the borders of civilization identity rather than the national one. This kind of solidarity put the people in the same side, as the actors of global clashes between different parties, all over the world, in case of any clash. And the outcome has been increasing hatred between civilizations.

## References:

- Belien,P. (2005, October 27) Cartoon Case Escalates into International Crisis. retrieved April 21, 2014 from <http://www.brusselsjournal.com/node/407> english.people.com. English People's Daily Online (February 8,2006). World Leaders Call for Dialogue to Solve Cartoon Crisis. retrieved April 21, 2014 from [http://english.people.com.cn/200602/08/eng20060208\\_241063.html](http://english.people.com.cn/200602/08/eng20060208_241063.html)
- The Daily Star (2006, February 14). EU Seek to Ease Cartoons Crisis, Vol.5 Num.609 retrieved April 21, 2014 from <http://archive.thedailystar.net/2006/02/14/d60214130683.htm>
- Gudmundson,H., Leanen, F., and Belien, P. (2006, January 31). Danish Paper Apologizes. Dutch Cartoon on Its Way. retrieved April 21, 2014 from <http://www.brusselsjournal.com/node/736>
- Huntington, S,P., The Clash of Civilizations. Foreign Affairs, Summer,1993, pp. 22-49
- Jorgensen, I. (2006, March 21). Timeline: How the Cartoon Crisis Unfolded. Financial Times, retrieved April 21, 2014 from <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/d30b0c22-96ee-11da-82b7-0000779e2340.html>
- Juste, C. (2006, January 30). Honourable Fellow Citizens of the Muslim World. retrieved April 21, 2014 from <http://jyllands-posten.dk/international/ECE4771289/honourable-fellow-citizens-of-the-muslim-world/>
- Karimi,N. (2006, February 11). Iran Blames U.S., Europe in Cartoon Crisis. retrieved April 21, 2014 from <http://forums.stardock.com/100679/page/1/>
- Laciner, S. (2006, February 15), Cartoon Crisis – Islamic or Christian Fundamentalism. retrieved April 21, 2014 from

<http://www.turkishweekly.net/news/25999/cartoon-crisis-islamic-or-christian-fundamentalism.html>

Langhorne, R. (2001). *The Coming Of Globalization: Its Evolution and Contemporary Consequences*. Great Britain: Antony Rowe Ltd.

Rose,F. (2005, September 30) . Muhammeds ansight. Jyllands-Posten,

Rosenau, James N. (2003). “Distant Proximities: Dynamics Beyond Globalization. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Schoulte, Jan Aart (2005). *Globalization: A Critical Introduction*. 2nd. Ed. London:Palgrave

USATODAY (February 14, 2006). Muslims have enormous love for the prophet. retrieved April 21, 2014 from ([http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2006-02-14-prophet-love\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2006-02-14-prophet-love_x.htm)).

Wikipedia, (2014). Jyllands-Posten Muhammad Cartoons Controversy. retrieved April 21,2014 from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jyllands-Posten\\_Muhammad\\_cartoons\\_controversy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jyllands-Posten_Muhammad_cartoons_controversy).

Wikipedia, (2014). Carsten Juste. retrieved April 21, 2014 from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carsten\\_Juste](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carsten_Juste) .

Wikipedia. (2014). Ahmed Akkari. retrieved April 21, 2014 from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahmed\\_Akkari](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahmed_Akkari) .

- West dominated the global political order, but both land-based & maritime empires gave way to new states by the century's end. - Ottoman, Russian, & Qing empires collapsed due to a combination of internal and external factors. These changes in Russia eventually led to communist revolution. - The unsustainable peace settlement after WW I, the global economic crisis engendered by the Great Depression, continued imperialist aspirations, and especially the rise to power of fascist and totalitarian regimes that resulted in the militarism of Nazi Germany (Hitler). Explain similarities and differences in how governments used a variety of methods to conduct war. - Explain the relative significance of the causes of global conflict in the period 1900 to the present. The Jyllands-Posten Muhammad cartoons controversy (or Muhammad cartoons crisis) (Danish: Muhammedkrisen) began after the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten published 12 editorial cartoons on 30 September 2005, most of which depicted Muhammad, a principal figure of the religion of Islam. The newspaper announced that this was an attempt to contribute to the debate about criticism of Islam and self-censorship. Muslim groups in Denmark complained, and the issue eventually led to protests around the world For this sake it examines the global crisis known as Danish Cartoon Crisis, its background features, actors, the impacts of these actors and the effects of globalization trends on the process. Findings show that the background of the cartoon case is composed by the civilization identity. Whereas people from different cultures have become closer to each other with the accelerating pace of globalization, the differences come to the fore and put them further in mind in the new small world. Increasing communication availability also increased the tension between people from different civilizationa Conflict in the global age: the case of danish cartoon - January 29, 2019 by Mark Martin. Danish Cartoon Crisis, Take 2. February 13, 2008 The Danish cartoon that elicited so much outrage and protest from the Muslim world back in 2005 is being printed again. German news service Deutsche Welle reports: Five major daily Danish newspapers, 10 smaller papers and a Swedish daily reprinted on Wednesday, February 13, one of the 12