

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

## Pakistani Prior Restraint in Holland

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September 6, 2018

Should Pakistan's attitudes toward blasphemy against Islam apply in the Netherlands? This is the crux of a recent controversy involving the flamboyant politician Geert Wilders of the anti-Islam Dutch Freedom Party.

Last week, citing security concerns, Mr. Wilders canceled a proposed cartoon contest in Holland whose participants were invited to lampoon the prophet Muhammad. The cancellation followed protests in Pakistan as well as a spate of death threats from Pakistani celebrities and religious figures. On Aug. 28, Dutch police in The Hague arrested a 26-year-old Pakistani man who had threatened to attack Mr. Wilders and the Dutch Parliament.

The Pakistani government considers the cartoon contest's cancellation a triumph. In a press conference, Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry gave his country credit for Mr. Wilders's climb-down. Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi hailed it as "a great moral victory for the Muslim *ummah*," the world-wide community of believers.

In reality, the incident marks a setback for Pakistan's new government. By pandering to strident Islamists, Prime Minister Imran Khan deepens fears that his election in July strengthens fundamentalism in the nuclear-armed country. Rather than helping Muslims, Pakistani bullying will likely boost anti-Islamic sentiment in Europe. Mr. Wilders, for instance, has long called for an end to Muslim immigration to his country on the grounds that Islam is not compatible with the West.

In Pakistan, so-called blasphemy against Islam carries the death penalty. Sometimes a mere accusation can lead an enraged mob to lynch a supposed offender. Religious minorities, including Christians and members of the beleaguered Ahmadiyya Muslim sect, often bear the brunt of these attacks.

Instead of seeking to export this backward sensibility to Holland, Mr. Khan ought to use his bully pulpit to tamp down wild expectations from his people. No reasonable person grudges Pakistanis their right to revere Muhammad. And Mr. Wilders, whose political career has been defined by tasteless attacks on Muslims, is not exactly a sympathetic figure. But this does not give Pakistanis the right to set the boundaries of free speech in Holland.

"If Muslims are asking me to live by their taboos outside their spaces, they are not asking for my respect," says Flemming Rose, an expert on free speech at the Cato Institute, in a phone interview from Copenhagen. "They are asking for my submission."

In 2005, Mr. Rose commissioned cartoons of Muhammad for the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten, which led to an eruption of violent protests across the Islamic world. By contrast, only in Pakistan did the aborted Dutch contest appear to stoke emotions in a notable way.

Leading the protests was Khadim Rizvi, an influential cleric-cum-politician whose Tehreek-e-Labbaik party, ostentatiously dedicated to upholding tough punishment for blasphemy, won 2.2 million votes in July's elections. "If they give me the atom bomb, I'll immediately bomb Holland," declared Mr. Rizvi to reporters. He also demanded "strict measures" against the U.S. because the contest's judge was an American. Mr. Rizvi announced a march by his supporters to Islamabad to force Pakistan to cut diplomatic ties with Holland. Last week, thousands of Tehreek-e-Labbaik followers rallied in Lahore.

A former Pakistani cricketer offered a bounty of three million rupees (about \$24,000) to kill the Dutchmen behind the contest. Rabi Pirzada, an aspiring pop star, tweeted that "freedom of expression can never justify blasphemy," and that "the sketch makers must be hanged immediately." Her most recent music video, released before Mr. Wilders announced the cartoon contest in June, shows her wearing—and detonating—a suicide vest.

The outrage has a kitschy element, with minor celebrities jumping on the blasphemy bandwagon for a few minutes of self-righteous fame. But if we've learned anything from Europe's losing battle to maintain the freedom to caricature Islam as freely as Christianity, it's that nobody should take Islamist threats of violence lightly. In 2015, al Qaeda terrorists murdered 12 people in an attack on the French satirical weekly Charlie Hebdo in Paris.

A responsible Pakistani leader would have attempted to tamp down the protests. Mr. Khan could have explained to his people that, no matter how distasteful this may seem, the Dutch do not follow Pakistani law.

Instead the prime minister promised to approach the United Nations for a global ban on blasphemous caricatures. He also pledged to organize a joint approach to the issue with the 57-member Organization of Islamic Cooperation. In a letter to Human Rights Watch, Minister for Human Rights Shireen Mazari attributed rights violations against Muslims in Europe in part to "abuse of Islam and its Prophet."

In the ongoing war against free speech in the West, Islamists may have won this skirmish. In the long term, however, the notion that medieval ideas of blasphemy will prevail in post-enlightenment Western societies remains far-fetched. Mr. Khan ought to worry less about the Dutch and more about the price Pakistan will pay for emboldening its angry Islamists.