

# The Spectacular Media Failure on Charlie Hebdo

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Global Research, January 20, 2015

Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#), [Poverty & Social Inequality](#)

*A core tenet of journalism is answering the question “why.” It’s the media’s duty to explain “why” an event happened so that readers will actually understand what they’re reading. Leave out the “why” and then assumptions and stereotypes fill in the blank, always readily supplied by politicians whose ridiculous answers are left unquestioned by the corporate media.*

Because the real “why” was unexplained in the Charlie Hebdo massacre, an obviously false culprit was created, leading to a moronic national discussion in the U.S. media about whether Islam was “inherently” violent.

For the media to even pose this question either betrays a blinding ignorance about the Middle East and Islam, or a conscious willingness to manipulate public sentiment by only interviewing so-called experts who believe such nonsense.

Media outlets should know that until the 1980’s Islamic fundamentalism was virtually inaudible in the Middle East — outside of the U.S.-supported dictatorship of Saudi Arabia, whose ruling monarchy survives thanks to U.S. support. The official religion of Saudi Arabia is a uniquely fundamentalist version of Islam, which along with the royal family are the two anchors of Saudi government power.

Before the 1980’s, the dominant ideology in the Middle East was pan-Arab socialism, a secular ideology that viewed Islamic fundamentalism as socially and economically regressive. Islamic fundamentalists engaged in terrorist attacks against the “pan-Arab socialist” governments of Egypt, Syria, Libya, Iraq and other governments that aligned themselves with this ideology at various times.

Islamic fundamentalism was virtually extinguished from 1950-1980, with Saudi Arabia and later Qatar being the last bastion and protective base of fundamentalists who were exiled from the secular countries. This dynamic was accentuated during the cold war, where the U.S. aligned itself with Islamic fundamentalism — Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states — while the Soviet Union became allies with the secular nations that identified as “socialist.”

When the 1978 Saur revolution in Afghanistan resulted in yet another socialist-inspired government, the United States responded by working with Saudi Arabia to give tons of weapons, training, and cash to the jihadists of the then-fledgling fundamentalist movement, helping to transform it into a regional social force that soon became the Taliban and al-Qaeda.

The U.S.-backed Afghan jihad was the birth of the modern Islamic fundamentalist movement. The jihad attracted and helped organize fundamentalists across the region, as

U.S. allies in the Gulf state dictatorships used the state religion to promote it. Fighters who traveled to fight in Afghanistan returned to their home countries with weapon training and hero status that inspired others to join the movement.

The U.S. later aided the fundamentalists by invading Afghanistan and Iraq, destroying Libya and waging a ruthless proxy war in Syria. Fundamentalists used these invasions and the consequent destruction of these once-proud nations to show that the West was at war with Islam.

Islamic fundamentalism grew steadily during this period, until it took another giant leap forward, starting with the U.S.-backed proxy war against the Syrian government, essentially the Afghan jihad on steroids.

Once again the U.S. government aligned itself with Islamic fundamentalists, who have been the principal groups fighting the Syrian government since 2012. To gain thousands of needed foreign fighters, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other Gulf states promoted jihad with their state-sponsored media, religious figures, and oil-rich donors.

While the Syria jihad movement was blossoming in Syria, the U.S. media and politicians were silent, even as groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS were growing exponentially with their huge sums of Gulf state supplied weapons and cash. They were virtually ignored by the Obama administration until the ISIS invasion of Iraq reached the U.S.-sponsored Kurdish region in 2014.

In short, the U.S. wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria have destroyed four civilizations within Muslim-majority nations. Once proud people have been crushed by war — either killed, injured, made refugees, or smothered by mass unemployment and scarcity. These are the ideal conditions for the Saudi-style Islamic fundamentalism to flourish, where promises of dignity and power resonate with those robbed of both.

Another U.S. media failure over Charlie Hebdo is how “satire” is discussed, where Hebdo’s actions were triumphed as the highest principle of the freedom of the media and speech.

It’s important to know what political satire is, and what it isn’t. Although the definition isn’t strict, political satire is commonly understood to be directed towards governments or powerful individuals. It is a very powerful form of political critique and analysis and deserves the strictest protection under freedom of speech.

However, when this same comedic power is directed against oppressed minorities, as Muslims are in France, the term satire ceases to apply, as it becomes a tool of oppression, discrimination, and racism.

The discrimination that French Muslims face has increased dramatically over the years, as Muslims have been subject to discrimination in politics and the media, most notoriously the 2010 ban on “face covering” in France, directed at the veil used by Muslim women.

This discrimination has increased as the French working class is put under the strain of austerity. Since the global 2008 recession this dynamic has accelerated, and consequently politicians are increasingly relying on scapegoating Muslims, Africans, or anyone who might be perceived as an immigrant.

It's in this context that the cartoons aimed at offending Muslims by ridiculing their prophet Muhammad — a uniquely and especially offensive act under Islam — is especially insulting, and should be viewed as an incitement of racist hatred in France, where Arabs and North Africans are especially targeted in the right-wing attacks on immigrants.

It's a sign of how far France has politically fallen that people are claiming solidarity with Charlie Hebdo, which has produced some of the most racist and inflammatory cartoons directed at Muslims, Arabs, and people of North Africans, which contributes to the culture of hatred that resulted in physical attacks against Muslims after the Charlie Hebdo massacre. This is the exact same political dynamic that led to Hitler's racist scapegoating of the Jews.

Racism in France may have surpassed racism in the United States, since it's unimaginable that, if the Ku Klux Klan were attacked in the United States for anti-Mexican hate speech, that the U.S. public would announce "I am the KKK."

Hebdo is of course not a far-right publication. But the consistent attacks on Muslims and Africans show how far Charlie had been incorporated into the French political establishment, which now relies increasingly on scapegoating minorities to remain in power, in order to prevent the big corporations and wealthy from being blamed by the depreciating state of the French working class. Better to blame unions and minorities for the sorry state of the corporate-dominated French economy.

The only way to combat political scapegoating is to focus on the social forces responsible for the economic crisis and have them pay for the solutions that they are demanding the working class to pay through austerity measures and lower wages.

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