Opening a dialogue with Muslims

Several weeks ago, the French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* was attacked by Islamist extremists known as the Karachi Brothers – both of whom had ties to al-Qaida.

The magazine was attacked for its cartoon depictions of the Islamic prophet Mohammed, which is seen as blasphemous within the religion. While zero logical thinkers have condoned the actions of the Karachi Brothers, many have said that *Charlie Hebdo* could have expected this outcome based on previous editions of the magazine that was published depicting the prophet Mohammed.

Among those who spoke about the violence was Pope Francis, saying "In theory, we can say a violent reaction to an offense or provocation isn't a good thing. In theory, we can say that we have the freedom to express ourselves. But we are human. And there is prudence, which is a virtue of human existence."

The terrorizing of magazines, newspapers, and various other media outlets for the depiction of Mohammed is nothing new to the global sphere. If you'll remember back to 2006 when vehement protest broke out against the Danish government after pictures depicting the prophet were published.

Similarly, after the film "Innocence of Muslims" was released depicting Mohammed as a sexual deviant, attacks and protests in four countries were recorded.

The question that constantly arises is how far is too far.

In itself, the Quran does not prohibit the depiction of Mohammed. But the Hadith, which tells Muslims how to live an exceptional life, does prohibit the depiction of Mohammed.

Print journalism allows for a direct median between a journalist and the public. And in many ways this median is not being respected. Through the disrespectful depiction of the prophet Mohammed, we allow ourselves to have our attention taken away from productive narratives that matter.

If *Charlie Hebdo* wanted to adequately provide counter narratives to the radical Islamist movement, they could have done so in a respectful manner – one that offers insight and spurs intellectual conversation.

As often stated, freedom of speech does not act as protection

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from ignorant or unwarranted comments. This does not act as a justification for radical Islamist to perpetuate violence, but rather an argument counter to those whom misuse the rights warranted to them.

However, like Voltaire, "I do not agree with what you have to say, but I'll defend to the death your right to say it."

The ignorant babble submitted by those seeking to counter institutions like *Charlie Hebdo* is likewise without a leg to stand on. Counter narratives to the messages of terrorist organizations such as al-Qaida, Boko Horam, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria or the Islamic State in the Levant will be published.

The second question that must be applied is how. How must we counter narratives to the radical Islamist movement without offending the majority of non-radicalized Muslims?

To answer this, we must look at organizations such as the Quilliam Foundation. Founded by Maajid Nawaz, a former Muslim who propagandized for the Islamist organization Hizb ut-Tahrir, the activist group Quilliam attempts to provide, advocate and facilitate intellectual discussions to both Muslims and non-believers on the faults in the Islamist propaganda story.

Specifically, the organization analyzes inconstancies in the message of misguided terrorist cells like the Islamic State. Furthermore, Quilliam acts as a median between the U.S. government and Muslims at risk of conceiting to radical Islam.

The role of journalism in this movement for religious respect and intellectual dialogue is large. And we will either apply a boisterous message or placid silence which will affect us all greatly.

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