

RELEASE IN PART
B6

From: McHale, Judith A <McHaleJA@state.gov>
Sent: Thursday, September 9, 2010 10:08 AM
To: H
Cc: Mills, Cheryl D; Sullivan, Jacob J; Reines, Philippe I
Subject: FW: Original Story from USA TODAY

More, original story.

From: Hensman, Chris D
Sent: Thursday, September 09, 2010 10:06 AM
To: McHale, Judith A
Subject: Original Story from USA TODAY

http://www.usatoday.com/news/religion/2010-09-08-quran-burning-florida_N.htm

Obama weighs in as plan to burn Qurans sparks debate

Updated 2h 8m ago

By Larry Copeland and Rick Hampson, USA TODAY

GAINESVILLE, Fla. — The Constitution won't let you yell "fire" in a crowded theater if there isn't one. It won't let you utter "fighting words" with impunity. But scholars agree it will let a pistol-packing minister of a tiny fundamentalist church outrage countless Muslims by burning the Quran, a book he says he hasn't read.

Florida preacher Terry Jones prepared for a bonfire of the Qurans on Saturday — the ninth anniversary of the 9/11 terror attacks— despite protests from the White House, the Vatican, the U.S. commander in Afghanistan, fellow Christian evangelicals and veterans' groups.

"As of right now," Jones said Wednesday, "we are not convinced that backing down is the right thing."

In an interview with USA TODAY he said he had not been contacted by the White House, State Department or Pentagon. If he were, he said, "that would cause us to definitely think it over. That's what we're doing now. I don't think a call from them is something we would ignore."

Jones' plans for "International Burn a Koran Day" at his Dove World Outreach Center provoked a warning this week from Gen. David Petraeus that U.S. troops in the field could be endangered.

President Obama became the latest to comment in an interview aired Thursday on ABC's Good Morning America. The president called the plan a "stunt" that could "greatly endanger our young men and women in uniform who are in Iraq, who are in Afghanistan."

"This is a recruitment bonanza for Al Qaeda," he added.

"We're concerned with troops and missionaries ourselves," Jones said. "Our question is when do we stop backing down. ... In certain areas of our country, we have lost our backbone. We have backed down too much."

Wayne Sapp, an associate pastor, said the church is "still in prayer over the whole thing" and could cancel. "God is leading us right up to the moment. It's no different than Abraham and his son. God didn't tell him, 'Go right up to the point where you might sacrifice him.' He wanted him to be fully committed. We're prepared to do what we're called to do."

The church's plan presents an excruciating dilemma for Americans, many of whom regard freedom of expression as a sort of secular religion. But a nation that allows the symbolic burning of its own flag cannot stop the burning of a book, says Stephen Gillers, a New York University law professor.

"From a legal point of view, Gen. Petraeus' prediction (of violence) is too ambiguous to support suppressing the conduct," he said. "Were the government to try to stop it, it would lose."

Still, he said, the facts of the case are troubling: "It's hard to find a direct analogy to this in U.S. constitutional history."

Although many Americans, including Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, expressed frustration that a small fringe group could command such attention, ignoring Jones was not an option.

Not after Petraeus warned that "images of the burning of a Quran would undoubtedly be used by extremists ... to inflame public opinion and incite violence." Not after the Vatican accused Jones of "an outrageous and grave gesture." Not after Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour, chairman of the Republican Governors Association, said, "I don't think there's any excuse for it."

Alan Wolfe, director of Boston College's Center for Religion and American Public Life, said Washington shouldn't ignore Jones: "This requires public diplomacy by the administration to point out how repugnant this is to most Americans."

The inconvenient Constitution

The incident was a reminder of how inconvenient the Constitution can be.

"The First Amendment, as it's been interpreted, would probably not win if it were put up to a vote," said Gillers, whose media law class discussed the case. "It is very hard to explain to people why this sort of conduct should be permitted."

If Americans schooled in civics have trouble understanding, how much harder is it for people in Ramallah or Khartoum or Jakarta? Wolfe was sanguine: "Enough people in the Muslim world understand that this is a fringe group."

Scott Appleby, a Notre Dame religious historian, acknowledges puzzlement, in a nation where artists and performers routinely ridicule organized religion, over Islam's exquisite sensitivity to disrespect for Allah, his word or his prophet, Mohammed.

The incident recalls a controversy in 2005, when 12 editorial cartoons, most depicting the prophet, were published in a Danish newspaper. After they were reprinted in other countries, protests spread across the Muslim world. Some demonstrators were killed and several Danish embassies were set on fire or vandalized.

Appleby explained that while not all Christians read the Bible literally, virtually all Muslims believe every word in the Quran came directly from Allah, as revealed to Mohammed by the angel Gabriel.

Coming amid discord over an Islamic center and mosque proposed near the site of the 9/11 attacks in New York, the Quran controversy gives many Americans something to agree on — and rally against, Wolfe said. "Even conservative Christians who might not like Muslims understand the importance of freedom of speech and religion."

Appleby calls the controversy "a mirror" for Americans who "revere their Bible, even if they've never opened it." Followers of all religions, he said, "can see what another religion's sacred text means to them, because you know what yours means to you."

Some wonder whether Jones is motivated less by fundamentalism than opportunism. "For people like this, this is a gold mine," Wolfe said of the furor. "What an opportunity to rise up from obscurity!"

Sapp, the associate pastor, asked, "When have you seen a congregation of 40 to 50 people with something they're doing get worldwide attention like this?"

As Sapp spoke with a reporter outside the church, a man walked up and handed him \$20 for Jones' effort. "I'm a Roman Catholic," Tommy Heenan said. "I don't know if I've ever seen a Roman Catholic cut anybody's head off, slice somebody's throat or abuse women. ... I don't know if Rev. Jones is correct, but we know where he stands."

Jones denied he was in it for profit or publicity: "I would not put my life on the line just for publicity. When we decided this, we had no idea this much attention, this much publicity would happen." As for profits, he said, "It's probably caused some members to leave."

Eddie Houk, who lives 300 yards from the church, said news coverage has created a monster. "If it wasn't for the media, it wouldn't go anywhere. Why would 40 to 50 people, if that, be able to make such a big impression on the whole wide world over one little thing?"

His frustration was shared by Clinton, who told the Council on Foreign Relations it was "regrettable that a pastor ... can make this outrageous and distrustful, disgraceful plan and get the world's attention. But that's the world we live in right now."

Jones, meanwhile, was besieged with calls from all quarters to cancel his protest.

Jones met with Imam Muhammad Musri, president of the Islamic Society of Central Florida, whom Jones called "very nice, very friendly, very respectful. In a lot of areas, not the religious area, we were in agreement on many subjects."

"We came to have a peaceful conversation with the pastor, to hear his grievance, to ask him to follow his own Scripture about his enemies," Musri told reporters. "His Scripture teaches him to love his enemies."

The office of evangelist Franklin Graham, who was traveling in Alaska, said he tried unsuccessfully to reach Jones by phone to ask him to cancel the burning. Graham, son of the Rev. Billy Graham, has said that although he loves Muslims, Islam is "evil" and cannot lead to salvation.

Joe Davis, spokesman for the Veterans of Foreign Wars and a Gulf War veteran, called Jones selfish for exposing Americans overseas to danger: "If this guy really wants to make a statement, why doesn't he go to Afghanistan in the middle of a market square and then douse the Quran on fire? Then he would have a true vested interest in his actions."

Todd Bowers, a former Marine officer and now spokesman for Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, said it's costly just to be accused of offending religious sensibilities in some Muslim nations. Bowers said his unit was in Afghanistan last year when the Taliban spread rumors that U.S. forces had desecrated a Quran and thrown a dead dog into a mosque, even though "no one was even patrolling in that village at that time."

The rumors sparked protests involving hundreds of demonstrators. Shots were fired, killing an Afghan police officer and a Marine, Bowers said. Afterward, "we would do patrols and realized no one was talking to us," he said. "It set us back months."

Jones' relatively few defenders included Chuck Morse, a Massachusetts-based conservative writer and talk-show host. He said opposition to the Quran burning showed how successful "Islamic fundamentalists have been ... in their international campaign of threats and terror. ... The world is now cowering in fear."

He said protesters who burned a Bible or a Quran in the West "need not worry that they will be beheaded. They know that American or Christian leaders would not sentence them to death, nor would Western leaders use the protest to incite violence in the populace at large. And this is the basic point of Pastor Jones' protest."

'It's just wrong'

The Dove World Outreach Center sits on 20 acres in a residential area 7 miles northwest of downtown Gainesville, a city of 125,000 that is home to the University of Florida.

Jones, who has been with the church since it was founded about 25 years ago, says he's received more than 100 death threats, some extremely graphic. He's started wearing a .40-caliber pistol strapped to his hip.

His second-floor office is sparsely decorated, with a painting of Presidents Washington, Lincoln and George W. Bush on one wall, and a poster for the Mel Gibson 1995 movie, Braveheart, on another. (Jones has a YouTube video series called The Braveheart Show.)

Scores of Qurans, some ordered by his supporters from Amazon and shipped directly to the church, were piled on a table in another room.

Outside, three signs on the road in front of Dove World read: "Islam ... is of the ... Devil."

Some neighbors are not happy with the church's plans for Saturday. "Totally immoral," said Shirley Turner, a retired teacher. "It's bigoted. It's just wrong to burn the holy book of any faith. ... They've had the devil sign up for over a year."

On Wednesday morning police went door-to-door with fliers to alert residents of a driver's license checkpoint to be set up at an intersection near the church. The flier warns: "In the event of a significant incident occurring in the area ... the sole entrance to your neighborhood will be shut down, and there will be no way in or out for an undetermined amount of time."

Shirley Turner said she had planned to leave for the day Saturday, but now will hunker down. "I'm not going to be scared into leaving my home. I hope he (Jones) gets a message from God that says, 'Don't do this!'"

Chris Hensman

Special Assistant

Office of the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs (R)

U.S. Department of State

2201 C St, NW Rm 5932

W: 202.647.9130 | M: | ✉: hensmancd@state.gov

B6