



UNISCI Discussion Papers

MUHAMMAD CARTOONS IN DENMARK: FROM FREEDOM OF SPEECH TO DENMARK'S BIGGEST INTERNATIONAL CRISIS SINCE 1945

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Introduction

The incidents and events provoked by the publication of twelve cartoons in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* were unexpected and have harmed Danish interests: Danish businesses have lost export earnings of more than \$1 billion; demonstrations against Denmark have been global in scope; and it will be a long time before Denmark – right or wrong – can hope to regain its reputation as a small, open, and tolerant society. In this article we take stock of the events that took place in Denmark during the autumn and winter of 2005-2006, and we assess the responses of the international community, including notably the principal allies, and where all this leaves Denmark and Danish foreign policy.

There are three sections to this paper. First, we provide an account of the events and issues involved in the Danish debate, and here we work our way through the chronology of events, distinguishing between a phase of escalation, one of internationalization, and finally one of management and damage control. Second, we assess the types of criticisms launched against Denmark, giving special emphasis to the coalition that emerged between domestic and international critics. Finally, we analyze the implications for the Danish foreign policy of activism and engagement that has taken shape since the end of the Cold War. We particularly take note of the timid support that key allies offered during the initial stages of the conflict. Our conclusion emphasizes that Denmark, while preserving its ties to the United States, now must do more to enhance European cooperation on matters such as immigration and soft security cooperation.

1. The Cartoons: events and views

One prevalent view of the events in Denmark was aired in the United States in late February 2006 by the acclaimed American news program *60 Minutes*, which had come to Denmark for

¹ *Las opiniones expresadas en estos artículos son propias de sus autores. Estos artículos no reflejan necesariamente la opinión de UNISCI.* The views expressed in these articles are those of the authors. These articles do not necessarily reflect the views of UNISCI.



the first time ever to make a news story. The title of the *60 Minutes* program was “The State of Denmark.” The title is ambiguous at several levels. First, it makes reference to the Danish state and also the state of affairs more generally, as if the two were connected somehow in this affair. Moreover, the title is paraphrased from Shakespeare’s “Hamlet” who famously asked whether something was rotten in the state of Denmark – but *60 Minutes* did not explicitly make this claim, at least not in its headline. Many who watched the program would agree that the program aligned with the arguments of a good number of critics, namely that there is indeed something rotten in the state of Denmark. The problem, they contend, concerns a generally negative and hostile public debate on issues such as immigration and the influence of Muslims and Islam in Denmark – a debate that has emerged as people and officials have shed past taboos and begun a frank, if not harsh debate on the future of Danish society in light of immigration and incipient demands for greater multiculturalism. This debate had brought Denmark into the international spotlight prior to the publication of the cartoons. The debate, and the reason for the international interest, had much to do with the constitution of the right-wing government in the fall of 2001 when the Social Democrats lost power in the general elections. Anders Fogh Rasmussen (liberal) then composed of a minority government (with the conservatives). Minority governments are regular occurrences in Denmark, but this time the majority behind the government was secured by the People’s Party – a nationalist-populist right-wing party advocating anti-immigration in addition to enhanced national welfare programs and reduced European integration. With this change of government, the debate on the future of the Danish “welfare state” – in all its dimensions, including religion and immigration – sharpened.

Not all people accept the view that something is rotten in Denmark, however. For these people, the controversy boils down to the issue of free speech. They argue that the newspaper and the cartoonists enjoy an inherent right to publish commentaries and that, in the absence of a legal/judicial sanction against their actions, they should not bend or otherwise subjugate basic rights and freedoms in order to satisfy religious or other divinely revealed principles. Unsurprisingly, the newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* maintains this line of reasoning. The liberal Fogh government has done likewise, and so has many commentators in the country.

Finally, there is a third answer to the question of whether something is wrong in the state of Denmark – an answer defined by the desire of some people to place themselves between the first two answers. They emphasize the inviolability of the freedom of speech but also the responsibility that follows the act of speaking, communicating, and publishing freely. According to these critics, the Muhammad cartoons were an insensitive and unnecessary provocation against Muslims.

Simultaneously, these critics oppose the fundamentalist and violent behaviour that characterized some of the reactions to the cartoons. These critics are found in Denmark and also often abroad. Indeed, many international organizations, including the United Nations and the European Union, have adopted this “yes but” approach.

1.1. Phase 1: Conflict in Denmark

Phase 1 is the shortest and least dramatic period of the crisis during which controversies were relatively muted and contained within Denmark. The story begins 30 September when *Jyllands-Posten* publishes twelve cartoons of the prophet Muhammad. Why did it do so? *Jyllands-Posten* is neither racist nor nationalist, nor is it a populist tabloid; in terms of



readership it is the largest newspaper in Denmark. It is known to be liberal in persuasion, a right-wing daily, but a serious and acclaimed one that appeals to the mid-to-upper level middleclass and the business community. The newspaper is best compared to *The Times* in Great Britain and *Le Figaro* in France. This general background does not tell us why the cartoons appeared, although we might note that *Jyllands-Posten* in recent years has given extensive coverage to the debate between nationalism versus multiculturalism. The decision to first solicit and then publish the cartoons was made by Flemming Rose, Cultural Editor, and Rose has widely argued that the decision had to do with – in his view – the emergence of a climate of fear in relation to certain Islamist taboos and thus the emergence of news forms of totalitarianism. Flemming Rose should be familiar with the latter phenomenon because he was formerly a correspondent in the Soviet Union and Iran. In Rose's words: "*As a former correspondent in the Soviet Union, I am sensitive about calls for censorship on the grounds of insult. This is a popular trick of totalitarian movements.*"² Moving to the cartoons, Rose explains: "*Last September, a Danish children's writer had trouble finding an illustrator for a book about the life of Muhammad. Three people turned down the job for fear of consequences. The person who finally accepted insisted on anonymity, which in my book is a form of self-censorship...So, over two weeks we witnessed a half-dozen cases of self-censorship, pitting freedom of speech against the fear of confronting issues about Islam. This was a legitimate news story to cover, and Jyllands-Posten decided to do it by adopting the well-known journalistic principle: Show, don't tell. I wrote to members of the association of Danish cartoonists asking them "to draw Muhammad as you see him." We certainly did not ask them to make fun of the prophet. Twelve out of 25 active members responded. We have a tradition of satire when dealing with the royal family and other public figures, and that was reflected in the cartoons...We are integrating you into the Danish tradition of satire because you are part of our society, not strangers. The cartoons are including, rather than excluding, Muslims.*"³

Following the publication a week went by without public reactions. At this point the Islamic community in Denmark reacted and demanded an explanation. *Jyllands-Posten* did not provide one, but the demand generated action elsewhere. On 12 October, 11 Muslim ambassadors formally complained in writing to Prime Minister Fogh Rasmussen and requested a meeting with him. Fogh Rasmussen answered with a clear rejection, referring to the importance of freedom of speech within Denmark.

Fogh Rasmussen's decision was made outside the traditional framework of foreign policy consensus that reigns in parliament. The parties that coalesce around the centre of the political spectrum (typically the conservatives and liberals on the right, the social-liberals in the centre, and the social democrats on the left) typically agree on the framework for foreign policy and then let the government carry out this policy. This tradition is still alive: the Fogh Rasmussen government runs notably European policy in agreement with these parties and in opposition to the People's Party – otherwise the parliamentary safety valve of the government. The latter accepts this marginalization in foreign policy matters because it gains influence elsewhere. The traditional circle of consensus broke down in October, however, as the social-liberals and social democrats asked Fogh Rasmussen to meet with the ambassadors. Fogh Rasmussen refused, arguing that a head of government cannot be summoned to discuss the freedom of speech merely because some local congregations feel offended by a newspaper's actions.

² "Why I Published Those Cartoons", *The Washington Post*, 19 February 2006, in www.washingtonpost.com, (accessed 6 May 2006).

³ *Ibid*



1.2. Phase 2: Internationalization

Internationalization began around 7 December, the date when the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC), representing 57 Muslim countries, placed the cartoons on their agenda at a high-level meeting. Furthermore, the OIC complained to the UN, criticizing the Danish government for refusing to meet with the 11 aforementioned ambassadors and for failing to correct *Jyllands-Posten*; 22 former Danish ambassadors publicly criticized the government in mid-December; the UN's Human Rights Commission asked the government to explain its view of the case; and the foreign ministers of the Arab League directly criticized the Danish government in a statement of 29 December. The ministers expressed their "*surprise and indignation at the reaction of the Danish government, which was disappointing despite its political, economic and cultural ties with the Muslim world.*"⁴ The crisis develops further 2 January when it is discovered that Imams living and working in Denmark have travelled throughout the Middle East for the purpose of arousing support from the Islamic world against Denmark. At this point the crisis explodes.

By mid-January various Islamic voices encourage a boycott against Danish products and by 26 January the boycott begins in Saudi-Arabia. *Jyllands-Posten* feels moved to react: the newspaper has received bomb threats and is being flooded with angry phone calls and emails. On 29 January, Flemming Rose appears on *Al Jazeera* to excuse for the fact that the publication of the drawings inadvertently hurt and insulted Muslims. On 30 January, *Jyllands-Posten* publishes a declaration in Danish, English and Arabic in which it apologizes for these inadvertent effects. However, *Jyllands-Posten* does not apologize the publication of the drawings and sees no need for doing so as long as the Danish public prosecutor and the judicial system does not find it guilty of violating Danish law. This type of apology did not suffice for large parts of the Muslim community, and boycotts and demonstrations, now including flag burnings, continue. The Muslim countries Syria, Lebanon, Iran, and Saudi-Arabia then reacted diplomatically and closed their embassies. The Danish government is at this point actively seeking help from its friends and allies, though most are quiet. The main opinion from the allies and the EU at this particular moment of time is that Fogh Rasmussen's decision not to meet with the 11 ambassadors was mindless and unprofessional.

1.3. Phase 3: Climax and Crisis Management

On 2 February Fogh Rasmussen reacts to the crisis for the first time outside Denmark; he appears on *Al-Arabiya* and states to the viewers that the Danes had and have no intention to insult Muslims. However, the performance fails to illicit the desired effect; the crisis continues to develop hour by hour and several Muslim spokespersons demand that the Fogh Rasmussen government apologizes outright for the cartoons. Fogh Rasmussen chooses another strategy 3 January he meets with the ambassadors of 76 countries to discuss how to avoid the crisis' further escalation and ultimately globalization.

One might question whether this was not an attempt by the government to turn internationalization to its own advantage by getting more countries involved and making it a common issue among the states of the status quo – among Denmark and its allies. This effort

⁴ "Arab FM's Slam Denmark Over Prophet Muhammad Cartoon," *Arab News*, 30 December 2005, in <http://www.arabnews.com/?page=4§ion=0&article=75480&d=30&m=12&y=2005>, (accessed 6 May 2006).



could have been inspired by the timid responses of Denmark's principal allies. They all aligned closer following the 4-5 February attacks on Danish embassies in Syria, Lebanon, Indonesia and Pakistan. We shall return to the question of allied assistance and at this point we note a few of the key gestures of international support. Javier Solana took the weight of EU diplomacy to the Middle East 13 February, seeking dialogue with Saudi-Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Israel, the Palestinian authority and in addition representatives of the OIC and the Arab League. Two days later, 15 February, the president of the European Commission, Barroso, breaks his silence on the issue and declares his full support of Denmark. One day later, 16 February, the European Parliament calls for respectful dialogue but also condemns the violence against Danish Embassies and offers full support to Denmark. The foreign ministers of Austria and Denmark, Ursula Plassnik and Per Stig Møller, in parallel open a path of dialogue and compromise with Muslim representatives, and Turkey is at one stage proposed as an honest broker. Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary-General, offers the UN as a venue for settling the affair but most European countries and also the United States are sceptical: they will support Denmark but, this being a conflict generated by Danish events, they prefer to see Denmark solve the issue with international assistance rather than bringing the issue squarely into the complicated mechanisms of multilateral diplomacy. Following prolonged negotiations, the EU countries adopted a final joint statement on the issue 27 February. They underscore the sanctity of freedom of speech while simultaneously apologizing for any unintended insulting behaviour. The statement argues that freedom of speech must be exercised responsibly, and the 25 foreign ministers finally condemn the violent reactions against the cartoons.⁵

Table 1: Chronology of key events in the cartoon crisis

Phase 1: Conflict in Denmark

September 30, 2005 *Jyllands-Posten* publishes 12 cartoons depicting the prophet Muhammad.

October 8, Islamic groups in Denmark demand an apology from *Jyllands-Posten*

October 12, Eleven Muslim ambassadors formally complain and request a meeting with Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen.

October 21, Fogh Rasmussen rejects the meeting with reference to the freedom of speech. Opposition parties urge Fogh Rasmussen to meet with the ambassadors but he maintains his decision, saying "It's a matter of principle."

Phase 2: Internationalization

December 7, OIC takes up the matter and complain to the UN.

December 20, 22 former Danish ambassadors criticize Fogh Rasmussen

December 29, the foreign ministers of the Arab League criticize the Danish government.

January 2, 2006, Imams from the Islamic Community in Denmark are found to have aroused support for criticism against Denmark in the Middle East

January 26, Boycott against Danish goods begins in Saudi-Arabia. It soon spreads to other countries in the region.

January 30, *Jyllands-Posten* excuses the unintended insult to Muslims. Fogh Rasmussen states on TV that "I personally have such respect for people's religious feelings that I personally would not have depicted Muhammad, Jesus or other religious figures in such a manner that would offend other people." However, he does not apologize for what was printed in a newspaper exercising free speech.⁶

⁵ "Council conclusions on reactions in the Muslim world to publications in European media", 27 February 2006, in http://www.europa-kommissionen.dk/upload/application/940f8239/raadet_muhammad.pdf , (accessed 6 May 2006).

⁶ "Anatomy of the Cartoon Protest Movement", *The Miami Herald*, 19 February 2006.



Phase 3: Climax and Crisis Management

February 2, Fogh Rasmussen explains his case on *Al-Arabiya*.

February 3, Fogh Rasmussen meets with ambassadors and representatives from 76 countries in Copenhagen.

February 4, 5 and 6, Danish and other Nordic embassies under attack.

February 7, Violent demonstration against the EU-Commission's office in Gaza. Declaration from EU.

Furthermore, Kofi Annan (UN), Javier Solana (EU) and Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu (OIC) urge dialogue and peace.⁷

February 8, Turkey candidate for honest broker role following meeting with Austrian EU presidency.

February 11, The Danish Foreign ministry withdraws the embassy staffs in Iran, Indonesia, Lebanon and Syria.

February 13, Javier Solana begins a weeklong visit in the Middle East.

February 15 and 16, Barroso declares his full support to Denmark.

February 26, The embassy in Syria is reopened.

February 27, EU statement: freedom of speech is inviolable but must be used with responsibility.

March 18, UN report criticizes Denmark for doing too little to resolve the crisis.

2. The Critics

We know that *Jyllands-Posten* provided fuel to a conflict whose depth and proportions we may have vaguely perceived beforehand but now know all too well. The question we raise here concerns the people who fanned the conflict: who stood to benefit from the crisis and thus exploited it? The question leads us into difficult territory because the protests were both orchestrated and spontaneous, and many people spoke out against the cartoons. Responsibility can be assigned only with caution. Nevertheless, we know some things about the actors who helped ignite and perpetuate the protests.

We should first of all note that the criticism raised against *Jyllands-Posten* in particular and Denmark in general has been very significant. The latest figures from the Danish ministry of foreign affairs show that the ministry has received about 750.000 protests from Muslims all over the world; *Jyllands-Posten* has received a wealth of angry correspondence and phone calls, although we do not know the figures, and at one point the editor Flemming Rose was forced to go on leave – following his announcement that *Jyllands-Posten* would soon publish Iranian cartoons of the Holocaust. This the editor in chief prevented.

The Muslim community in Denmark naturally is at the heart of the matter when we speak of the actors fanning the conflict. Denmark is home to about 200.000 Muslims. On the one hand, a number of Imams has been very outspoken in their criticism of the cartoons; on the other, it is far from all of the 200.000 Muslims who have protested in one form or the other. We thus face the usual question of representation: do the people who speak the loudest also represent the most people? This is unlikely but it does not prevent them from making the claim. We might divide the Muslim community into three groups. In the middle we find the silent majority – the Muslims who do not speak up or take to the streets. On each side we find political actors claiming to speak on behalf of the community – or the major parts of it. To one side we find the Imams, the very outspoken critics. To the other side we find a moderate

⁷ "Joint Statement", 7 February 2006, in http://www.europa-kommissionen.dk/upload/application/692e3147/joint_statement.pdf.



group that operates within the democratic political system to garner respect for Muslims. A Danish member of parliament, Naser Khader (social-liberal/centrist), heads this movement and has gained considerable exposure from it. Incidentally, he is now under 24-hour police surveillance following the issuing of several threats to his life.

The Imams in Denmark were the first to react to the Muhammad cartoons. Not all Imams reacted, though: it was primarily the Arab imams representing the Sunni branch – and these typically have come to Denmark from Egypt, the Palestine areas, and Saudi Arabia. They took offence because, in their view, it is simply forbidden according to Islam to picture Muhammad – and they were especially upset that it happened in a provocative and blasphemous manner. The other branch, the Shias, is less strict on this issue, as Shia Muslims allow pictures of the Prophet as long as these are respectful and not ridiculing.

The aforementioned Imams reacted instantly when the cartoons were published: they felt angry and insulted, and they met to plan and organize their actions. The Imams agreed upon a plan containing eleven steps: the eleven steps represented a ladder of escalation, with the last step being the dispatch of a delegation of Imams to the Middle East to rally support. The Imams began by writing to local and global media and also policy-makers: they wrote the minister of culture, they collected 17.000 signatures against the cartoons, and they arranged a large demonstration in Copenhagen. The purpose was consistently the same, namely to force *Jyllands-Posten* and the Danish government to apologize for the publication of the cartoons and to issue assurances that nothing like it would take place again. The Imams proceeded with their plan as they met with the 11 Muslim ambassadors and as they contacted politicians and religious leaders in their home countries. Throughout these events Danish officials remained silent.

Silence ended on 18 November, however, when Prime Minister Fogh Rasmussen met the Dutch Member of Parliament Ayaan Hirsi Ali who wrote the manuscript behind the movie criticizing Islam – *Submission Part 1*. The director of the movie, Theo Van Gogh, was later murdered. The Imams were upset that Prime Minister Rasmussen could find the time to meet with Ayaan Hirsi Ali, and indeed laud her work, while he refused to meet with the 11 Muslim ambassadors critical of the cartoons. The Imams thus played their ace – organizing a trip to the Middle East to rally support. There is no doubt that the aim was to internationalize the conflict. In their words, the aim was to “*visit the Islamic world and inform them of the situation and the dangerous aspects to it and get a participation in the defence and support of our prophet.*”⁸

The Imams visited several Muslim Countries and met several religious leaders and thus garnered support. It was later revealed that this campaign was manipulative: they did not only bring with them the 12 cartoons but a total of 43 pictures, images, or drawings that could all be said to be offensive to Islam, and some of these had nothing to do with Islam but now, placed out of context, could be perceived to the contrary. This case of manipulation did not advance their cause in the Danish debate where, as mentioned earlier, many reacted against this attempt by people residing in Denmark – the Imams – to stir foreign criticism of the country. The case did advance their cause in the Middle East but maybe to an extent they failed to anticipate.

In the Middle East, governments, intellectuals, and regular people mobilized, and many agendas and interests came into play. Still, and before we assess Middle Eastern politics, we

⁸ *Jyllands-Posten*, “Muhammed-krisen: Rejsende i islam,” 12 February 2006.



should note that the Imams played two important roles in relation to the Danish debate. First, they made an international coalition with the Muslim community, the Arab League, OIC, and individual countries. Secondly, they spearheaded a larger debate domestically and inspired critics, intellectuals, observers and distinct groups such as the 22 former ambassadors to argue that there may in fact be something rotten in the state of Denmark. The domestic questioning of the condition of Danish society naturally tied in with the international coalition's criticism.

Moving to the Middle East, some observers claim that the Imams did not make much of a difference. The various states in the region, the Arab League and the OIC, would sooner or later have picked up the noise – noticed the cartoons – and then mobilized against them. In favour of this argument is the fact that the popular and sometimes violent demonstrations and boycotts began almost a month and a half subsequent to the delegation's visit to the region. Finally, some point out that the Imams managed to prevent a Fatwa being issued against Denmark.

What we do know is that the Imams did make an imprint on a region where several actors were upset with the Western community, notably because of the 2003 Iraq war but also for a host of other reasons. The reaction was strongest from the countries of Egypt, Saudi-Arabia, Syria, Pakistan and Iran. Egypt was very soon into the process, during phase 1 of the crisis, involved in the critique of the cartoons and the Danish government's reaction. It was the Egyptian ambassador in Denmark who suggested and created the request of the 11 Muslim ambassadors to meet with Fogh Rasmussen. On the same day, October 12, in Egypt, Egyptian government officials met with a delegation from the Danish foreign ministry and used the opportunity to underscore their indignation at the cartoons' publication and outlined the necessity of a reaction from the government. Observers are generally in agreement that Egypt played a key role during these initial phases – together with the Imams – and that the Egyptian regime had several good reasons to be active on the issue. Egypt could speak up for the Arab cause in beleaguered times; it could position itself as the leading voice of the Arab world; and it could appease domestic relations between Islamic fundamentalists and moderates.

Saudi-Arabia entered the process at a later stage but became quite decisive in advancing the conflict, particularly because the regime was behind the boycott of Danish products that soon internationalized itself in the region. Saudi Arabia also inspired others to call home their ambassadors to Denmark, and the country was not prone to accept the explanations and veiled apologies emanating from both *Jyllands-Posten* and the government. Pakistan entered the fray at this point, becoming the site of some of the most virulent demonstrations against Denmark, and the Pakistani president condemned the cartoons. Kuwait sent a similar message, and so did Iran. In fact, the Iranian parliament enacted a law sanctioning the killing of people who disgrace the Prophet.

Many people in the streets no doubt volunteered to go and genuinely felt offended and desired to protest. However, at the high point of the crisis, in early February, governments unmistakably manipulated demonstrations to incite attack on Danish embassies. Syria was the first to do so, and it was odd to watch a government that normally allows no measure of dissent declare its inability to prevent a fairly small group of people from assaulting a building hosting the Danish and other embassies. Other such events followed in Lebanon, Pakistan and Iran.



3. The Allies

As a small country, Denmark is dependent on outside assistance when it finds itself in the line of fire. Typically, Denmark – and other small countries – place significant trust in global organizations such as the United Nations in the belief and hope that such a global arrangement can tie the hands of greater powers and offer voice opportunities to small countries that play by the rules. This is the traditional foundation of Danish foreign policy. It changed somewhat during the Cold War following Denmark's reluctant decision to join NATO in 1949. As the Cold War came to an end, some observers expected a return to the old policy of small state neutralism. This did not happen, however, and the country instead embarked on a new foreign policy of activism and engagement. In the initial phases the priority was given to engagements in conflict resolution and crisis management, while the broad spectrum of policy-makers – including now the social democrats – agreed that it was a vital Danish interest to maintain the United States' engagement in Europe. The adherence to the United States and NATO became more prevalent following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. At the time of the attacks, the social democrats headed the government and decided to support the United States in full, including in Afghanistan. Some months later, when Anders Fogh Rasmussen won the general election, the support was enhanced and culminated in the Danish decision to join the war against Iraq in 2003. Denmark had become a belligerent – an actor with a diplomatic-military strategy to defend cherished and threatened values against specific enemies. Denmark was no longer operating according to small state thinking but a type of power politics normally reserved for larger states. To maintain this role, and secure the country itself from reprisals, Denmark needed reliable and powerful allies. The case of the Muhammad cartoons illustrate that such support should not be taken for granted and it raises the question of whether the new turn in Danish foreign policy activism is a turn too far. We begin with a brief overview of the allies' reactions.

- **United States:** Prior to the embassy attacks of early February, the US Department of State took a balancing position: it supported the principle of freedom of speech but criticized the cartoons. The impression was thus conveyed that Denmark, lacking the American multicultural and melting pot experience, needed to improve its politics. This position of slight criticism changed with the embassy attacks, however. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice offered her support and the White house officially condemned the attacks. The American ambassador to Denmark, James Cain, then outright denounced the former criticism from the state department and stated that the United States supported Denmark in every way. Another state department spokesman added that the United States “would do everything in their power to protect Danish citizens.”
- **Great Britain:** Prior to the embassy attacks, in early February, the British foreign secretary, Jack Straw, described the cartoons as insulting and insensitive and expressed his satisfaction with the fact that the British media had not published the cartoons. Like in the case of the United States, the British position changed following the attacks. Prime Ministers Blair and Rasmussen spoke on the phone and Blair condemned the attacks in public. Jack Straw did likewise and offered Britain's full solidarity with the Danish government.
- **France-Germany:** The motor of European integration did not quite keep the same pace on the cartoon issue. In general, France was focused on creating stability though dialogue while Germany was slightly more adamant that there could be no interference with the freedom of speech. German media were also more supportive of *Jyllands-*



Posten in so far as the cartoons were fairly widely published. In France, only a few media chose to publish the cartoons and were met with controversy, if not outright criticism. President Chirac naturally defended the freedom of speech but also called for respect for other belief systems and moderation. He reacted to the embassy attacks by condemning the violence and encouraged all initiatives that would help calm the conflict. In Germany, Angela Merkel likewise condemned the attacks. Previously, the minister of the interior, Wolfgang Schäuble, had taken a position almost similar to the one of the Danish government in arguing that the German government could not apologize for the publication of the cartoons (this time in Germany) because it would amount to interference with the free press.

- **European Union:** In early January, when the boycott against Danish goods was taking shape, Denmark asked for and received assistance from the EU. Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson stated that a boycott against any EU member country is a boycott against the EU in general. The EU foreign ministers likewise supported Denmark, though some of them voiced criticism of the decision to decline a meeting with the 11 Muslim ambassadors.⁹ The embassy attacks drew criticism from the Austrian EU presidency, and the EU CFSP High Representative, Javier Solana, almost immediately condemned the violence and offered to work with Middle Eastern actors to undo the conflict, which then led to his round-trip in the region in mid-February. The European Commission presented itself differently, as it mostly stressed the respect for religious freedom prior to the attacks – and thus implicitly criticized Denmark – and waited until 15 February before issuing a declaration in support of Denmark.
- **NATO:** The Atlantic Alliance was not involved in the cartoon affair up until the embassy attacks for the reason that the affair fell outside the purview of the Alliance. This changed with the attacks – the embassies are after all national territory – and NATO's Secretary General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, almost instantly condemned the attacks on the Danish and other embassies, expressing his full solidarity with the countries in question, although his statement did balance an understanding for the offence taken by many Muslims with the condemnation of the attacks themselves.

There can be no doubt that support from allies and partners was tempered at best, at least up until the attacks. And it may even be difficult to qualify the American and British positions as supportive prior to the attacks, just as the European Commission placed the burden of blame on Danish shoulders. In spite of the severity of the embassy attacks, this pre-attack period might be characterized as the most unsettling because while the international criticism was gaining momentum, the allies were not lining up. The embassy attacks were unsettling and caused tremendous diplomatic efforts to quench the potential for even greater conflict, but at least Denmark now received the unconditional support of its key allies, notably the United States and Britain. The situation had deteriorated but the line-up of friends and foes was clearer.

There are obvious reasons why the United States and Britain would choose to be critical of Denmark in the fall of 2005: the two countries are the lead agents in the alleged transformation of Iraq, and they had no need for small allies who incensed Muslim opinion and lent credence to the clash of civilizations. Danish policy-makers no doubt recognize this but still the experience is a politically bruising one. It shows that in spite of the – for a country

⁹ Tidende, Berlingske: "Brug for venner", 3 January 2006.



this scale – significant investments made in Denmark’s adherence to the Atlantic Alliance, a small country remains just that, a small country.

One might argue that the investments did make a difference once the house was on fire – after all, the American support became quite strong following the attacks. Moreover, one might argue that Denmark has no other options in terms of key ally, partly because the EU is a nebulous political organization with no real coherence in security and defence policy. This may be true but it does not detract from the conclusion that the European Union was a solid partner in the case of the boycott and subsequently a crucial lieu of decision-making and organization when it concerned the making of a dialogue with Arab countries.

This may then be the real lesson of the cartoon crisis, seen from the perspective of Danish foreign policy. US policy was initially calculated not according to patterns of friendship in Europe but to national interests in the Middle East, and so Denmark should reappraise its Atlantic partnership in light of its own interests. Denmark, like the other European countries, maintains an interest in a healthy Atlantic partnership because the United States is the key external player in the Middle East, and because Middle Eastern affairs impact on Europe. However, there are good reasons to enhance the European dialogue on broader security issues, partly to utilize the economic and diplomatic muscle of the EU vis-à-vis the Middle East, partly to multilateralize Western relations and thus increase the doors at which a small country like Denmark can knock in times of trouble.

Conclusion

The cartoon crisis demonstrated two notable things. First that immigration and the ideal of multiculturalism, for all their worth, have a downside: new interests will make “foreign” demands on society and the political system, and these demands will inspire controversy between nationalists and multiculturalists. Second those allies may not be rushing to Denmark’s assistance if such issues get out of international hand. We conclude from this that the Danish government along with most policy-makers and organizations working on immigration now must wrestle the issue from the political extremes and enlarge the middle ground. There should be no compromising with either the nationalist or multiculturalists extremes, and policy should emphasize immigrants as individuals rather than as cultural agents. We also conclude that Denmark should continue to invest in a broad and multifaceted Atlantic Alliance because Denmark, like all European countries, is affected by American policy in the Middle East, the region from which the most controversial immigration springs, and therefore needs inroads into Washington policy-making. Moreover, the EU proved valuable in matters of trade and inter-cultural dialogue and Denmark must now revise its approach to European cooperation and discard the emphasis on opt-outs (notably in relation to home affairs and defence) in favour of a policy of engagement. The value of European cooperation on these matters is unlikely to diminish. Finally, we conclude that the cartoon affair reveals the inherent conundrum of being a small state with large ambitions.