

RELEASE IN FULL

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**From:** Sullivan, Jacob J <SullivanJJ@state.gov>  
**Sent:** Saturday, March 3, 2012 6:01 PM  
**To:** H  
**Subject:** Re:

From Rashad - entirely in line with our assessment (for all the drama he's caused, he is a very smart and reasonable guy):

First of all, this is such a sensitive issue in Afghanistan that we can expect very tough statements from the Council as they try to maintain their credibility. As hardline (and unfair) as some of their statements may be, I think we should continue to engage the Council because they may very well be acknowledging privately the sincerity of our apology and the steps we are taking to address the situation. And what we are telling them might still be playing some moderating effect. If we disengage now, I think they will become an even bigger problem for us.

Privately, I think we should reiterate that the burning was unintentional and that we are taking a number of steps to ensure that nothing like this happens again. We should also continue to communicate that we understand the pressure that they are under, any why this is such a sensitive matter in Afghanistan. At the same time, we should also be clear that it is important for them to refrain from making inflammatory statements, and to emphasize that no matter how angry people are, that violence is not the appropriate way to respond. We should also be clear that we will take disciplinary action if the investigation reveals any intentional wrong-doing.

If we have to respond publicly, I think we should generally reiterate the points we have been making. I don't think it will be a good idea domestically or in Afghanistan to be seen as getting into a debate with the Ulema Council because if we specifically reject their new demands publicly, I think we escalate the situation (and keep it in the headlines). If we are seen as being open in any way to their demands, that causes problems as well.

----- Original Message -----

**From:** Sullivan, Jacob J  
**Sent:** Saturday, March 03, 2012 04:56 PM  
**To:** 'HDR22@clintonemail.com' <HDR22@clintonemail.com>  
**Subject:** Re:

He said he would think on it and get back to me.

----- Original Message -----

**From:** H [mailto:HDR22@clintonemail.com]  
**Sent:** Saturday, March 03, 2012 04:51 PM  
**To:** Sullivan, Jacob J  
**Subject:** Re:

Does he have any suggestions as to how we handle the Ulema?

----- Original Message -----

**From:** Sullivan, Jacob J [mailto:SullivanJJ@state.gov]  
**Sent:** Saturday, March 03, 2012 03:50 PM  
**To:** H  
**Subject:** FW:

FYI

-----Original Message-----

From: Hussain, Rashad

Sent: Saturday, March 03, 2012 3:43 PM

To: Sullivan, Jacob J

Subject: Re: Random

Jake- A few points (including some background) to respond to your friend's question-

Muslims believe that the Quran is the direct word of God and the final revelation that was sent to correct human changes that were made to the messages sent to previous prophets (Abraham, Moses, Jesus, etc.). They believe that the message sent to these previous prophets was essentially Islam, but was changed because the texts (Bible, Torah, etc.) were not preserved. Muslims for generations have therefore memorized the Quran in Arabic and they handle the physical text with utmost respect because a) they believe it is God's word and b) they want to make sure it remains preserved. As a result, certain rules of etiquette have developed for handling the Quran:

1) Muslims don't touch it unless they are in a state of wudu (which you typically attain before 5 daily prayers by washing parts of your body- hands, face, nose, mouth, etc.) This rule is based on the verse:

"This is indeed a Holy Qur'an most honorable, in a book well-guarded, which none shall touch but those who are clean..." (56:77-79)

2) Most Muslim schools of thought (including those followed in Afghanistan (Hanafi Madhab) teach that one should keep the Quran above the waist when handling it and should keep it only in clean places (definitely never in a bathroom). Usually Muslims keep the Quran high on a bookshelf or other elevated area and won't place anything on top of it. ( Actually, there's such a deep respect for knowledge generally in Islam, that many Muslims won't put any book - even secular textbooks- on the floor.)

3) The above verses are also often widely interpreted to mean that only Muslims should handle the Quran and many scholars would say that unless non-Muslims are handling it for educational purposes, they should avoid handling it all together.

In terms of disposing of old Qurans or other documents with God's name, your friend is right, and as I expressed shortly after the incident, burning is actually an acceptable method, but needs to be done with the proper intent and in accordance with the above rules.

A related point is that Muslims guard vigilantly against the deification of any person, including the Prophet Muhammad, because they fear that people will begin to worship him (as Christians began to worship Jesus, who they believe is a saintly prophet, but not the son of God).

Therefore, Muslims protest any depiction of the Prophet Muhammad- even very positive ones. So you can imagine the emotional reaction to negative depictions.

Afghanistan is particularly tough because low levels of education and literacy allow extremists to exploit the high level of attachment Afghans have for the textual tradition and love for the Prophet that Muslims generally have (the basis of which I've described above).

As far as the confinement to Afghanistan, I think there are a few reasons- 1) the burning happened in Afghanistan in an already tense climate; 2) Syria has dominated the headlines elsewhere; 3) there have been so many recent instances of desecration in the news that people are not as shocked as they used to be to hear these types stories (Terry Jones, Gitmo toilet story, urination on corpses story), and 4) as I mentioned above, low levels of literacy prevalent particularly in Afghanistan have allowed extremists to exploit the situation.

That said, Muslims all over the world are definitely saddened/upset by the news, but for the most part, they understand that the Quran itself teaches that violence is not the answer.

Rashad