



## Newsweek Article Sparks Anti-American Violence

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*The retraction Monday of a Newsweek article that caused anti-U.S. protests in Afghanistan has led to questions of when reporters should use anonymous sources.*

Officials at the White House are criticizing a Newsweek magazine article they say damaged the image of the United States in the Arab world and led to deadly riots in Afghanistan and other Muslim countries.

The article, which was printed in the May 9 issue of the widely circulated news magazine, claimed that American interrogators in a jail at the Guantanamo Bay military facility in Cuba antagonized accused Muslim terrorists by flushing a Quran, the Muslim holy book, down a toilet.

Following the publication of the article, 15 anti-American demonstrators in Afghanistan died when police fired on the crowd. Another 100 people were injured in similar protests in other parts of the Muslim world including Indonesia and Pakistan.

In both Pakistan and Indonesia, and in some other Muslim countries, defaming or insulting the Quran is considered a crime and can be punished by death, according to the BBC.

### **Newsweek's story**

A week after the story was published, under heavy pressure from the White House, Newsweek formally retracted its story.

"We certainly accept some responsibility and we feel awful about it," Newsweek editor Mark Whitaker told the NewsHour.

"In the magazine this week and in the editor's note ... I say how upset we are and I express sympathy for the Afghans who have died and been injured and for the U.S. soldiers who have been caught in the middle of all this."

In the magazine's defense, Whitaker said his staff had shown the article to government officials before publishing it in order to back up the information.

"[W]e approached two separate Defense Department officials for comment. One declined to give us a response; the other challenged another aspect of the story but did not dispute the Quran charge," Whitaker wrote in the magazine.

## **The use of anonymous sources**

The two reporters who wrote the story -- two of the magazine's top journalists -- cited only an unnamed U.S. official as the provider of the Quran information. The controversy has raised questions about the use of anonymous sources in journalism.

Common journalistic practice calls for at least two sources to corroborate details of a news story. Reporters are only supposed to use anonymous sources in the most extreme cases such as if the life of the source is in danger or if national security depends on the source's identity remaining secret, according to Tom Goldstein, professor of journalism and mass communications at the University of California, Berkeley.

"[Y]ou try to get people on the record. But there are certain situations ... where a person who has access to information cannot be identified by name," said Goldstein.

"Journalism totally without anonymous sources ... would be a very tepid, lame journalism," he added.

Some critics blame the competition to beat other news organizations to the story for the misuse and overuse of anonymous sources.

"What was the imperative to tell the story even if we weren't sure of it as journalists? It was kind of a case of gotcha -- cynicism and to say we got somebody in the government or with a case of showing off, it would be addiction to exclusives," said Jeff Jarvis, author of the Web log, [buzzmachine.com](http://buzzmachine.com).

## **The U.S. image abroad**

White House officials say the Newsweek story has hurt the U.S. image abroad. The story follows a slew of similar stories that have led to anti-U.S. sentiment particularly in Muslim countries.

Among them, a CBS 60 Minutes report in early 2004 that showed images of U.S. soldiers abusing inmates at the Abu Ghraib prison facility in Iraq; and in November, an NBC video that showed images of a U.S. Marine executing an unarmed insurgent in an Iraq mosque.

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has defended American practices overseas.

"The United States is a country that believes deeply in religious freedom and the equality of all to practice religion as they see it," she said.

"And we would certainly never condone anything that would be a desecration of the holy book of one of the world's great religions."

*-- Compiled by Kristina Nwazota for NewsHour Extra*

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