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"Blasphemous Blundering"

Until this week, this month had been a good one for the fight against Islamist blasphemy laws.

Sir Salman Rushdie, the author of the book *Satanic Verses*, was appointed by The Queen to the Order of the Companions of Honour. The honour is amongst the highest afforded to artists, writers, and creative contributors of every type.

The recognition came some 34 years after Rushdie had written his seminal work. The text was – at least ostensibly – a fairly unobjectionable reinterpretation of a centuries-old legend of verses uttered and later recanted by the Muslim Prophet Mohammed. Rushdie later bemoaned that, if anything, he viewed the text as rather too positive about the prophet.

Yet, in any event, as Rushdie explained, Islamic theology had never claimed that Mohammed was perfect or without flaw. The sourcing for his fictional interpretation of these events were some of the earliest known Islamic texts.

Nothing within what he'd written ought to have offended the average Muslim. Indeed, for many, it did not.

All too many Islamic clerics, however, were not so understanding. The Ayatollah of Iran issued a fatwa calling for Rushdie's death. Meanwhile, Imams, Sheikhs, and Hafizes from all over the world competed over how excoriating their condemnation of Rushdie could be. Muslim nations immediately banned the text.

Sadly, these overseas voices found an eager audience in the West.

In both the USA and UK, bookshops were bombed and attacked for having the audacity to sell the book. The FBI was notified of 78 separate threats to bookstores in early March 1989. In the UK, bombings – acts of terrorism – were conducted in London, High Wycombe and York – with other failed attacks elsewhere.

Rushdie received little support. Under threat of death, he apologised for the book's publication. In response, the Ayatollah placed a bounty on his head.

To this day, Rushdie relies on round-the-clock police protection.

When he was first knighted in 2007, the leaders of Muslim nations around the world protested and petitioned the British government.

It was then affirming to see – a year on from the events of Batley Grammar School – the British state recognise Rushdie's work in the face of such opposition.

Yet, this week, we have seen afresh that blasphemy rows are by no means a historical problem.

Lady of Heaven is a fictional film produced by a fringe but nevertheless qualified Shia sheikh. In it, he sets out his interpretation of the events that followed the death of the Prophet Mohammed and in particular those concerning Mohammed's daughter Fatima.

The film – it is fair to say – is not popular with most sides in traditional Islamic theological disputes. It has been denounced as both ahistorical and offensive by both Shia and Sunni clerics.

Yet, in spite of this criticism, the film having been supported by the cleric's followers, has a large budget and hefty distribution. Accordingly, it was slated to be shown at cinemas across the UK.

It was not to be.

Hordes of protesters descended on any cinema brazen enough to display the film. The cinema chains – despite showing a film written, produced, and directed by Muslims – were denounced as Islamophobic.

Underlying all the events was a none too subtly implied threat of violence: show the film and face the consequence.

Unsurprisingly, most chains crumbled. Better not to take the risk.

Today, the Daily Telegraph carries the latest outrageous finding from HJS' new investigative unit, which has been established to conduct deep dive research into extremism in public life.

It turns out that one of the leading backers of the protests and a coordinator of negotiations with cinemas appears to have been none other than Qari Asim MBE, the British government's Independent Adviser on tackling "Islamophobia" and deputy chair of its Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group. This is particularly strange as Mr Asim has previously had a strong record in supporting free speech over Islamic theological issues, yet changed tune so prominently on this

particular film.

The government have claimed they oppose cancel culture and attempts to shut this film down, yet their own Independent Adviser felt comfortable enough to boast about his role in censoring this film. He is unlikely to face any action, even though his position is at odds with comments made by his fellow independent government adviser Dame Sara Khan condemning the shutdown.

Despite the talk, it would seem to be the case that politicians (of all stripes) are as yet unprepared to truly lance the boil of attempts to impose Islamic blasphemy laws.

For all the government's purported interest in freedom of speech, the teacher at Batley Grammar School and the Islamic producer of this film have seen their rights violated with impunity.

This was not even a case where it could be said the material was 'anti-Islamic'; it turned out to belittle more than a sectarian dispute. Yet, for now, the authorities seem prepared to let the mob win.

They have blundered badly, for doing so is a stain on our democracy and the equality before the law it symbolises. Politicians must end this aberration now.

From the Director's Desk

10th June 16.00

Following months of heavy scrutiny surrounding the ongoing Partygate controversy, on Monday, Prime Minister Boris Johnson survived a no-confidence vote after 59% of his MPs voted in his favour. Critics argue the result has damaged Johnson's position and left him vulnerable. However, too little attention has been paid to Johnson's role - through both word and deed - in leading the world in support of Ukraine in its defence against Russian aggression, and the way that the abilities demonstrated in that conflict played through to his advantage.



For all his troubles at home, Johnson is incredibly popular amongst Ukrainians: he has been officially inducted into Ukraine's Cossack community and has even had a croissant named after him by a local Kyiv café which proved so popular it

sold out within 30 minutes. Indeed, Zelensky himself celebrated the result of the no-confidence vote, describing Johnson as "a true friend of Ukraine."

Ukrainian support for Johnson should come as no surprise. The Prime Minister has been a crucial figure and steadfast friend in the global coalition supporting Ukraine.

While French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz have spent innumerable hours trying to reason with Putin, Johnson has repeatedly defended Ukraine by insisting that Zelensky must not be pressured into a bad peace deal, explaining that, after all, bad peace deals do not last. He was also the first leader of a major Western power to visit Kyiv following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, inducing enormous goodwill for Britain with the Ukrainian public.

But Johnson has gone beyond just symbolic gestures and rhetoric, providing the necessary, concrete support Ukraine needs most on the ground. British-supplied Javelin and NLAW missiles were essential in derailing early Russian attacks in Ukraine. Meanwhile, last month, Johnson pledged an additional £1.3 billion in military aid to Ukraine, almost doubling Britain's previous commitments and signalling the government's highest rate of spending in a conflict since the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Under Johnson, Britain has imposed significant trading sanctions on Russia, excluded Russian banks from the British financial markets and frozen assets, and placed restrictions on the access of Russian firms and individuals to financial services in Britain. Following decades of accommodation of Russian kleptocrats, Johnson's government has now sanctioned more than 1,000 people and businesses with ties to the Russian government, including high-profile oligarchs. Outside of Ukraine, Johnson has campaigned for and protected peace in Europe by signing bilateral defence pacts with both Sweden and Finland to cover the grey area period before their possible accession to NATO. Of course there is always room for moving further and faster, but the Prime Minister has left many of his alliance colleagues floundering with their slower responses.

With many Ukrainians concerned that the ousting of Johnson and instability in No 10 could distract the British government and reduce its support for the Ukrainian cause, the Prime Minister's survival this week ensures that the government is able to continue its critical support of Ukraine in its fight against Russia. Though Johnson's political future may be uncertain, his unequivocal support for Ukraine and the commitment of his government to Eastern European security have turned out to not only be the right thing to do internationally, but also provided him with a domestic ace in the hole that he has been able to flourish at his moment of greatest political need.

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The Scoop

A view from the HJS Team

This morning, the High Court began an emergency hearing to consider the legal challenge to Home Secretary Priti Patel's plan to send 130 migrants to the Rwandan capital of Kigali while their applications for asylum in Britain are processed.



If this challenge is upheld, it will wreck the Rwanda experiment before it has even been tried. The plan, set up in partnership with the Rwandan government, will never be attempted again.

Yesterday's Guardian newspaper predicted gleefully that if the flight is postponed, the people booked on it will be issued with electronic tags and given their freedom.

All are 'irregular migrants' — people who arrived by boat or lorry, almost certainly after handing a hefty fee to a people-smuggling gang.

What safeguards exist to prevent these people from simply snipping off their tags and melting into the background is not clear.

Under a legal precedent known as the 'Hardail Singh principles', the Home Office's powers to detain people indefinitely are severely curtailed.

This suits many subversives within the Home Office, of course. Far from carrying out their duties to implement Government guidelines on immigration, some in the Civil Service are working actively, and covertly, to undermine them.

Indeed, an anonymous 'Our Home Office' Twitter account was launched last month with a poster said to have been posted on an official noticeboard which reads: 'We have the spine to say, "No minister". No to hostile environments, no to shutting down democracy, no to racist deportations.'

It even offers stickers that proclaim 'Refugees Welcome' and these have begun to appear in the Home Office.

One virtue-signalling civil servant, who lacked the courage to be identified, told Sky News this week that processing asylum claims in Africa was akin to people-trafficking.

'We should offer sanctuary and provide safe haven for those who need it,' the civil servant said, 'but it feels like we are taking part in human trafficking — transporting people against their will and paying another country to take them.'

As a result of Left-wing activism, Britain's immigration policy is in abject chaos. More than 10,000 migrants have made the perilous sea crossing from northern France so far this year, which means that hundreds of lives are at risk every day from drowning.

That total is more than twice as many as by early June last year. And that is just the migrants that border patrols have spotted. Thousands more will be entering the country crammed into container lorries, often without food or water and with barely enough air.

Organised criminal gangs of people-traffickers are extorting countless millions of pounds from the very migrants whose lives are put in danger.

Many who think they are coming to Britain to enjoy our country's unique freedoms will find themselves in a lifetime of debt, or coerced into modern-day slavery as labourers and sex workers.

The situation is inhumane beyond belief.

Its roots lie in the deliberate choice by New Labour, after 1997, to engineer mass immigration. Former Labour adviser Andrew Neather notoriously said this was a policy devised to 'rub the Right's nose in diversity' — that is, to change the UK's ethnic make-up as a taunt to Middle England.

Labour's secret calculation was that this would mean more votes for the Left. Instead, it was a policy that backfired spectacularly, as it was working-class communities that watched as their schools grew ever more overcrowded, their GPs oversubscribed and waiting lists for social housing grew ever longer.

Many would argue it led directly to Brexit and a landslide for the Conservatives in 2019.

And nor will Labour benefit in the long term as statistics show that once immigrant families become well established and settled, they tend to vote Tory.

Lord Mandelson, the former secretary of state for business, told a think tank rally: 'In 2004, we were not only welcoming people to come into this country to work, we were sending out search parties for people.'

And it laid the foundations of the 'immigration industry' — an unholy partnership between greedy lawyers, naive charity workers, self-indulgent civil servants and rapacious criminals.

Yet Left-wing charities and self-appointed 'human rights activists' continue to thwart every effort the Government makes to address this crisis.

To these professional liberals, it seems that the only acceptable immigration policy is one that allows every migrant unrestricted passage to Britain, regardless of the chaos that will cause.

No other interpretation can be placed on the Rwanda challenge. It is devoid of any logic, other than a determination to see the scheme wrecked.

Rwanda is a Commonwealth country, one that has made enormous strides in rebuilding itself since the genocidal civil war in 1994. It is safe, civilised, and friendly. Its track record on ensuring women are represented at every level of government is outstanding.

For anyone facing persecution, religious oppression, sexual torture or death in their home country, Kigali can be the safest of havens.

Because full details of the Home Secretary's plan have not been released, we don't know whether migrants would be permitted to return to Britain if their application for asylum is successful, or whether they would remain in Rwanda.

Surely either is a blessed alternative to the constant threat of prison or murder at home.

Yet so-called 'human rights activists' have ruthlessly stoked the fears of migrants, to encourage them to resist relocation.

One man in his 40s, identified only as Bahram from Iran, told a Sky reporter that he paid a people trafficker \$13,000 (£10,400) to be transported to the UK, to escape jail and torture at home.

But faced with a ticket to Rwanda, he claimed: 'I cannot even think about it. I have no connection to Rwanda. My safety in Rwanda cannot be guaranteed. I prefer to be back in Iran — I know it's certain death for me in Iran but I'd rather have that than going to Rwanda.'

If that man's protests are sincere, and we have no reason to suppose they are not, I shudder to think what horror stories have been fed to him about life in Africa.

Has he been led to imagine that the massacres of the 1990s are still going on? Or, since one part of the legal challenge cites the existence of malaria in East Africa, does he believe he will contract a fatal disease?

His mind has been cruelly manipulated, by people who cannot have his best interests at heart.

I must stress that Britain has a long history of giving refuge to people fleeing violent regimes. We take deep pride in our tradition of welcoming those in need.

But if we allow it to be exploited by international criminal gangs of traffickers, that tradition will break down. The very people most in need will be denied the safety of our shores.

The Church of England joins in, with evangelicals urging Muslim migrants in particular to adopt Christianity. The immigrants then claim that they will face religious persecution as apostates in their home countries.

Perhaps some church-goers genuinely believe they are saving souls — but these days there is a school in the Church of England that treats liberalism and not Christianity as the one true religion.

When Priti Patel announced the innovative Rwanda trial last month, I hailed it as the kind of lateral thinking that is urgently needed. Like the Home Secretary herself, I anticipated there would be resistance — what she calls 'hurdles and barriers'.

But the sheer cynicism of the highly co-ordinated response by charities, social media activists and lawyers has taken my breath away.

For many Left-wing opponents of the Government, immigration has become an ideological rather than a humanitarian issue. They are determined to oppose every possible solution, to encourage unrestricted immigration.

They offer no answers, propose no alternatives. As long as the Left keeps sabotaging the Government's best efforts, 'irregular migrants' will continue to drown at sea or suffocate in lorries, while criminals rake in the profits.

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Quote of the Week

8th June 2022

"He [Alex Davies] is a deeply unpleasant person given his views, given what he's been trying to do to foment race war and push this Nazi propaganda in the UK..."

Dr Alan Mendoza on extremism, far-right groups, and cancel culture in the UK |
[TalkTV](#)